

An Eco-Discourse Analysis of Gerileqimuge Hei He's Animal Literature: A Transitivity System Interpretation with Ghost Dog as an Example

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Abstract: At the moment when the ecological crisis is becoming increasingly prominent, the animal novels of Gerileqimuge Hei He have attracted much attention for their unique ecological perspective and narrative style. This paper focuses on his work *Ghost Dog*, and based on Halliday's transitivity theory in systemic functional linguistics, analyzes the ecological discourse characteristics in the text from the perspectives of material process, psychological process and relational process. Through research, it is found that Hei He uses the material process and the relational process to construct the equal interactive relationship between animals and nature, and profoundly reveals the erosion of modern civilization on the wilderness; At the same time, the changes of characters' ecological consciousness are mapped by psychological process. The purpose of this paper is to deeply explore the eco-ethical value in Hei He's animal literature from the perspective of eco-linguistics, and provide beneficial enlightenment for the construction of contemporary ecological civilization.

Keywords: Hei He; *Ghost Dog*; Transitivity; Ecological Discourse Analysis; Animal Literature

1. Introduction

With the aggravation of the global ecological crisis, the ecological environment problem has become a great challenge for human society. In this context, the ecological value contained in literary works has been paid more and more attention by academic circles. Literary works can not only reflect the reality of nature and society, but also arouse people's ecological consciousness and promote the construction of

ecological civilization through unique artistic expressions.

As an outstanding representative writer of contemporary animal literature in China, Gerileqimuge Hei He's works are set in the vast wilderness, narrated from the perspective of animals, and deeply reflect on many disadvantages brought by anthropocentrism. *Ghost Dog*, as Hei He's early masterpiece, vividly depicts the story of a Mongolian shepherd named "Ghost" struggling to survive between grassland and city, and profoundly reveals the fierce conflict between safari culture and modern civilization. With its exquisite description and profound connotation, this work provides us with rich materials for studying the ecological discourse in animal literature.

Based on the transitivity theory in systemic functional linguistics and closely combined with the "non-metaphorical model" of eco-linguistics, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of the ecological discourse characteristics of *Ghost Dog*, and discusses how Hei He skillfully uses language choice to convey profound ecological consciousness, with a view to contributing to the construction of contemporary ecological civilization [1].

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Transitivity System

Transitivity system proposed by British linguist Halliday is an important part of systemic functional linguistics. The system divides language experience into six process types, namely, material process (dynamic behavior), psychological process (emotion and cognition), relationship process (attribute and attribution), behavior process (physiological activity), speech process (information transmission) and existence process (existence

of things) [2]. Through the analysis of verbs, participants and environmental components in the text, the transitivity system can clearly reveal how the text constructs the empirical world. For example, when describing an action, the transitivity system can help us to determine who is the executor (agent) of the action, who is the receiver (patient) of the action, and the background and conditions of the action.

2.2 Ecological Discourse Analysis Paradigm

The "non-metaphorical model" in eco-linguistics emphasizes the in-depth analysis of the ecological orientation of discourse from the lexical and grammatical level. He Wei (2017) proposed that ecological discourse can be roughly divided into three categories: beneficial (promoting ecological harmony), vague (neutral position) and

destructive (strengthening human center) [3]. This classification method helps us to grasp the ecological information conveyed in the text more accurately and understand the author's attitude and position on ecological issues. When analyzing literary works, we can carefully sort out and interpret the transitivity process in the text according to this framework, thus revealing the ecological significance contained in the works [4].

3. The Transitivity Process Distribution and Ecological Characteristics of Ghost Dog

In order to deeply understand the ecological discourse characteristics in Ghost Dog, we marked and counted the text sentence by sentence and extracted 366 effective clauses [5]. The following is the specific distribution of transitivity process (see Table 1):

Table 1. Distribution of Transitivity Process in Ghost Dog

Process type	quantity	proportion	Typical example
Material process	142	38.8%	"Dezi chained the ghost's neck and forced it to bite its prey."
Psychological process	67	18.3%	"Ghosts smell smoke and feel death approaching."
Relational process	eighty-nine	24.3%	"The wind in the grassland is free, with the blood of the wilderness."
Existential process	18	4.9%	"In the moonlight, only ghosts are lonely."
Speech process	twelve	3.3%	"Alseng said softly, 'Don't be afraid, I'll help you.' "
Behavioral process	38	10.4%	"Ghosts roam the grass, looking for food and water."

3.1 Material Process: The Power Game between Man and Nature

Material process occupies the highest proportion in the text of Ghost Dog, which is mainly divided into the following two categories:

3.1.1 Initiative of natural subject

In his works, Hei He often endows natural elements with the role of Agent, which effectively dispels the anthropocentrism concept.

Ex. (1): "Wind [Ag] swept over the wilderness with [Pro] grass seeds [Af] and spread the traces of life into the distance."

In this sentence, "wind" as an agent performs the dynamic behavior of "volume", which embodies the autonomy and initiative of nature, suggesting that nature is not a passive object, but a subject with independent vitality and can actively participate in and influence the operation of the world. This description highlights the strong vitality and autonomy of

nature, emphasizes the interaction and interdependence of elements in the natural ecosystem, shows the self-regulation and regeneration ability of nature, and reminds people to respect and fear nature.

3.1.2 Human's violent domination of animals

Human characters often appear as agents in texts, and most of the verbs used have oppressive semantics, such as "tying", "whipping" and "domesticating".

Example (2): "Dezi [Ag] raised the whip [Pro] and pulled it to the back of the ghost [Af]."

In this sentence, "Dezi", as the agent, whipped the "ghost" on the back with a whip. This reveals that modern civilization's instrumental treatment of animals belongs to destructive ecological discourse. This kind of process reflects the domination and control of animals by human beings, who regard animals as tools to meet human needs, rather than living beings with perception and rights. This kind of violence destroys the harmonious relationship between man and nature and violates the

concept of respecting and protecting all life advocated by eco-linguistics.

3.2 Relationship Process: Identity Construction in the Wilderness

The relationship process endows nature with personalized characteristics through attribution and identification.

3.2.1 Ownership process

Example (3): "Ghost [Ca] is the king of [Pro] wasteland [At]." (Attribution process)

In this sentence, "ghost" belongs to "the king of the wasteland", which endows "ghost" with personalized characteristics and emphasizes its equal status with human beings in the ecosystem. By turning "ghost" into "king", the author not only highlights the dignity and strength of "ghost" as an animal, but also implies the equal status of all living things in the ecosystem. This expression breaks the traditional perception that human beings are superior to animals, which helps readers to re-examine the relationship between human beings and nature, realize that human beings are not the masters of nature, but a part of it, and make readers pay more attention to the existence value and ecological status of animals.

3.2.2 Identification process

Example (4): "The smell of smoke [Ca] means [Pro] the decline of human nature [At]." (identification process)

In this sentence, "the smell of smoke" is recognized as a symbol of "the decline of human nature", which reveals the influence of human activities on the natural environment. By linking the smell of smoke with the decay of human nature, the author criticizes the looting and destruction of nature by human beings and calls on readers to reflect on the harmonious symbiotic relationship between man and nature. This description not only enhances readers' perception of ecological crisis, but also warns people to reflect on their own behavior and think about how to change the status quo, avoid further damage to the natural environment and pursue a sustainable lifestyle.

3.3 Psychological Process: The Awakening of Ecological Consciousness

Psychological process also occupies a certain proportion in *Ghost Dog*, which mainly reflects the perceptual experience of animals

and characters.

3.3.1 Fear and Resistance of Animals

Example (5): "Ghost [Se] hates the shackles of [Pro] chains [Ph]." (emotional process)

In this sentence, the word "hate" clearly reflects the instinctive resistance of animals to oppression, suggesting that the internal balance of the ecosystem has been broken. By describing the emotional reaction of "ghosts" to the chains, readers not only feel the pain and helplessness of animals, but also reveal the instrumental treatment of animals by human beings and the impact of this treatment on animal psychology and ecosystem. This expression emphasizes the importance of respecting and protecting animal rights and calls on readers to reflect on the harmonious symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

3.3.2 Children's Ecological Empathy

Example (6): "Alsleng [Se] believes that [Pro] ghosts can understand his whispers [Ph]." (cognitive process)

In this sentence, the psychological activities of children's roles convey the possibility of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, which belongs to beneficial ecological discourse. Children often have pure hearts and keen perception, and they are full of curiosity and love for nature. Through the belief of "Alsleng", the author conveys a positive ecological concept, that is, human beings should respect and understand animals and establish emotional ties with them. This description helps to build a more harmonious ecosystem and promote the benign interaction between man and nature.

3.4 Existential Process: The Metaphor of the Disappearance of Wilderness

The process of existence is used to describe ecological phenomena and environmental changes through verbs such as "being" and "being", which highlights the ecological crisis.

Example (7): "There is no trace of ghosts [Ex] running on the grassland." (negative existence process)

In this sentence, the "ghost footprint" disappears on the "grassland", and the lack of this existence process reveals the demise of the hunting culture. By linking the footprint of "ghost" with grassland, the author not only depicts a picture of ecological changes, but also implies the fragility of the ecosystem.

This metaphor makes readers feel the seriousness of the ecological crisis more intuitively, emphasizes the influence of changes in the ecological environment on human culture and lifestyle, and warns us that we must pay attention to and protect the natural environment to prevent similar ecological crises.

Ex. (8): "In the moonlight, only the ghost [Ex] is lonely."

This sentence describes the exclusive existence of "ghost lonely figure" in the moonlight through the existential verb "you" (presented in the form of "only"). This expression seems to definitely exist, but in fact, through the limitation of "only", it strengthens the sense of isolation of "ghost" as an individual in the natural environment and implies the disappearance of other life forms. As a natural phenomenon, moonlight is usually associated with tranquility, mystery and loneliness, which makes the loneliness of "ghosts" more prominent. In the story, the "ghost" experienced the transformation from a police dog to a fighting dog, and finally found a sense of belonging under the care of Alsleng. However, in the process of its growth, "ghost" is in a state of exclusion and utilization most of the time, which makes its heart full of loneliness and anxiety. The existence process of "ghost" also symbolizes many neglected lives in nature. In the rapid development of modern society, the living space of many animals and plants has been continuously compressed, and their position in the ecosystem has gradually been marginalized [6]. The lonely figure of "ghost" is a metaphor for these neglected lives, calling on people to pay attention to ecological protection and respect the value of every life.

3.5 Behavior Process: Ecological Fable of Biological Instinct

In the text of Ghosts and Dogs, the behavior process mainly describes the physiological activities of organisms and reflects the subtle interaction of ecosystems through specific behaviors.

Example (9): "Ghost [Beh] carefully raised his nose and sniffed [Pro] the air around him, which was mixed with complex smells that he had never felt before. Those fresh and strange smells stimulated his sensitive nasal mucosa." In this sentence, the behavior process of

"sniffing" shows the exploration and adaptation of "ghost" to the new environment, and reflects its inherent sensitivity and keen response to natural changes. Canine's instinct of perceiving the environment by smell is embodied as an early warning mechanism of the ecosystem-mixed strange smell symbolizes the pollution and invasion of industrialization to the natural environment, while "sensitive nasal mucosa" is a metaphor for the original ecological sensory system that has not been alienated. The detailed description of this behavior process not only reveals the survival wisdom of animals in the ecological upheaval, but also implies that nature is sending out the signal of ecological crisis through biological instinct.

Ex. (10): "It (the ghost [Beh]) can hardly breathe. It coughed [Pro] and trotted a few steps to catch up with the man."

In this sentence, the behavior process of "cough" shows the pain and struggle of "ghost" when it is bound and oppressed, and its physiological reaction directly corresponds to the ecological reality of environmental pollution or space oppression. The running instinct of dogs is compressed into "trotting a few steps", suggesting that the living space of natural creatures is shrinking under the intervention of human activities. This alienated behavior pattern constitutes an accusation that modern civilization squeezes wild life and reveals the deep crisis that the right to free movement is deprived in the ecosystem.

3.6 Speech Process: Multi-voice Dialogue of Ecological Ethics

In the text of Ghost Dog, the speech process mainly involves information transmission and communication, and the conflict and reconciliation of ecological ethics are shown through the opposition of discourse positions.

Example (11): "Alsleng [Sa] whispered [Pro]: 'Don't be afraid [Ver], I'll help you.'" "

This sentence constructs a cross-species ethical dialogue through the speech process. As a speaker, Alsleng [Sa] adopts the way of equal consultation ("speaking softly"), and its discourse content breaks through the hegemony of human language and recognizes the qualification of animals as the subject of dialogue. This speech process subverts the vertical power structure of "human-animal"

and transforms the rescue behavior into the fulfillment of obligations among members of the ecological community, which belongs to beneficial ecological discourse. The word "help" in his discourse dispels the gesture of benefactor, implies that human and animals should be interdependent life partners, and at the same time conveys a positive ecological concept, that is, human beings should respect and protect all living things and establish a harmonious relationship with nature.

Example (12): "Dezi [Sa] raised the whip, drew it to the ghost's back and said [Pro]: 'A beast [Ver] is a beast, and you can't raise things that are not ripe!'" "

In this sentence, "Dezi" sends a negative message to "ghost" through words and actions, showing the discrimination and violence of human beings towards animals. The speech process and violence here form a discourse matrix, which exposes the cognitive violence of anthropocentrism. Dezi obliterated the subjectivity of animals at the linguistic level through the species discriminatory appellation of "beast". The logic of "domestication failure" implied in his discourse is essentially the denial of wild vitality by industrial civilization. The synchronicity of this speech process and flogging behavior constitutes a double oppression of body and spirit, revealing that the ecological crisis is not only environmental destruction, but also a distortion of life value cognition. This description is helpful to reveal the ecological contradictions in society and promote people's thinking and action on ecological protection.

4. Narrative Function of Ecological Discourse

Hei He's ecological narrative is not a simple description of nature, but a multi-dimensional ecological ethics expression system is constructed through the subtle design of language strategy and narrative structure. The narrative function of its ecological discourse is embodied in the criticism of anthropocentrism, the reconstruction of natural subjectivity and the exploration of the possibility of ecological redemption, which together constitute a deep reflection on modern civilization.

4.1 Criticizing Anthropocentrism: The Deconstruction of Power Discourse and the Mirror Image of Ecological Alienation

Hei He profoundly exposed the alienation of modern civilization through human violence in the material process (such as the domestication of virtue) and instrumental metaphor in the relationship process (such as "ghosts are fighting dogs"). Hei He incarnates the violence and alienation of anthropocentrism through the material process and relationship process in the transitivity system. In *Ghost Dog*, the behaviors of human characters such as Dezi and Negro mostly involve transitive verbs such as "tying", "whipping" and "taming" (for example, "Dezi tied the ghost's neck with a chain"). This kind of material process takes the binary opposition structure of "human-agent" and "animal-patient", which is not only the abuse of a dog, but also the human abuse. Halliday pointed out that language constructs the empirical world through transitivity system [2], and Hei He's text selection just reveals the distortion of ecological relationship by anthropocentrism. For example, Dezi's domestication is not only a physical oppression of "ghosts", but also a complete subversion of the "dog-human symbiotic relationship" in safari culture. Hei He's dog training plot symbolizes the denial of wild vitality by industrial civilization, and its essence is the collusion of "gradualism" and "growth", which coincides with Guo-Wen Huang's "destructive ecological discourse" [7]. This destructive discourse is like a mirror, which makes readers clearly see the evil consequences brought by anthropocentrism and aims to awaken readers' deep reflection on ecological exploitation.

In addition, Hei He strengthened his criticism of anthropocentrism through the metaphorical application of relational process. For example, "the smell of smoke means the decline of human nature", through the identification process, the natural phenomenon (smoke) is directly related to human morality (decline), forming a moral judgment on modern civilization. This narrative strategy echoes Arran Stibbe's view of eco-linguistics: language constructs human value judgment of nature through metaphor [8]. In *Ghost Dog*, the bloody scene of dog fighting field ("the tourists' faces are hung with dementia") becomes the epitome of modern people's spiritual alienation. Its violent narration of carnival and the numbness of "spectators" in

Lu Xun's works form a cross-time dialogue, revealing the corrosion of anthropocentrism to spiritual ecology.

4.2 Reconstruction of Natural Subjectivity: The Narrative Practice of Wilderness Poetics and "Natural Standard" Ethics

Hei He's ecological narrative subverts the traditional narrative mode in which human beings are the only subject by endowing natural elements with the role of agents. For example, in "the wind sweeps the grass seeds across the wilderness", "the wind" performs dynamic behavior as the agent. This description makes people feel the self-repair and reproduction ability of nature, and its autonomy implies that nature is not a passive object, but a vital subject. This kind of description is consistent with the Ewenki's original ecological view of "animism", which reflects the awe of safari culture to the divinity of nature. Hei He's "wilderness writing" is a resistance to the erosion of industrial civilization. The grassland, wolves and sheepdogs in his text constitute a "wilderness community", and through the "natural subjectivity" strategy of transitivity system, the "natural standard" ecological ethics is successfully constructed [9]. The spread of this beneficial discourse is helpful for people to re-examine the value of nature and change the previous concept that nature is regarded as an accessory of human beings.

In the description of psychological process, Hei He further endowed animals with emotional and cognitive abilities. For example, "ghosts hate the shackles of chains", which shows the animal's resistance consciousness through emotional process and dispels the stereotype of human beings' "subjectivity-free" of animals. This narrative technique echoes the "depersonalization" advocated by eco-feminism [10], emphasizing the intrinsic value of all living things. In addition, the application of the process of existence (such as "no ghosts running on the grassland") uses "absence" as a metaphor for the fracture of the ecosystem, and its negative expression constitutes a silent complaint against the expansion of modern civilization.

4.3 Children as Ecological Salvation: Ethical Potential and Intergenerational Hope of Pure Narration

The interaction between Alsleng and ghosts is mainly verbal process ("don't be afraid") and psychological process ("trust"). Hei He shaped children as "ideal carriers" of ecological ethics, and conveyed the possibility of harmonious symbiosis through their interaction with animals. The relationship between Alsleng and "Ghost" is centered on the verbal process ("Don't be afraid, I'll help you") and the psychological process ("Believe that the ghost can understand his whisper"), and a non-violent cross-species communication model is constructed, which symbolizes the maintenance of ecological harmony by life individuals who are not polluted by civilization. Children's innocence and kindness have become a glimmer of hope to save the ecological crisis, and their existence reminds people to keep a heart that respects nature and cares for life when facing ecological problems.

It is worth noting that Hei He's children's narrative implies intergenerational criticism. The greed of adult characters (such as Dezi) and the innocence of children form a binary opposition, suggesting that the root of the ecological crisis lies in the concealment of "beginning of life" by modernity. At the end of Ghost Dog, the "ghost" dies while waiting for Alsleng's watch. Its tragic ending is not only an indictment of the adult world, but also a mourning for the ecological hope represented by children. This narrative structure reveals Hei He's deep ecological appeal: only by reconstructing the "childlike" natural ethics can the ultimate ideal of "the unity of heaven and man" be realized.

Through the narrative function of ecological discourse, Hei He completed the ethical closed loop from "criticism" to "reconstruction" to "redemption". His text is not only a literary diagnosis of ecological crisis, but also a fable of the collision between the spirit of safari culture and modern civilization. From the perspective of eco-linguistics, Hei He's narrative strategy provides a "non-anthropocentric" writing paradigm for contemporary literature. Its value lies not only in exposing problems, but also in reshaping ecological cognition with the power of language, which opens up a poetic path for the construction of a "community of human and natural life".

5. Conclusion

Ghost Dog, as one of the representative works of Hei He's animal literature, completes the literary diagnosis of ecological crisis through the delicate transitivity system configuration, and also provides profound ecological thinking for the conflict between safari culture and modern civilization. With his unique narrative strategy and language choice, Hei He vividly depicts the complex relationship between man and nature and between man and animals, and profoundly reveals the erosion of wilderness by modern civilization and the root of ecological crisis.

From the perspective of eco-linguistics, Ghost Dog is not only an excellent literary work, but also a work with important ecological ethics value. It reminds us to abandon anthropocentrism, respect nature, protect animals and reconstruct the harmonious relationship between man and nature. At the same time, the innocence and kindness of children shown in the works also provide us with useful enlightenment in the construction of ecological civilization. In the future, we expect more literary works to pay attention to ecological problems, spread ecological ideas and contribute more to the construction of ecological civilization, just like Ghost Dog.

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