

An Eco-discourse Analysis of the Nature Poem from the Perspective of Transitivity System - A Case Study of Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

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Abstract

Ecological discourse analysis, as an emerging discipline, aims to reveal the role of language in ecology. The transitivity system serves as a theoretical foundation, which helps to explore the ecological ideas implied in ecological discourse. William Wordsworth, a British Romantic poet, is famous for his poetry depicting natural scenery. *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is a representative work of his nature poems. Based on the transitivity system of systemic functional linguistics, this paper conducts a deep analysis of Wordsworth's nature poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* from the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, exploring the basic path of the poet's expression of his ecological view through language. On the one hand, the poet regards the relationship between humans and all things in nature as a harmonious and equal dialogue partnership. He wants to advocate respect for nature, awe of nature, and oppose anthropocentrism, promoting the ecological idea of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, which reflects his positive ecological view. On the other hand, by studying Wordsworth's ecological ideas, readers can be guided to establish a healthy ecological view, enhance their sense of ecological responsibility, and promote people's love for nature and friendship with nature.

Keywords: Ecological discourse analysis; the transitivity system; William Wordsworth; nature poem; daffodils.

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I. INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was a prominent figure in the Romantic poetry scene in 19th century England. As one of the most famous Romantic poets in 19th century England, Wordsworth witnessed the negative impact of rapid industrial development on the natural environment. Therefore, he opposed the oppression of nature brought about by industrialization and anthropocentrism, and longed for a state of mutual equality and harmony among all living beings. Most of his poems are nature poems, which contain ecological thoughts and are worth analyzing and promoting. Through his detailed descriptions and sincere praises of nature in his poetry, his views on nature and ecology are fully demonstrated.

His poetry mainly depicts the beautiful natural scenery, common things, and rural life. His poetry style is natural, simple, and imaginative. It reveals his deep concern for nature and humanity, and the concept of returning to nature and harmonious coexistence with it, which coincides with contemporary ecological thinking.

A widely accepted view is that Wordsworth is a rare master of praising nature in the history of English literature. His poetry reveals a subtle connection between humans and nature, and *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is a representative work of his nature poems. This poem consists of four sections, each with six lines. The first section describes the author's glimpse of a group of golden daffodils swaying in the wind during a walk; the second section is a continuation of the first, as the daffodils stretch endlessly and dance gracefully; the third section recounts the author's prolonged gaze and joyful feelings; the fourth section depicts the impression and spiritual companionship of the daffodils in the poet's heart.

This poem describes a poet's ordinary outing experience. From the organization of the poem, the depicted scene unfolds in a step-by-step and orderly manner. First, "I" wandered alone, then noticed a patch of golden daffodils, and followed the sight to see the daffodils extending endlessly, dancing in the shimmering sea of flowers. Next is "my" reaction: I was

mesmerized by this intoxicating natural beauty, and such a spectacle made "me" feel spiritually happy, as if in a trance. Finally, it is "my" memory: Whenever I feel empty, lonely, and lost, I think of the joy and happiness that the daffodils brought me, and can't help but dance with them. However, how is this emotion towards nature expressed through the construction of words? This paper takes William Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* as the research object, based on the theory of transitivity system in systemic functional linguistics, and interprets it from the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, in order to reveal more deeply how the poet conveys his attitude towards nature through language, explain the author's ecological values, and enrich the research of ecological discourse.

II. Definition of Two Key Terms

This section will provide definitions for two terms to help make the current research more comprehensive and verifiable.

2.1. Ecological Discourse Analysis

With the increasing global ecological awareness, linguistics has received more and more attention from scholars. Based on this situation, Halliday believed that some views, such as "anthropocentrism", can be seen as the main cause of ecological destruction. Therefore, he proposed the Halliday model, which aims to emphasize the impact of language on ecology and study ecological issues from a linguistic perspective. Later it became the beginning of EDA. In order to reveal hidden ecological or non-ecological ideologies, Harré defined EDA as including but not limited to the analysis of discourse related to the environment. Discourse analysis can be related to ecological issues such as animals, food, climate, and weather. In 2014, the term "ecological discourse analysis" entered the academic field as a term. It appeared in Alexander and Stibbe's article "*From Ecological Discourse Analysis to Discourse Ecological Analysis*". Their use of this term is to emphasize that as the main research path of ecological linguistics, discourse analysis within the ecological linguistics framework (ecological discourse analysis) is different from ecological discourse analysis. EDA not only includes the analysis of ecological discourse, but also the analysis of the relationship between humans and other organisms. Based on the above research, discourse choices can be clearly defined. Through ecological discourse analysis, ecological ideas and values can be conveyed.

2.2 Nature Poem

As an important part of culture, poetry shows its great charm and is an essential object of cultural research. Poetry, according to Cambridge dictionary, means "poems in general as a form of literature", which is "the spontaneous overflow of strong feelings". Poetry is a broad concept and covers multiple categories. Hence, this paper pays special attention to nature poems, aiming

to explore its implied meaning through the study of nature poems.

For nature poems, German scholar Wilbert gave it a general definition, "nature poem is a general term of all forms of poetry determined by its subject matter, which takes various natural phenomena (scenery, climate, animal and plant world) as the core theme and is based on natural experience."

In 1993, Jay Parini's gave the definition to nature poems in his book *Writing Poems for the Little Planet*. He said that nature poem is "poetry with a high degree of concern for the natural world". And in this book's postscript, Robert Pack provided his demands on nature poets. He stressed that "nature poems need poets to rediscover themselves, take a new moral code, and develop people's appreciation of natural beauty and sympathy for non-human nature."

In conclusion, nature poems play an important role. It describes all the creatures in nature, no matter they are large or small. For them, they can be plants, animals, seasons and even the weather. Poets added their detailed observation, great imagination and their own thoughts to their works. By studying them, people can enjoy the beauty of the poems.

2.3. The Relationship Between Ecological Discourse Analysis and Nature Poem

In today's world where global environmental issues are frequent, language as a means of social intervention, many scholars have begun to realize the importance of ecological analysis of discourse. As the president of the International Society for Ecological Discourse Language, Stibbe distinguishes discourse into three different types: beneficial discourse, neutral discourse, and destructive discourse, pointing out that we should advocate, encourage, and promote ecological beneficial discourse, resist ecological destructive discourse, criticize and improve non-ecological factors in neutral discourse, and spread more positive energy. Unlike traditional linguistic research, ecological linguistics is no longer limited to the language system itself, but more concerned with how language intervenes in society and determines our living environment. Its research scope is not only limited to human society, but also includes concern for the fate of other species in nature.

Nature poems belong to a beneficial discourse and is an important content in the study of ecological linguistics. Nature poems mostly praise the non-human life forms in nature, such as mountains, rivers, lakes, wind, frost, snow, flowers, plants, and trees. Through the means of poetry's rhythm, wording, imagery, artistic conception, and language style, it expresses the admiration and love for nature, as well as the awe and friendship towards all things in nature. From the perspective of ecological linguistics, they belong to

ecological discourse. Existing research on nature poem mainly focuses on literary and translation perspectives, and the interpretation of natural poetry based on the framework of ecological linguistics is relatively limited. Based on the theory of transitivity system in systemic functional linguistics, this paper conducts an ecological discourse analysis of Wordsworth's nature poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, analyzing the language and discourse of the poem from multiple dimensions and levels to interpret its spiritual connotation and explore the poet's ecological view of nature.

III. The Transitivity System

Systemic functional linguists, represented by Halliday, provide a theoretical basis for ecological discourse analysis and propose three meta functions of language system networks: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational meta function is realized in the form of clauses by the transitivity system. Halliday believes that the transitivity system reflects the speaker's experience of the objective world, covering three parts: process, participants in the process, and environmental components related to the process. Its function is to divide people's perceptions and thoughts in the real world into various "processes" and indicate the "participants" and "environmental components" related to various processes.

Based on people's perceptions and thoughts in the real world, the transitivity system divides human experience into six types of processes: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. Generally, material processes, mental processes, and relational processes frequently appear in various discourses, while behavioral processes, verbal processes, and existential processes occur less frequently. The classification of transitive processes mainly depends on the connotation of the verb in the clause, and different process types correspond to different participants. The most frequently occurring material process (doing) represents the process of doing something, generally expressed by various action verbs, and its main participants are the Actor and the Goal; the mental process (sensing) describes the inner world and can be further subdivided into emotional processes, cognitive processes, etc., often expressed by words such as "like, want, feel, see, think", and its main

participants are the Sayer and the Phenomenon; the relational process (being) reflects the logical relationship between two things, which can be further subdivided into two categories of attribution and identification, so there are many types of participants, mainly including Carrier and Attribute, identified and identifier, occupied and occupier; the verbal process (saying) refers to the process of people communicating information through speaking, generally expressed by verbs such as "say, tell, talk, ask", and its main participants are the Sayer and the Receiver; the behavioral process (behaving) is the physiological activity process of things, and its participants are the Behaver; the existential process (existing) is the process of something existing, mainly expressed by the "there be" sentence pattern and words such as "exist, happen, take place", and its participant is the Existent. In addition, the environmental components in the clause are also an important part of the transitivity system, which are indirect participants relative to the direct participants, mainly including time, space, manner, comparison, cause and effect, identity, usually appearing in the form of prepositional phrases in the discourse.

In short, transitivity system is used to reflect people and objects in the subjective and objective world, as well as the corresponding participants and environmental factors. Therefore, people can use language to discover, analyze, and solve ecological problems, evaluate ecological status, and promote ecological harmony development from the perspective of transitivity system.

IV. Analysis of Transitivity in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

4.1 Distribution of the six processes of the transitivity system

Although the poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* consists of 24 lines, this paper classifies lines 4, 10, 16, and 20 as participants (line 4) and environmental components (lines 10, 16, and 20) based on their form of expression and the meaning of the context of the poem, rather than treating them as independent clauses. Therefore, in fact, 20 lines in the poem undergo the analysis of the six processes. The detailed distribution information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Transitive Processes in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

	Number (Line)	Proportion
Material Process	13 (Line 1,2,6,8,9,12,13,14,18,19,21,23,24)	65%
Mental Process	3 (Line 3,11,17)	15%
Relational Process	3 (Line 7,15,22)	15%
Existential Process	1 (Line 5)	5%
Total	20	100%

From Table 1, it can be seen that *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* mainly includes four types of processes: material process, mental process, relational process, and existential process, totaling 20. Among them, the material process accounts for the largest

proportion, which is 65%. The second is the mental process, with three, accounting for 15%. There are three relational processes, accounting for 15%, one existential process, accounting for 5%. In the entire poem, the material process appears 13 times, with the highest

proportion, the mental process and relational process both appear three times, the existential process appears once, and there is no occurrence of behavioral process and verbal process. This is because *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is a poem that combines scenery and emotion. On the one hand, it requires detailed and vivid descriptions of the scenery, especially with the help of dynamic verbs to give the scenery strong vitality. These involve material processes, so the frequency of their appearance is the highest. On the other hand, the poet expresses his love for nature and the joy that nature brings to him through the scenery, emphasizing the integration of the poet himself and nature. Therefore, the

proportion of mental processes and relational processes ranks second. The ecological views implied in various relationships in the poem will be analyzed one by one below.

4.2 Analysis of Material Processes

It should be pointed out that which type of transitive process a clause belongs to can basically be determined by the semantic connotation of the verb in the clause. Therefore, the specific analysis of material processes in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* only involves verbs and participants, and environmental components are not taken into account, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of Material Processes in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

Line	Verb	Participant	
		Actor	Goal
Line 1	wandered	I	
Line 2	floats	that (a cloud)	
Line 6	fluttering and dancing	(daffodils)	
Line 8	twinkle	(daffodils)	
Line 9	stretched	they (daffodils)	
Line 12	tossing	(daffodils)	their heads
Line 13	danced	waves	
Line 14	out-did	(they/daffodils)	waves
Line 18	brought	the show	me
Line 19	lie	I	
Line 21	flash upon	they (daffodils)	
Line 23	fills	my heart	
Line 24	dances	my heart	

From Table 2, it can be seen that out of the 13 material processes, there are 4 (I, I, my heart, my heart) that involve human or human-related agents, accounting for 20%, while the remaining 80% of agents are related to non-human organisms or things (cloud, daffodil, wave, the show). From a rhetorical perspective, it can be said that the poet uses personification as a rhetorical device, using dynamic verbs that are originally used to describe human actions, such as “toss” and “dance”, to describe non-human organisms. However, from an ecological linguistic perspective, this reflects the poet's ecological consciousness. Verbs such as “fluttering”, “dancing” (Line 6), “twinkle” (Line 8), “tossing” (Line 12), “danced” (Line 13), and “out-did” (Line 14) appear in the active form, with their logical subjects participating in the processes as agents, reflecting the poet's description of the behavioral abilities of non-human life forms.

Regan and Singer pointed out that “including sentient animals in moral consideration and recognizing their ability to experience pleasure and pain is the obligation of humans as agents under ecological ethics towards animals.” Similarly, in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, the poet uses dynamic verbs that imply vitality to describe daffodils or waves, placing them in the position of the subject and giving them equal status with humans. This can also be seen as the author's responsibility and

obligation towards non-human organisms or things in nature, and is a positive ecological consciousness and behavior. When Wordsworth uses material processes to characterize meaning in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* by treating non-human life forms as the agent, he integrates the aesthetic subject and object, indicating that he does not see himself as the ruler of nature, but expresses a strong ecological consciousness and ecological values towards nature.

There are six sentences with “daffodils” as the subject or object. The main process with daffodils as the subject is material process (lines 9, 14, 21), and the three sentences “they stretched in never-ending line, they out-did the sparkling waves in glee, they flash upon that inward eye” reveal the growth environment and natural properties of daffodils. In a material process (line 24), “a host of golden daffodils” and “the great show” depict daffodils as the object, reflecting their non-active status in the empirical world.

In this poem, the processes related to daffodils are mostly material processes, and daffodils are participants in the process, belonging to non-human life forms as agents, but characterized as subjects with behavioral abilities, that is, individual agents, rather than recipients of human behavior. By placing “daffodils” in the agent position, the author gives non-human life forms

the same status as humans and acknowledges their various behavioral and perceptual abilities, which reflects the author's ecological view. At the same time, the frequency of appearance of humans and daffodils as subjects is roughly equal, indicating the equality of humans and nature, and that humans cannot control nature. In addition, from a process perspective, the author's "lied, danced" surface form is a material process, but it expresses deeper meanings based on the semantic context before and after. The author's "lying on a chair" to enjoy the beautiful scenery is a comfortable and pleasant state, and in such a beautiful natural scenery, the author is happy in body and mind, wanting to "dance" with the daffodils, which expresses the author's love for natural scenery, and also indirectly reflects a positive attitude of humans towards their place of attachment, conveying a positive ecological meaning in the discourse.

4.3 Analysis of Mental Processes

From Table 3, it can be seen that all sensors are human beings ("I"), and the objects of phenomenon are

the "daffodils" or "companions of daffodils" of non-human beings. In terms of surface meaning, "saw," "gazed," and "thought" are all verbs that express a static state, but the semantic coherence in the context can trigger deep evaluative psychological activities. The verb "gazed" itself contains the meaning of "being attracted by something and therefore watching it attentively," expressing the poet's long gaze at the vibrant daffodils in the poem. "Little thought" expresses that the impact of nature (daffodils) on human beings is not temporary but lasting. Therefore, the mental process in the poem actually expresses the poet's admiration for nature, as a human being ("I") who is stunned by the scenery of nature. Although the senser is human and the phenomenon is a non-human life form in nature, the deep meaning expresses the impact of the perceived phenomenon on the senser, that is, the impact of nature on humans. At this point, the relationship between humans and nature is no longer one of subject and object, but rather a fusion of the two, demonstrating the poet's reverence for nature and a natural ecological consciousness.

Table 3: Analysis of Mental Processes in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

Line	Verb	Participant	
		Senser	Phenomenon
Line 3	saw	I	a crowd
Line 11	saw	I	ten thousand
Line 17	gazed and thought	I	(daffodils)

4.4 Analysis of Relational Processes

Table 4 is an analysis of the relational process in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. The word "continuous" (Line 7) in the clause of the relational process describes the attribute of daffodils, which is abundant, and numerous. The surface meaning of this sentence is an objective statement about daffodils, but the deeper meaning conveys the poet's positive evaluation of daffodils as full of vitality and energy,

expressing the poet's admiration for them. The word "gay" (Line 5) in the poem expresses the joy that daffodils bring to the poet, and "which" (Line 22) refers to the happy experience which is recognized as a "bliss" or comfort. These two sentences describe the calm and joy that daffodils bring to the poet, illustrating the spiritual comfort that nature brings to humanity and reflecting the poet's ecological concept of being close to this quiet, fresh and beautiful natural scenery.

Table 4: Analysis of Relational Processes in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

Line	Verb	Participant	
		Carrier	Attribute
Line 7	(are)	(daffodils)	continuous
Line 15	be	a poet	gay
Line 22	is	which	the bliss of solitude

4.5 Analysis of Existential Processes

In *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, the only occurrence of an existential process is the line "Beside the lake, beneath the trees" (Line 5). The participants in this existential process are the daffodils, while the environmental components involve the "lake" and "tree." The appearance of cloud, vales and hills, daffodils, lake, tree, breeze, stars, bay, and wave throughout the poem demonstrates the harmonious coexistence and integration of all things in nature, reflecting the poet's pursuit of a balanced and harmonious ecological view at a deeper level.

V. CONCLUSION

Many poets are concerned with nature, love nature, and advocate for harmony between human and nature because in some degree nature can nurture humanity with a broad mind and internal rhythm, inspiring and cultivating people, leading them back to purity and tranquility, and making them noble in character and pure in thought. People also constantly gain insight and sublimation of life through the enjoyment of natural beauty; thus, it is necessary to respect nature and establish a harmonious ecological environment.

This paper analyzes and discusses William Wordsworth's nature poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* from the perspective of ecological discourse analysis and the theoretical basis of systemic functional linguistics, in order to summarize the unique ways in which poetic language conveys meaning and to conduct an in-depth analysis of the author's ecological views. The research results show that: The processes related to daffodils are mostly material processes. Daffodils are outsiders to life, but they are portrayed as subjects with behavioral abilities, i.e., human actors, rather than recipients of human behavior. Daffodils belong to nature and in this poem represent nature that exists in relation to humans.

The repeated appearance of the daffodils as subjects in the transitive process indicates the important position of nature represented by the daffodils in the poet's mind, expressing the poet's ecological view of being attached to and loving nature, and the poem is a true expression of the poet's admiration for nature. Through detailed analysis, it can be inferred that from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, interpreting ecological discourse and exploring deeper ecological connotations of discourse is feasible. Meanwhile, language is a carrier for expressing thoughts and ideologies. People should learn to use language to construct an ecological worldview of harmonious coexistence between human and nature, gradually influencing people's language habits through this

worldview, and building an environmentally friendly society of harmonious coexistence.

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