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available online at: <http://www.jtuh.tu.edu.iq>Shkar Saffir Abdullah<sup>1</sup>Dr. Zanyar Faiq Saeed<sup>2</sup>

- 1- MA student/  
English Literature  
Sulaimani University
- 2- Department of English  
College of Languages  
University of Sulaimani  
Sulaimani, Iraq

\* E-mail : shkar.abdullah@univsul.edu.iq

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## Linguistic Revelations: A Stylistic Study of Sassoon's Post-Traumatic Experience in Barker's *Regeneration*

**ABSTRACT**

This paper adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to study Siegfried Sassoon, a major character in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*. SFG shows the relationships between various process types and the participants who participate in the action. Accordingly, Barker's characterization of Sassoon is better understood through the analysis of the linguistic choices they make. Therefore, the study claims that Barker's and Sassoon's linguistic choices can reveal many aspects of the latter's world view and psychology. One such issue demonstrated by *Regeneration* a psychological disorder inflicting the soldiers is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

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### المظاهر اللغوية: دراسة اسلوبية لخبرات صدمة ساسون في رواية احياء لكاكتبتها باركر

شكار سفير عبدالله / طالبة ماجستير / جامعة السليمانية / كلية اللغات

د. زانيار فائق سعيد / الجامعة السليمانية / كلية اللغات

**الخلاصة:**

يتبنى هذا البحث نظرية النحو الوظيفي لهاليداي لدراسة سيغفريد ساسون، وهو شخصية رئيسية في رواية احياء لكاكتبتها بات باركر. يظهر النحو الوظيفي العلاقات بين أنواع العمليات المختلفة والكيانات التي تشارك في العملية. بناءً على هذا، تدعي الدراسة بأن الخيارات اللغوية لباركر وساسون يمكن أن تكشف عن جوانب كثيرة من الواقع النفسي لساسون. إحدى الاضطرابات النفسية التي تتناولها رواية احياء هو اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة الذي يصيب الجنود الشعراء الذين شاركوا في الحرب العالمية الاولى.

## List of Abbreviations:

Material Process	MP
Actor	A
Goal	G
Mental Process	MTP
Senser	SS
Phenomenon	PH
Behavioural Process	BP
Behaver	BR
Verbal Process	VP
Sayer	SR
Verbiage	VG
Receiver	RV
Relational Process	RP
Identifier	IR
Identified	ID
Existential Process	EP
Existent	EX
Post-traumatic stress disorder	PTSD

## 1. Introduction

*Regeneration* is the first novel of Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy series published in 1991. *Regeneration* is an account of exploring the gruesome realities of the First World War fronts through the characters' point of view. Barker demonstrates how continuous intensive stress and pressure of warfare inflict pain on the soldier's psyche. Thus, in *Regeneration*, characters exist and act at a certain remove from society and they progressively distance themselves from the supposedly normative roles, experiences, and attitudes (Bond, 2016: 9). Moreover, the setting is mostly located in Craiglockhart military hospital for soldiers who develop symptoms of PTSD. Soldiers with PTSD suffer from flashbacks that have a hallucinatory quality, hypervigilance that may reach paranoid proportions, and feeling of detachment or estrangement from others (Jeste et al, 2013: 104). The novel, then, records therapeutic sessions between a psychiatrist called Rivers and his patients who speak about the tragic incidents they witnessed which are captured and analyzed using stylistic theories.

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that attempts to study various types of texts from a linguistic lens. In literary studies, stylistics aims to analyze and interpret the linguistic

features of a text to demonstrate how the language used affects the way meaning is communicated. Additionally, among various definitions of stylistics, it mainly refers to the author's distinctive linguistic choices from the overall possible sets of options. These choices in turn act as a valuable index to individual's mind style and thinking mechanism as Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (2006, 229) state that, "stylistics involves an idea of choice among equivalent ways of expressing the same thought". Hence, to systematically capture and interpret the linguistic preferences an individual makes, there should be a linguistic model or a theory developed to analyze a given text by. The theory that is adopted in this paper to analyze Sassoon's character is Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG henceforth).

## 2. Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic functional grammar is a linguistic approach developed by the British linguist Michael Halliday in his seminal work *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994, 2004). In SFG, language is seen as a tool or a resource for construing meaning and also to store the experience built up in the process of living (Matthiessen, 2013: 4). Therefore, grammar, which is responsible for studying how meanings are made through the choice of words and other grammatical resources, is a natural part of the system of language (Bloor and Bloor, 2004: 2).

To Halliday, language has developed to express, or construct three types of meaning, which he terms meta-functions of language: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational function refers to the way people talk about their experience in life; the interpersonal is concerned with using language to interact with other people socially; and the textual function captures the organization of language to fit in its context (Thomson, 1996: 30; Norgaard, 2010: 184). Hence, the grammar of language provides the basic resources in terms of systemic sets of options to express these functions.

In this paper, only the ideational function is adopted to analyze Sassoon's character through the linguistic choices made by him and the author as well. The ideational function depicts the ways people make sense of reality; that is when language is used to express the events happening in the physical as well as in the abstract world, it fulfills the ideational function. Halliday and Hassan (2004: 17) define the ideational function as "a representation of the real world, whether abstract or physical, as it is apprehended in an individual's experience".

The experiential function is an outstanding marker of an individual's style, especially in the narrative discourse for it is specifically concerned with analyzing the character's

linguistic choices from the whole language repertoire. Moreover, Halliday develops the system of transitivity as a grammatical facility for capturing and analyzing an individual's experience in the language. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 170) claim that "The transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types". The processes are material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential. Each clause contains two central functional elements that are the process itself which is realized by a verbal group and the participant (s) realized by a nominal group; there is also a less important element that is the circumstances that are mostly realized by adverbial or prepositional phrases (Simpson, 2004: 22).

### **3. Six Process Types:**

The following account is an elaboration on the six process types according to Halliday's theory:

#### **3.1 Material Process**

A material process represents concrete and abstract doing and happening. This process expresses people's experience with the outer or the external world. Furthermore, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 179), "a material clause construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy". They add that "the source of the energy bringing about the change is typically a participant — the Actor" (2004: 179). In addition, there is another participant that is the goal which refers to the thing(s)/person(s) that gets affected by the doing and the happening. The following example illustrates this process type:

- The man (**A**) kicked (**MP**) the ball (**G**).

#### **3.2 Mental Process**

A mental process represents the process of abstract sensing. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 197) argue that "This process of sensing may be construed either as flowing from a person's consciousness or as impinging on it, but it is not construed as a material act." There are three main types of mental processes, namely, processes of cognition (e.g. remember, think, etc.), perception (e.g. see, notice, etc.), and reaction also called emotive (e.g. like, hate, love, etc.) (Simpson, 2004: 23). There are two participant roles associated with mental processes: one is the conscious Senser who feels, reacts, perceives a phenomenon that is either the thing, the act or the fact that is sensed, as the following example illuminates:

- The old man (**SS**) liked (**MTP**) the film (**PH**).

### 3.3 Relational Process

A Relational process represents the process of being that serves primarily to characterize and identify (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:210). In addition, the relational process functions to establish a connection between two or more participants or entities. Therefore, based on the nature of the relationship, there are three main types of relational processes that are intensive, possessive, and circumstantial. According to Michael Burke (2014: 53), intensive relational process denotes a relationship of equivalence as in “x is y”. The possessive marks a relationship of possession for instance as in “x has y”. The third type is the circumstantial that “marks a relationship of time, place, manner, cause, accompaniment, role, matter or angle (x is on y, x is at y, and so on).” Furthermore, there are two participant roles associated with the process: the identifier which describes and defines the other entity namely the identified (Simpson: 2004: 25). The following is an example of this process type:

- The child (**ID**) is (**RP**) in the garden (**IR**).

### 3.4 Behavioral Process

A behavioral process represents, typically human, physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, smiling, etc. (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 248). The processes of this type do not have distinct identifiable features of their own since they partly resemble the material processes and partly resemble the mental ones. They are similar to the material processes in representing a physical action, yet reversely, the action is not practiced on another entity. Additionally, the behavioral processes, like the mental processes, are frequently described as manifestations of states of consciousness; yet, there are physical actions in performing the processes. Further, the major participant associated with a behavioral process is the Behaver, which should be a conscious participant (Burke, 2014: 54). The following is an instance of this process type:

- The patient (**BR**) cried (**BP**).

### 3.5 Verbal Process

A verbal process is a process of saying. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 252) point to the importance of verbal processes and assert that “They contribute to the creation of narrative

by making it possible to set up dialogic passages.” The participant involved in these processes are the Sayer, the entity that verbalizes a speech, the Verbiage, the thing that is said or communicated, and the Receiver or the Target, an entity to whom the verbiage is addressed (Finch, 1998: 123; Simpson, 2004: 24), as the following example, illustrates:

- The prime minister (**SR**) announced (**VP**) his new decision (**VG**) to the parliament (**RV**).

### 3.6 Existential Process

An existential process shows that something exists or happens. The frequency of using this process type is low in comparison with the other process types; however, in a narrative, existential processes serve to introduce participants or things and also used to introduce phenomena into the (predominantly) material stream of narration (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 255-6). These processes include the dummy participant (there), and the Existent element that denotes the entity or event that exists, as in the following example:

- There was (**EP**) a mouse (**EX**).

## 4. Siegfried Sassoon: Linguistic Revelations

Sassoon is one of the central characters in *Regeneration*. He is an angry satirist, a poet and a soldier who has fought in the British army in the First World War before the novel opens; despite being a serving officer with an awesome reputation for reckless courage, he has chosen to oppose the war publically (Simpson, 1997: 8). This protest seems to spring from his own experiences in the bloody fronts as men`s only fate is to be killed or kill mercilessly. However, instead of court-martialing him, the authority boarded Sassoon to a mental hospital to undermine his influence on the soldiers as they are less likely to be influenced by a mentally-ill man. However, at Craiglockhart hospital, a number of psychological symptoms of PTSD appear on Sassoon such as hallucinations, nightmares, and feeling of detachment from society, as the extracts below show:

For a moment, **looking up** [BP] to find that khaki-clad figure standing just inside the door, he [SS] **thought** [MTP] he was hallucinating again [PH].

‘Robert, what on earth **are you** [A] **doing** [MP] here?’ He [A] **jumped up** [MP] and **ran** [MP] across the lounge. ‘Thank God you [A] **’ve come** [MP].’

(Barker, 1991: 3)

He [A] **found** [MP] this more difficult [G]. ‘It [ID] **was** [RP] just that when I woke up [IR], the nightmares [A] **didn’t** always **stop** [MP]. So I [SS] **used to see** [MTP]...’ A deep breath. ‘Corpses [PH]. Men with half their faces shot off [A], **crawling** [MP] across the floor.’

‘I [SS] **don’t know** [MTP]. I [ID] **must’ve been** [RP], because I [SS] **could see** [MTP] the sister [PH].’

‘No. It [A] **happened** [MP] once during the day. I [ID] **’d been** [RP] to my club for lunch [IR], and when I [A] **came out** [MP] I [BR] **sat** [BP] on a bench, and... I [SS] **suppose** [MTP] I must’ve nodded off [PH].’ He [A] **was forcing** [MP] himself [G] to go on. ‘When I [A] **woke up** [MP], the pavement [G] **was covered** [MP] in corpses. Old ones, new ones, black, green.’ His [A] mouth **twisted** [MP]. ‘People [A] **were treading** [MP] on their faces [G].’

(ibid, 10)

‘Yes. I [BR] **used to sleep** [BP] quite a bit during the day, because I [ID] **was** [RP] afraid [IR] to go to sleep at night.’

No. I [SS] **do dream** [MTP], of course, but not about the war. Sometimes a dream [ID] **seems** [RP] to go on [IR] after I [A] **’ve woken up** [MP], so there’s [EP] a kind of in-between stage [IR].’ He [SS] **hesitated** [MTP]. ‘I [SS] **don’t know** [MTP] whether that’s abnormal [PH].’

(ibid, 10-11)

They [A] **worked** [MP] on the poem [G] for half an hour. The wind [A] **had been rising** [MP] all evening, and the thin curtain [A] **billowed** [MP] in the draught. One point Sassoon [BR] **looked up** [BP] and **said** [SR], ‘What [ID] ’s [RP] that noise [ID]?’

‘No, *that*.’

‘**Must be imagining** [MTP] things [PH].’ Sassoon [BR] **listened** [BP] again, then **said** [VP], ‘They [SR] **don’t wail** [VP]. They [BR] **hiss** [BP].’

(ibid, 125)

Table (1): Frequency of six process types

Process type	Frequency
Material	18
Mental	9
Behavioral	6
Verbal	2
Relational	6
Existential	1

Table (2): Frequency of six process types used by different participants

Participants	Sassoon	Hallucination-related phenomena
Actor	9	7
Senser	9	0
Behaver	5	1
Sayer	1	1
Identified	3	3
Existent	0	1

A brief glance at (1) and (2) tables above shows Sassoon in a struggle with the spectral creatures and sounds he visualizes and hears. Despite becoming an active participant in and sounds. On one hand, in the total 18 material processes, Sassoon becomes an actor in half of them mostly of the intransitive type. This means that Sassoon is unable to affect the things around him. While, at the same time, the nightmares and the hallucinations become active actors 7 times. Moreover, Sassoon is depicted as having no control over his actions because they are dominantly dictated and directed by his imagination; for instance, after perceiving the image of Robert, his closest friend, Sassoon starts to jump and run towards him.

Another process related to this point is the behavioral one, occurring 6 times, in which 5 of them are associated with Sassoon in the role of Behaver and the illusory creature functions as Behaver only once. Similarly, Sassoon`s behaviors are directed by internal motivations, that is, he looks up when he falsely sees Robert; he listens when he hears unrealistic sounds.

Relatedly, the hallucinations of the auditory type are imagined as Sassoon becomes a listener while the unknown sounds obtain the role of Sayer in a verbal clause.

Above all, by functioning as Senser in all 9 mental processes, Barker provides vivid evidence that the inhabitants of Sassoon`s world existed and sensed merely in his imagination and powerfully lead him into certain reactions towards the external world as well as his own inner world.

The following extract is another instance of hallucination in which Sassoon recalls what he sees adequately in the form of a flashback to his psychiatrist, Rivers:

‘Tapping. It [A] **started** [MP] in Owen’s room and then when I [A] **went** [MP] back to my own room it [A] **started** [MP] again. Owen [SS] **didn’t hear** [MTP] it [PH]. It [SS] **didn’t bother** [PH] me [PH] particularly, I [A] just **went off** [MP] to sleep and... when I [A] **woke up** [MP], somebody [BR] **was standing** [BP] just inside the door. I [SS] **knew** [MTP] who it was [PH]. I [SS] **couldn’t see** [MTP] the face [PH], but I [SS] **recognized** [MTP] his coat [PH].’ He [A] paused [MP]. ‘Orme. Nice lad. **Died** [MP] six months ago.’

‘No. Various people.’ A long silence. ‘I [SS] **know** [MTP] this must sound like the kind of thing I was seeing in London [PH], but it [ID] **isn’t** [RP]. It [ID] **’s** [RP]... nothing like that [IR]. In London they [A] **were clutching** [MP] holes [G] in their heads and **waving** [MP] their stumps [G] around. These **are** [EP]... very quiet [EX].’



Sassoon [SS] **thought** [MTP] about it [PH]. ‘No. They [ID] just **look** [RP] puzzled [IR]. They [SS] can’t **understand** [MTP] why I’m here [PH].’

(Barker, 1991: 163)

Table (3): Frequency of six process types

Process type	Frequency
Material	9
Mental	7
Behavioral	1
Verbal	0
Relational	3
Existential	1

Table (4): Frequency of six process types used by different participants

Participants	Sassoon	Hallucination-related phenomena
Actor	4	5
Senser	5	1
Behaver	0	1
Sayer	0	0
Identified	0	3
Existent	0	1

Tables (3) and (4) above demonstrate Sassoon’s experience with the people appearing to him in his own mind. In this sense, the extreme effect of hallucination appears on him as the people in his imagination become more active than he is. This fact is represented as the material and behavioral processes attributed to them outnumber those processes Sassoon attributes to himself.

In addition, Sassoon’s agonized mental life is revealed by becoming a Senser 5 times. The horrendous war memories seem to continuously disrupt the soldier’s mind in a way that he repeatedly re-experiences the incidents in the form of hallucinations. Moreover, Sassoon attributes realistic features to the illusory people that function as Senser once, which makes them appear more realistic than imaginary.

Sassoon’s account is dominated by pauses and silences occurring totally 5 times; Sassoon, while verbalizing his memories, he pauses at different intervals, especially when he attempts to utter the horrors of the mutilated corpses he sees. This manifests his confused mind and his inability to control it.

Isolation and feeling of detachment from his society seem to be two characteristic features of Sassoon character as the following extracts reveal:

‘Isolation, I [SS] **suppose** [MTP]. I [SR] **can’t talk** [VP] to anybody [RV].’

‘You [SR] **don’t say** [VP] stupid things [VG].’

(Barker, 1991: 32)

A flash of anger. ‘Nobody else [ID] in this *stinking* country **seems** [RP] to find it difficult [IR]. I [SS] **expect** [MTP] I’ll just learn to live with it [PH]. Like everybody else.’

(ibid, 33)

Alone and shivering on the pavement, Sassoon [SS] **thought** [MTP] about taking a taxi [PH] and **decided** [MTP] against it [PH]. The walk [A] **would do** [MP] him [G] good, and if he [A] **hurried** [MP] he [A] **could** probably **make** [MP] it [G] back in time. He [A] **threaded** [MP] his way [G] through the crowds on Princes Street. Now that Robert [G] **was gone** [MP], he [SS] **hated** [MTP] everybody, giggling girls, portly middle-aged men, women whose eyes settled on his wound stripe like flies [PH]. Only the young soldier home on leave [SS], staggering out of a pub, dazed and vacant-eyed, **escaped** [MTP] his disgust [PH].

Once he [A] **’d left** [MP] the city [G] behind, he [A] **began** [MP] to relax and swing [MP] along as he [A] **might have done** [MP] in France. He [SS] **remembered** [MTP] the march to Arras behind a limber [PH] whose swaying lantern [A] **cast** [MP] huge shadows [G] of striding legs across a white-washed wall. Then... No more walls. Ruined buildings. Shelled roads. ‘From sunlight to the sunless land.’ And for a second he [ID] **was** [RP] back [ID] there, Armageddon, Golgotha, there **were** [EP] no words [EX], a place of desolation so complete no imagination [A] **could have invented** [MP] it [G]. He [SS] **thought** [MTP] of Rivers [PH], and what he [SR] **’d said** [VP] that morning about finding safety unbearable [VG]. Well, Rivers [ID] **was** [RP] wrong [IR], people [IS] **were** [RP] more corruptible [IR] than that. *He [ID] was* [RP] more corruptible [IR] than that. A few days of safety, and all the clear spirit of the trenches [G] **was gone** [MP]. It [ID] **was** [RP] still, after all these weeks, pure joy [IR] to go to bed in white sheets and **know** [MTP] that he would wake [PH]. The road [SS] **smelled** [MTP] of hot tar [PH], moths [A] **flickered** [MP] between the trees, and when at last, turning up the drive into Craiglockhart, he [A] **stopped** [MP] and **threw back** [MP] his head [G], the stars [A] **burst** [MP] on his upturned face [G] like spray.

(ibid, 39-40)

Apart from Owen, he [A] **’d made** [MP] no friends [G] at Craiglockhart, not even Anderson, though they [A] **’d spent** [MP] a large part of every day together [G]. And he [SS] **’d never bothered** [MTP] to disguise his hatred of the place [PH].

(ibid, 213)

Table (5): Frequency of six process types

Process type	Frequency
Material	18
Mental	11
Behavioral	0
Verbal	3
Relational	6
Existential	1

Table (6): Frequency of six process types used by different participants

Participant roles	Sassoon	Other people
Actor	11	2
Senser	9	1
Behavior	0	0
Verbal	1	2
Relational	2	3
Existential	0	1

Tables (5) and (6) above demonstrate how Sassoon feels detached from the community and that he is not actively interacting with them. The pervasiveness of mental and material processes associated with Sassoon assert that he is a self-centered man abhorring and feeling estranged from the people with whom no memories of the fronts and trenches could be shared. In addition, he can act or think in the aftermath of being left alone which is apparent in the opening of each paragraph with words or phrases indicating isolation as (isolation, alone and shivering, and left the city, etc.). Consequently, Sassoon becomes an active actor in nearly half of the material processes mostly of the intransitive type.

Sassoon`s feeling of isolation is presented as nearly all of the 11 mental processes, mostly of the cognitive type, are associated with him. The only use of emotive mental process “hate” by Sassoon summarizes his contempt of all members of society, who sit safely at home while he and his fellow soldiers live under vulnerable conditions. Additionally, being alone with natural landscape reminds Sassoon of the trenches, i.e., the place where he belongs, and leave him in a state of internal conflict. This point is further aided by the use of three clusters of deviant clauses (Then... No more walls. Ruined buildings. Shelled roads) in which he escapes the city to be alone; yet, his loneliness is filled with memories of war and corrupted people.

Another interesting feature of Sassoon`s character is his inclination towards being silent; the absence of verbal processes attributed to Sassoon except in “I cannot talk...”, reduces his interactional interchange to a minimum.

This fact is concluded by the only Existent “no words” which explicitly reflects Sassoon`s wish to distance himself from his surrounding into a desolate place where total silence and speechlessness prevail his life. This fact also presents adequate evidence of miscommunication between the soldiers and the rest of society.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study has come up with the following conclusions:

- 1- It is concluded that Halliday`s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a good method to analyze and interpret literary texts.
- 2- The linguistic choices of Barker and his characters reveal much about the mental reality of his characters.

- 3- By using SFG, the paper has proved that the psychological reality of Sassoon is inflicted by post-traumatic hallucinations and isolation caused by his blood-curdling experiences in World War I.
- 4- Being unable to confront the horrible objective reality, Sassoon's attention is driven inward as is manifested by the frequent mental processes attributed to him. Although he functions as Actor as well, his actions are intransitive and have no trace left on the external reality.

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