

Transitivity is how grammar turns experience into meaning



How Do We Construe Our Experience Through Language?

Transitivity

Experience

Language



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Contents

- Transitivity
- Language as Experience
- The Grammar of Experience
- The Ideational Metafunction
- What Is Transitivity?
- Three Core Components of Transitivity
- Process
- Participants
- Circumstances
- Six Process Types
- Material Process (Doing & Happening)
- Mental Process (Sensing)
- Relational Process (Being & Having)

Contents

- Attributive Relational Process
- Identifying Relational Process
- Identifying vs Attributive
- Behavioral Process
- Verbal Process
- Existential Process
- Summary Table

- Why Transitivity Matters
- Conclusion
- Reference

Language as Experience

Humans experience:



- The external world (actions, events)
- ✓ She closed the door



- The internal world (thoughts, feelings, perceptions)
- ✓ She felt relieved.





Grammar gives
order to these
experiences

Language is a
representation of
human
experience

The Grammar of Experience

- ❖ Grammar helps us:
 - Describe actions
 - Describe thoughts and emotions
 - Describe relationships and existence
 - This organization happens through clauses
 - Each clause reflects one experience



The Ideational Metafunction



Ideational
metafunction



Interpersonal
metafunction



Textual metafunction

Concerned with experience and meaning
Realized through transitivity



What Is Transitivity?

- Transitivity explains how language represents experience
- It shows what is happening, who is involved, and under what conditions



Language

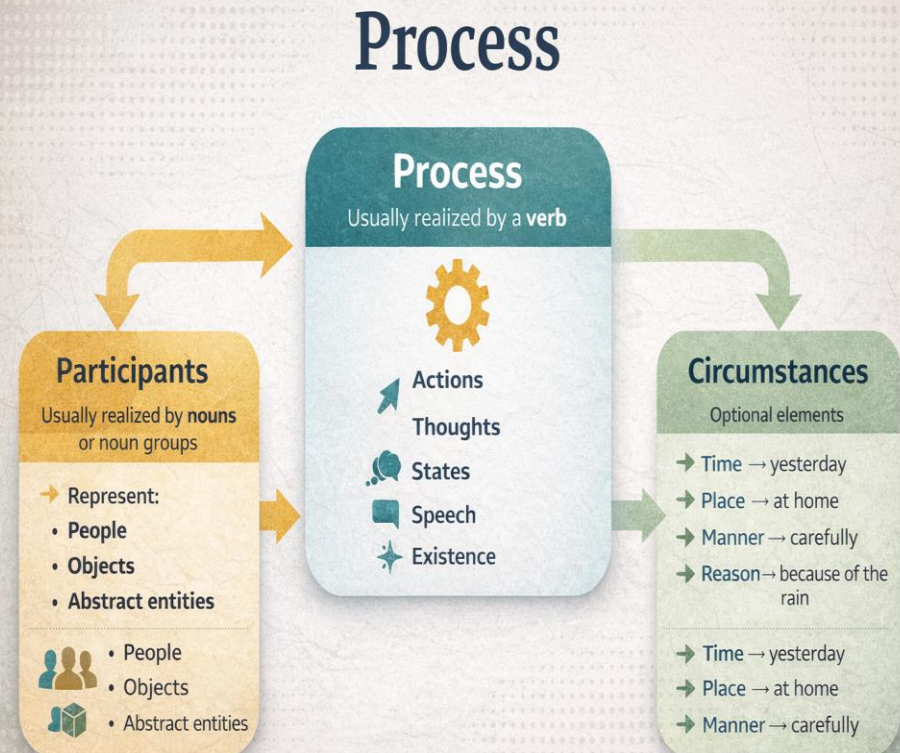
Experience

Three Core Components of Transitivity

- ❖ Every clause contains:
 - Process – what is happening
 - Participants – who or what is involved
 - Circumstances – additional details (time, place, manner, reason)

Process

- Usually realized by a verb
- ❖ Represents:
 - Actions
 - Thoughts
 - States
 - Speech
 - Existence



Participants

- Usually realized by nouns or noun groups
- ❖ Represent:
 - People
 - Objects
 - Abstract entities
 - Role depends on process type

Circumstances

- Optional elements
- ❖ Provide background information:
 - Time → yesterday
 - Place → at home
 - Manner → carefully
 - Reason → because of the rain

Six Process Types

Halliday identifies six types of processes:

Material

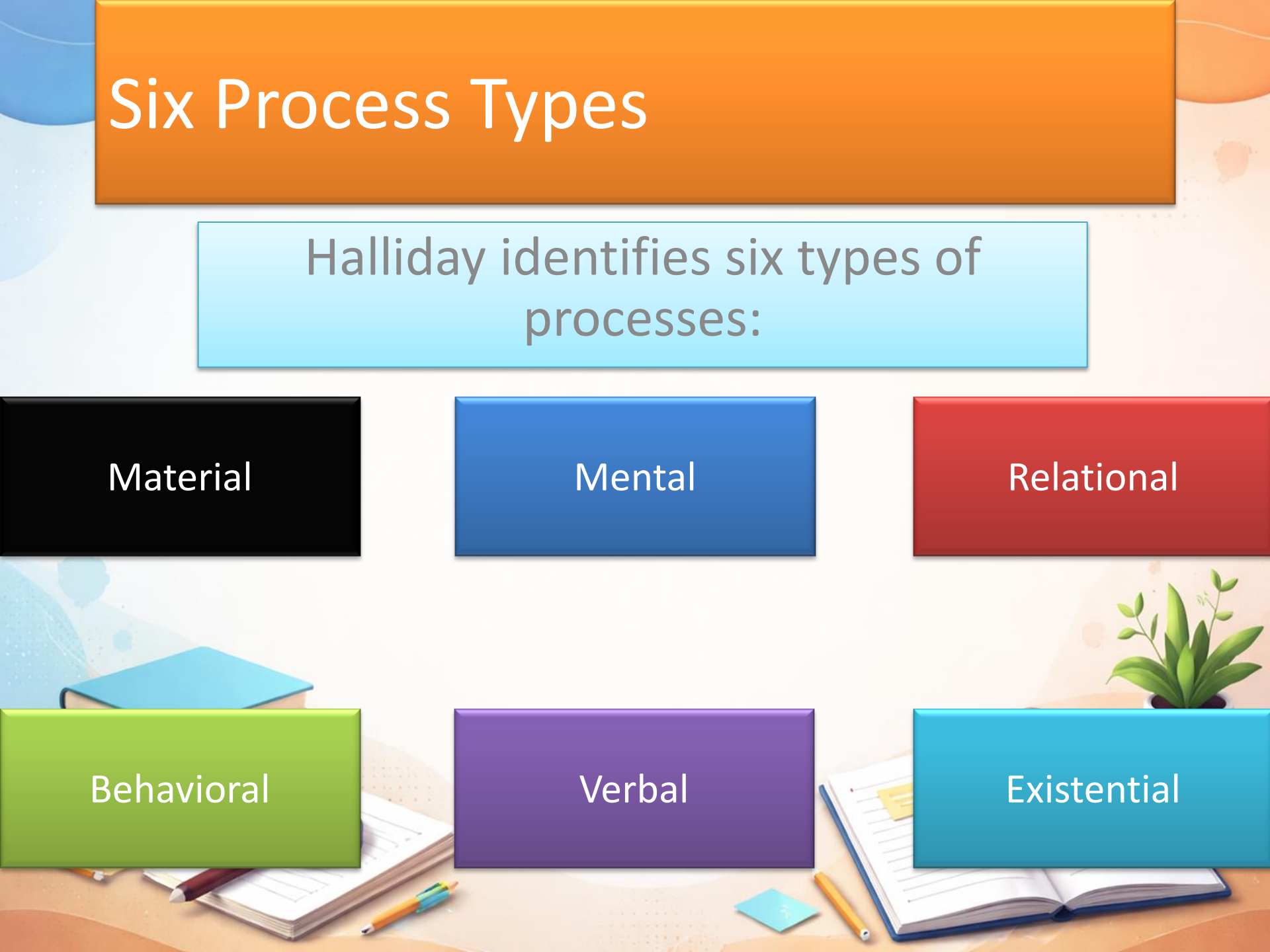
Mental

Relational

Behavioral

Verbal

Existential



Material Process (Doing & Happening)

- Actions in the physical world
- Focus: what someone does
- ❖ Participants:
 - Actor – doer of the action
 - Goal – affected entity (optional)



The mechanic fixed the car.

Actor

Goal



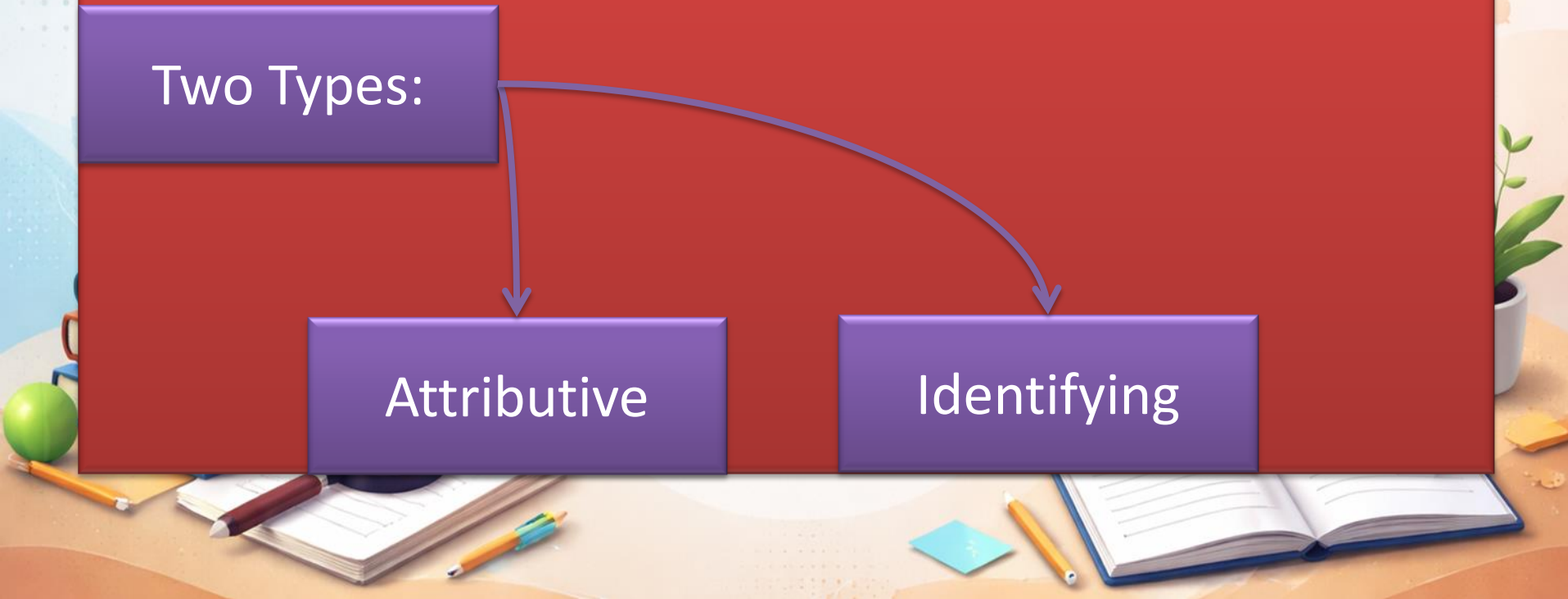
Relational Process (Being & Having)

- Expresses relationships
- Uses verbs like be, seem, have

Two Types:

Attributive

Identifying



Mental Process (Sensing)

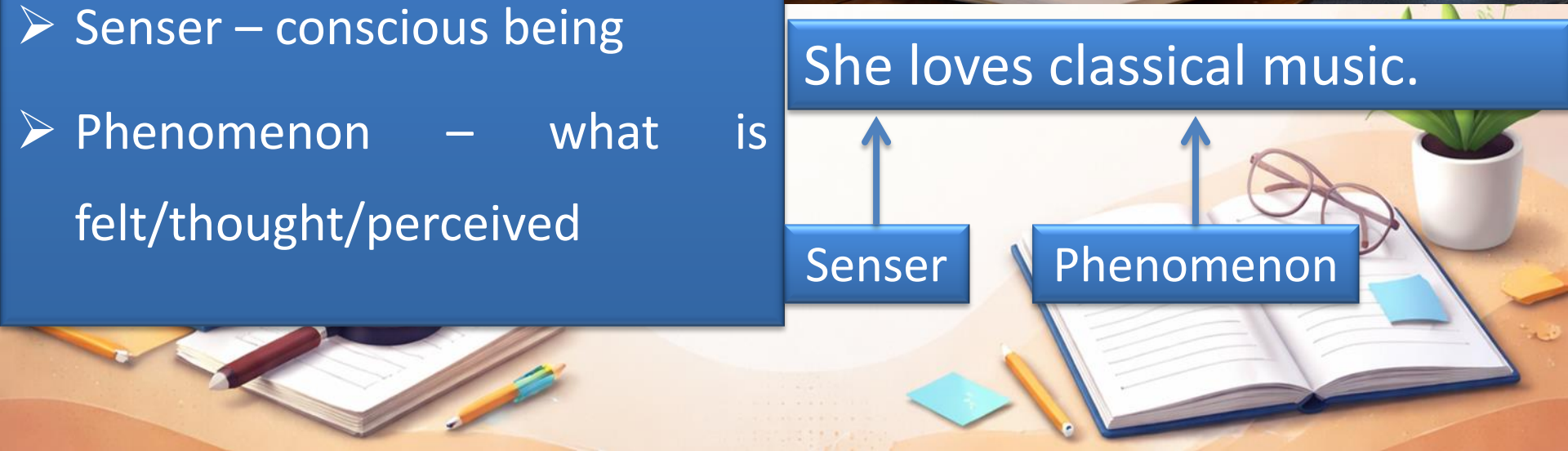
- Inner experiences:
- Thinking – Feeling
- Perceiving – Wanting
- ❖ Participants:
- Senser – conscious being
- Phenomenon – what is felt/thought/perceived



She loves classical music.

Senser

Phenomenon



Identifying Relational Process

- Assigns identity
- One participant defines the other
- ❖ Participants:
 - Token – specific
 - Value – general



This building is the university library.

Token

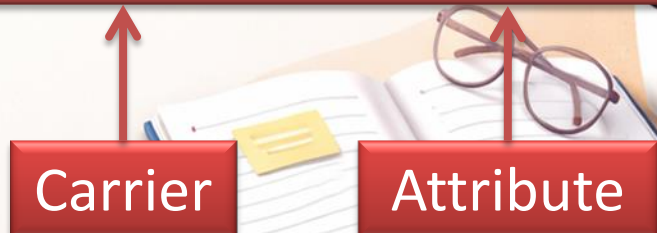
Value

Attributive Relational Process

- Assigns a quality or attribute
- ❖ Participants:
 - Carrier – entity described
 - Attribute – quality



The weather feels cold.



Identifying vs Attributive

Identifying

- The two participants can swap places without changing the meaning.

Example:

- Ali is the leader.
- The leader is Ali.

Attributive

- One participant describes the other; swapping them makes the clause incorrect or odd.

Example:

- Ali is clever.
- ✗ Clever is Ali.

Behavioral Process

- Human physiological or psychological behavior
- Between material & mental processes
- ❖ Participant:
- Behavior



She laughed loudly.

↑
Behavior



Verbal Process

- Processes of saying
- ❖ Verbs like:
 - say, tell, ask, explain
- ❖ Participants:
 - Sayer
 - Receiver (optional)
 - Verbiage (what is said)



The teacher explained the rule to the class.

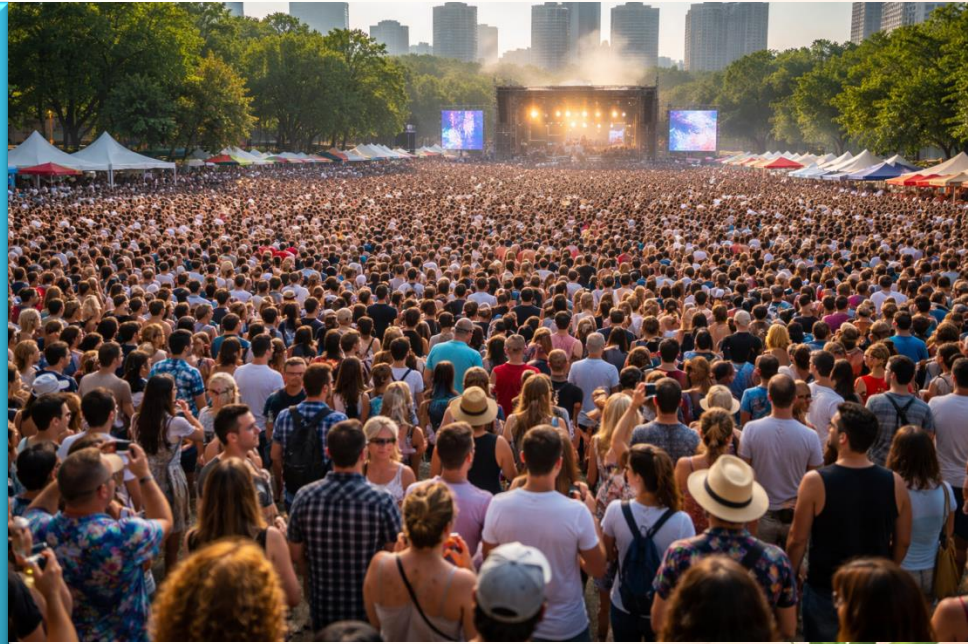
Sayer

Verbiage

Receiver

Existential Process

- Expresses existence
- Often uses there is / there are
- ❖ Participant:
- Existent



There were many people at the event.

Existent

A desk with an open notebook, a pair of glasses, a pencil, and a small plant. A blue arrow points upwards from the word 'Existent' to the notebook.

Summary Table

Process Type	Participants	Example
Material	Actor, Goal	The chef cooked dinner
Mental	Senser, Phenomenon	I enjoy music
Relational	Carrier/Attribute, Token/Value	The sky is blue
Behavioral	Behaver	He laughed
Verbal	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage	She explained the idea
Existential	Existent	There is a solution

Why Transitivity Matters

❖ Helps us:

- Analyze meaning in texts
- Understand how language shapes reality
- Study discourse, education, and translation
- Shows how grammar reflects worldviews

Conclusion

Transitivity shows how language represents experience through actions, thoughts, relationships, and existence. It helps us understand how grammar structures meaning and organizes our view of the world.

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