



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

## **Agency, Gendered Psychology and Authorial Messaging in Haruki Murakami's "The Second Bakery Attack": A Systemic Functional Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper applies Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyse the gendered agency, psychological depth and authorial intent in *The Second Bakery Attack* by Haruki Murakami through the use of language. The examination is based on the three metafunctions of ideational, interpersonal and textual structure and demonstrates how transitivity, mood, modality and thematic structures place the husband and wife characters in an opposing situation. The results show that the male speaker takes the first place on the basis of clause count, but his speech is characterized by the epistemic modality and mental activity, which points to emotional ambiguity and passivity. On the other hand, the less but more decisive clauses of the wife are made up of material processes, deontic modality and imperatives, which suggest narrative control and psychological assertiveness. Thematic analysis also reveals that her clauses also accord with narrative shifts which make her a textual presence even though she is marginal in the text. Such trends reinforce earlier analysis that the female characters in Murakami novels function as agents of transformation. The study confirms the importance of SFL in the criticism of literature as it reveals the ways in which authorial messages and gender ideological positions are encoded not only on a thematic level, but also on a grammatical level. The analysis gives the linguistically based interpretation of the gender processes and offers the general implications of the incorporation of SFL into feminist literary analysis.

**Keywords:** Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Gender, Transitivity, Modality, Agency, Psychological Discourse

### **Introduction**

The short story by Haruki Murakami, *The Second Bakery Attack*, is the nocturnal adventure of a newly married couple when the strange urge to eat drives them to commit a surrealistic hold-up in a McDonald's. Behind the humorous and dreamlike quality of it, the story struggles with more serious questions of agency, marriage, power systems, and gender role changes. The husband-narrator is depicted as passive, doubtful, and



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

psychologically troubled by an earlier bakery attack, but the wife is the one who is the initiator of action, pushing to the extreme even transgressive action. This reversal of traditional gender roles ensures that the story is a significant location in exploring the creation of gendered psychology and authorial position, not just in the plot and characterisation, but also within the linguistic patterns within the text.

The image of gender that Murakami introduced has been subject to a fresh academic analysis over the past few years. The feminist interpretation of his works, including *After Dark*, makes it possible to argue that the fiction both restates and challenges the patriarchal rules, as his female characters are ambivalent between objectification and veiled forms of subversion (Tasneem & Dwivedi, 2024; Boz, 2025). Other critics state that a sexualised male gaze and stereotypical representations of femininity tend to continue even in the middle of an apparent narrative neutrality, reinforcing the old gender hierarchies, despite the one-off ambiguity or empowerment (Dennis, 2025; Zahra, 2022). Popular criticism has also raised doubts about the way that Murakami asserted that he has never considered altering the manner in which he handles women, a sign of an unresolved conflict between his global recognition and the very question of whether his work stems from gender bias.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has emerged as an important paradigm of analysis of how texts create social reality by means of patterned grammatical selection, along with the trends in gender-oriented literary criticism. SFL postulates three metafunctions, namely, the experiential, the interpersonal, and the textual, as the most critical resources in which meaning is actualised in context. The recent research proves that SFL is particularly effective in the analysis of literature: it shows how authors allocate agency using transitivity patterns, how they create psychological interiority using mental processes and how they place readers using mood and modality strategies (Cheng, 2024; Harahap et al., 2024; Kato, 2024; Alzahrani & Chaudhary, 2024). SFL has also been used to analyze gendered discourse in fiction, media, and digital communication over the past five years, demonstrating how patterns in language reproduce or challenge gender stereotypes, encode mental conditions, and negotiate interpersonal power (Nie, 2023; Ishaq et al., 2025; Haunt, 2025).

Although this literature has been accumulating, the short fiction of Murakami has never been analyzed in the light of SFL, and the story "The Second Bakery Attack" has not been studied at the level of the clause-by-clause linguistic analysis. This is a significant blind spot, as the reversal of gender roles in the story is too conspicuous and the author's message is too subtle (concerning the topic of responsibility, intimacy, and marital negotiation).

To address this gap, the present study applies Systemic Functional Linguistics to "The Second Bakery Attack" to investigate how agency, gendered psychology, and authorial positioning are linguistically realised in the narrative. Focusing on transitivity patterns (who acts, who is acted upon), mood and modality structures (how commands, obligations, and evaluations are encoded). By focusing on a single short story, the research demonstrates how SFL can illuminate debates about Murakami's gendered poetics through Systemic linguistic evidence, rather than relying solely on thematic inference.

### Literature Review

The past five years have witnessed the growth in research on the intersections of linguistics, gender studies, and literary analysis that have concentrated on the importance of linguistic structures in influencing the agency distribution mechanisms, psychological



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

interiority creation, and ideological meaning encoding of narratives. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which was created by M.A.K. Halliday, has turned out to be an especially powerful way of exploring the role of grammar as a meaning-making resource in narrative fiction. The trend is more widely representative of a general direction in humanities studies toward the rejection of a thematic or impressionistic approach to reading, towards an evidence-based approach to the study of text as a patterned system of linguistic decisions. The current research is placed within these developments in the present literature review by analyzing recent work in the SFL literary studies, gendered discourse analysis, as well as Murakami scholarship, and then an integrated theoretical framework is used to analyze *The Second Bakery Attack*.

The recent research shows that SFL has an enormous explanatory value when it comes to the analysis of narrative structure, characterisation, and ideological placement in books. Cheng (2024) emphasises that SFL is a fine-grained approach to the means of understanding how metafunctional decisions, in particular, transitivity, and thematic organisation, are used to build character agency and emotional subtlety. Their survey of the existing empirical data demonstrates that SFL enables scholars to follow Systemically how linguistic characteristics play a role in the larger narrative structure. Similarly, Harahap et al. (2024) use SFL on the Indonesian short story, "Cindelas", to show that transitivity patterns can be used to explain the experience of the main character, his or her moral growth, and the way he or she relates to other people. They demonstrate how the tension of the narrative is created and solved through the use of thematic development and unifying devices. This procedure can be applied to the Murakami case of short fiction in which the interpretative significance of linguistic detail can be inflated by the parsimony of narrative structure.

SFL has been extended to be used in the analysis of literary texts in terms of interpersonal and textual metafunctions as well as transitivity. The example of Kato and Kadhim (2024) discusses mood and modality in a modern novel in the English language, as modal verbs, interpersonal clauses, and speech patterns reveal the aspects of psychological uncertainty, power relations, and interpersonal distance between the characters. Their results highlight that the interpersonal metafunction is the key factor that can be used to bring out the nuanced aspects of character psychology. Equally, as Alzahrani & Chaudhary (2024) discuss Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, it is evident that Toni Morrison constructs transitivity patterns, mental processes constructions, and thematic placement to bring out a linguistic image of Pecola as vulnerable, internalised marginalised, and emotionally fragmented. All these studies show that the versatility of SFL in terms of metafunctions renders it a solid model for studying the manner in which narrative texts can encode multifaceted psychological and ideological implications.

At the same time, studies exploring the gendered discourse with the help of SFL have increased significantly. In the last five years, researchers have revealed that linguistic forms are organized forms of cultural construction of gender. An analysis of the international media discourse by Nie (2023) reveals unequal representation of women by mental and relational processes as emotional, sensitive, or defined in relation to others and men in relation to material and verbal processes that develop them as active, rational, and authoritative. This tendency is representative of wider gender ideologies that are replicated in linguistic representation. In the literary sphere, Haunt (2025) analyze the contemporary short stories and also reach similar conclusions when stating that the male characters are usually related to action-oriented processes, and the female characters to the state of being, perception, or evaluation. Their results indicate that grammatical structures, not only narrative content, are the main factor in creating gender character



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

identity.

In line with this research, Ishaq et al. (2025) perform a transitivity analysis of Sorrows of Sarasvati and find that male characters appear as the Actor much more often and are not limited to their agency so often. Women characters, on the contrary, tend to present themselves as Goals, Sensers, which renders them as being acted on, emotionally encumbered, or dependent. All these studies point to the fact that gendered subjectivities are internalized in the grammar of narrative discourse. The results, combined, indicate that transitivity, mood, modality, and thematic organisation can be effective diagnostic instruments in determining gendered patterns of agency and psychological positioning.

Although SFL-based gender research has evolved significantly, it is not particularly common to apply it to the Japanese literature, especially Haruki Murakami's works. In the last five years, gender-oriented Murakami studies have sharpened, although a lot of it is largely thematic and not linguistically based. Tasneem and Dwivedi (2024) review *After Dark* and find a concurrent humanisation and objectification of female characters in the form of changing the focus of narrative and descriptive detail. Their work indicates the ambivalent expression in which Murakami depicts the issues of women as emotionally complicated and structurally marginalised. Boz (2025) builds upon this debate by considering how the female characters of Murakami's fiction are represented as being in liminal shadow spaces, which offer them a bargaining zone of agency but leave them exposed to voyeuristic scrutiny. This discussion comes up with the unclear ethics of gender representation by Murakami as one of the issues of academic controversy.

Continuing the same line of criticism, Ahmed (2025) dwells on *Kafka on the Shore* and asserts that the gender representations of Murakami are performative fluidity, but that they are subjected to the narrative structures that are dominated by men. As Ahmed claims, even though the stories of Murakami are inclined to ambiguity, they often support the patriarchy by rooting the identity of women in the psychological changes of male heroes. The same argument can be made by Dennis (2025), who states that female characters in the fiction of Murakami are often viewed as agents of male self-discovery and not as storytellers of their own. Such observations echo the wider feminist criticism of Murakami's work that has pointed to the repetitive nature of this oeuvre in its use of sexualised female bodies, mysterious women, and the deployment of the female as an emotional stabilizer to men in crisis.

Nevertheless, despite the increased mass of research, *The Second Bakery Attack* is still under-researched, especially linguistically. The gendered agency set up in the story is distinctive, as the male narrator is passive and indecisive and full of unresolved psychological baggage from his past, but his wife is an assertive, tactical person who drives the central action of the story. This reversal provides a perfect avenue through which to question how linguistic options give gendering psychology and marriage power relations. Current literature gives thematic explanations of how Murakami has depicted gender, but few analyze how authorial messages are actualised in terms of clause-level meaning-making, like the types of processes, modality, interpersonal stance, and thematic prominence. This literature gap highlights the necessity of linguistically based analysis of gender and agency in the story.

Systemic Functional Linguistics is used as a theoretical background to inform the current research. The experiential metafunction - realised by the transitivity system - offers the framework of studying the linguistic construction of actions, events, perceptions, and relational states. Through material, mental, verbal, and relational inquiry, the paper determines the agent(s) acting, thinking, experiencing, or being acted upon. The transitivity of agency is pointed out as relevant to discovering gendered



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

dynamics of agency in recent studies (Nie, 2023; Ishaq et al., 2025), which is why it is crucial to consider how the narrator of Murakami and his wife are situated in the narrative of this book.

The interpretation of SFL in the works of literature, although not as widespread as its applications in the pedagogical and discourse analysis fields, is a potent way of revealing the linguistic basis of artistic expression (Vatandoost and Anvarhagigi, 2020). Nevertheless, SFL has much more to say about the meaning-making and the intentionality of the author in any given text, and this can be studied extremely well through the use of surface-level observations about style (Elf et al., 2024). In particular, the three metafunctions that SFL coexists with, namely, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual ones, offer an in-depth model of the way in which authors create their stories, and how readers read them (Zulprianto et al., 2023). An example of such is the ideational metafunction that is concerned with the way language encodes experience, which permits the study of the processes, involved, and circumstances that make up the content of the story (Quinn, 2021). This is done by examining the transitivity system in order to get to know the kind of actions and occasions depicted, and the role played by characters in the events depicted (Sigsgaard and Jacobsen, 2018) (Pedersen et al., 2022). The interpersonal metafunction, on the other hand, explores the social associations and attitudes expressed by language and sheds light on how the author creates voice in the narrative, the connections among characters, and the tone of the narrative (Gursimsek, 2012). The textual metafunction, in its turn, analyses the structuring of language to form coherent, cohesive texts and how authors lead readers through their narrative and how they control information flow (Xia and Ni, 2024).

The interpersonal metafunction, which manifests in the form of mood and modality, enables the analysis of power, obligation, authority, and emotional stance. As illustrated by Kato (2024), the modality options, which include commands, hedges, questions, or statements of certainty, represent linguistic indicators of his/her dominance over other people or psychological vulnerability. In *The Second Bakery Attack*, the analysis of modal verbs and interpersonal structures employed by the narrator and his wife gives information about the way the dynamics of their relationship and their inner world are coded.

The textual metafunction, as achieved by the means of theme-rheme structure, cohesion, and information organisation, can be used to examine how the narrative previews or previews some of the characters and views. As demonstrated by Alzahrani & Chaudhary, (2024), narrative prominence and ideological centrality can be indicated by the consistent thematic placement of a character. When discussing the focal characters in the story by Murakami, the presence of thematic roles in major passages assists in exposing the psychological condition and worldview organization of one of the characters that drives the narrative.

Combining such metafunctions, SFL provides a holistic approach to the analysis of how gendered psychology, marital agency, and unspoken messages of the author are encoded through the linguistic choices of Murakami. It is a way to make a closer analysis of the patterns that can prove, complicate, or contradict the thematic statements regarding reversed gender roles. This would fill a methodological gap in the available body of Murakami scholarship, which frequently focuses on the thematic gender analysis of texts without exploring the language processes that generate these interpretations.

Collectively, the current studies in SFL, gendered discourse, and Murakami research are a good explanation of the importance of the clause-level interpretation of "*The Second Bakery Attack*." The combination of three metafunctions of SFL helps the current study



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

to understand that the distribution of agency between the husband-narrator and his wife is presented, the psychological profile of both characters is formed with the use of linguistic options, and the authorial position of Murakami concerning the relations between genders is implied implicitly by the structure of the text. This work generates not only a possible contribution to the increasingly popular field of SFL literary criticism but also to existing discourse on gender representation within the fiction of Murakami.

### Objectives

The objectives of this study is to analyze the depiction of agency, gender psychology and authorial messaging in Haruki Murakami's "The Second Bakery Attack" through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

To examine how transitivity and participant role construct gendered identities and roles of agency in "The Second Bakery Attack"

To Investigate how modality and mood markers echo the psychological states of characters, with focus on gendered expression of certainty, obligation, and emotional tension.

To explore how thematic progression helps in the development of gender dynamics and psychological positioning within the narrative.

To compare the linguistic construction of gender and agency in the Murakami story in perspective with larger trends that have been observed in SFL-based literary analysis, it is proposed to provide some comparative information about authorial messages.

### Research Questions

RQ1. How do transitivity patterns and participant roles (e.g., Actor, Goal, Range), together with mood, modality, and thematic structures, construct gendered agency in "The Second Bakery Attack"?

RQ2. How do mood and modality choices encode power dynamics and gender ideologies in the relationship between the husband-narrator and his wife?

RQ3. What specific linguistic strategies, particularly mental process types, behavioural processes, and thematic choices, are used to represent the characters' psychological states and the story's philosophical tensions?

### Methodology

This research paper uses qualitative linguistic analysis with quantitative frequency counts. The theory is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and self-perceives language as a social semiotic system that is embodied in three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). The qualitative and quantitative steps are needed to find solutions to the research questions as they presuppose not only the numerical trends of grammatical conduct but also the interpretive comprehension of the gendered psychology and narrative agency.

The short story *The Second Bakery Attack* by Haruki Murakami is the corpus chosen in this study since it is a story that is full of psychological nuance and gendered interaction. The entire text was a source of target linguistic data. The narrative format of the story, a husband and a wife participating in a very peculiar nighttime experience, presented absolutely perfect circumstances to consider the issue of language as a creator of psychological conditions and authority. The narrative by the husband in the first person with some major interruptions and wife commands were a rich resource to investigate the narrative agency and interpersonal control in terms of SFL.

The definition of the clauses came about in the sense that the concept of the clause was



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

defined by Halliday (1994) to be a unit that realises a single process alongside its respective participants and circumstances. Independent and dependent clauses were included in the count, as well as a new process being introduced - embedded clauses (Such as she said that she left) were counted as a new unit. The paratactic and hypotactic relations were stored to be used later in the mood and thematic analysis. Only the process that was omitted and could be recovered contextually was added as elliptical structures in the dialogue. This segmentation gave a corpus of 351 clauses.

The segmentation of the clauses was done manually, considering not only syntactic boundaries but also meanings that are of experience. All the clauses were then examined with the transitivity system using the six types of processes by Halliday, namely, material, mental, verbal, behavioural, relational, and existential. The roles of the participants were determined according to SFL conventions: Actor, Goal and Range (material); Senser, Phenomenon (mental); Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage (verbal); Behavior (behavioural); Carrier/Attribute or Token/Value (relational); and Existent (existential).

Since RQ3 explores the psychological construction, all mental clauses were further subtyped into cognition, perception, emotion, and desideration, and coded whether the particular Phenomenon was thought, felt, or perceived. This allowed a more detailed reading of the psychological positioning of the husband and the wife.

Frequency counts and pattern were done on Microsoft Excel. Pivot tables have been created to compare process types and participant roles distribution based on the character. Numbers were checked with Claude AI to verify the accuracy of tabulation but all the linguistic judgments were analyst-based.

In order to embrace the interpersonal metafunction, each clause was examined on the modalities (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and mood. The modal constructions (must, could, maybe, etc.) were divided into epistemic or deontic modality according to Halliday into expressions of belief and expressions of obligation. This gave an opportunity to compare the certainty, authority, negotiation, and interpersonal stance of the husband and the wife in a systematic manner.

In the case of the textual metafunction, Theme-Rheme analysis was performed, which was used to determine the point of departure of every clause and the progression of information. Thematic choices were compared between characters to trace the changes in the narrative focus and the discursive power, topical, interpersonal, and textual Themes were coded.

Intra-coder test was also performed to guarantee reliability, 20 % of the sample (70 clauses) was recoded two weeks later. This returned on 89 % level of agreement on process type identification as well as participants' role assignment. The inconsistencies have been addressed by re-reading Halliday (1994) and Matthiessen and Halliday (2014), which enhanced the internal consistency of the coding scheme. For more clarification, the coding decision and analytical procedures were reviewed by an SFL specialist, whose feedback further validated the accuracy and credibility of the analysis.

And lastly, triangulation was provided at the analytical layer levels of transitivity, mood and modality, Theme-Rheme, and contextual interpretation so that the observed patterns did not lie in solitary grammatical patterns, but rather they were components of a coherent narrative and interpersonal system. The analytical framework was based on Halliday (1994), Eggins (2004), and Matthiessen and Halliday (2014), as they gave a solid theoretical ground to all linguistic choices.



## Findings

### Analysis of RQ 1

This question goes into the way the Systemic decisions of the narrator and other characters, especially in terms of who acts, who speaks, who feels and who initiates change, are indicative of more gendered roles and agency in the story. The analysis is based on the Systemic functional grammar as put forward by Halliday (1994) especially the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions to unpack the meaning to the grammar in the discourse. Clauses based on the type of process i.e. material, mental and who performs or experiences them. In the story of *The Second Bakery Attack*, this transitivity analysis helps to analyze how gendered agency is linguistically distributed among the narrator (husband) and his wife.

**Table 1**

Transitivity process type in *The Second Bakery Attack*

Process Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Material	118	33.62%
Mental	72	20.51%
Verbal	47	13.39%
Relational	64	18.23%
Behavioral	22	6.27%
Existential	28	7.98%
TOTAL	351	100%

The way that process types are spread throughout the 351 clauses indicates the linguistic structure with which *The Second Bakery Attack* builds experience, psychology, and narrative action. The biggest category (33.62%), which shows an orientation of the story towards material action and movement, is material processes, and this is manifested in the search of the couple in search of food, the preparation of the attack, and procedural actions within McDonald's. This dense material is in line with the adventure-like structure of the story, as well as emphasizing the role of the wife in real action.

The second largest part (20.51%) includes mental processes, as it is natural in a first-person, introspective narrative. The mental instability of the husband is anticipated through constant thoughts, feelings, anxieties, and fantasies. It supports one of the main interpretations of the text the narrator is not in the states of acting but only thinking, feeling, remembering, or interpreting.

Relational processes (18.23) also contribute to this introspective dimension by giving descriptions of states, identities, and conditions (it was... there was...). These lines provide the narration with a stable world-building and emphasize emotional and existential circumstances, including hunger, curses, and marital relations.

Verbal processes (13.39%) demonstrate the dialogic character of the text; there is a lot of conversation between husband and wife. These clauses work at interpersonal levels, bringing out power negotiation, persuasion, and worldview differences.

A narrative of this kind has behavioral (6.27%) and existential processes (7.98%) in the right proportions. Psychology was reflected in behavioral expressions (e.g., staring, sighing, looking), in particular, in the nervousness and hesitation of the husband.



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Existential processes define the actual existence of objects, conditions, and other environmental details upon which the experiences of the characters are dependent.

Altogether, the distribution implies a text that is balanced in its approach to the outer action (material) and inner activity (deep), and the dialogic and behavioral processes demonstrate interpersonal tension between the characters. The multimodal linguistic form takes into consideration the two-sidedness of the story by Murakami: on the one hand, this is a candidly strange journey, but on the other, a mental confrontation hidden in the most ordinary of relationships with a spouse.

### Table

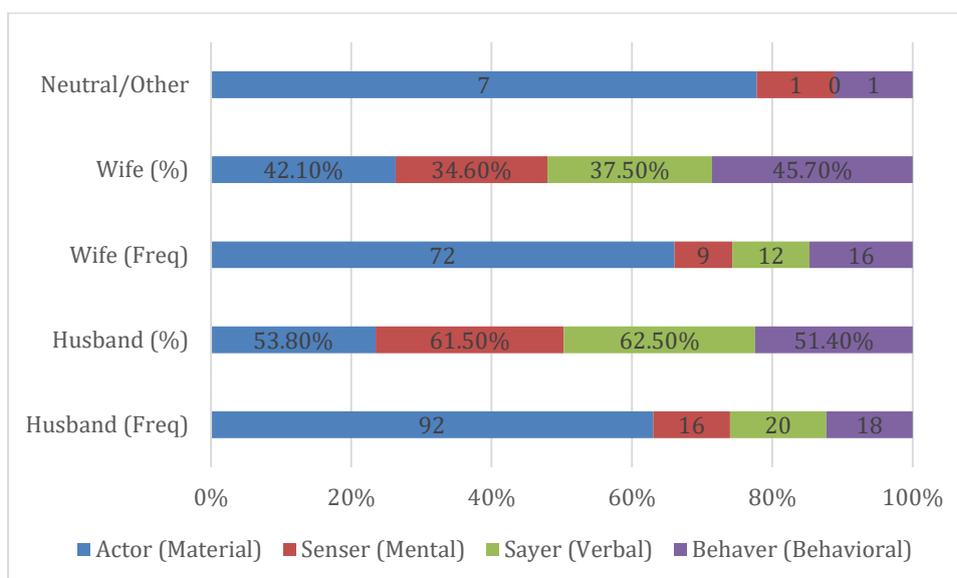
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Participants role distribution by gender

Participant Role	Husband (Freq)	Husband (%)	Wife (Freq)	Wife (%)	Neutral/Other
Actor (Material)	92	53.80%	72	42.10%	7
Senser (Mental)	16	61.50%	9	34.60%	1
Sayer (Verbal)	20	62.50%	12	37.50%	0
Behaver (Behavioral)	18	51.40%	16	45.70%	1

The following distribution explains a detailed distribution of agency. As it is evident in the above table that husband appear in more clauses, the wife occupies a significant proportion of actor roles (42%) reflecting on the fact that she is grammatically responsible for initiating action in many important scenes.

Figure 1 Participants role distribution by gender



The husband's identity is formed around mental (61%) and verbal (62%) he is a Senser and Sayer, suggesting introspection, emotional vulnerability and narrative passivity. Narrations like "I couldn't explain what I was feeling", "I guess I was just scared", "I kept thinking about that night".



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

**Table 3** Initial findings actor, goal & range

Participant Role	Husband (n)	Wife (n)	Neutral / Other Entities (n)
Actor	17	10	3
Goal / Patient	0	0	17+ objects (doors, shelves, cans, etc.)
Range / Circumstantial Movement	7	4	—

The initial findings indicate that material agency is evidently distributed in the initial story. The actor is represented by the husband in 17 clauses; though all are quite domestic, low-impact, or observational (e.g., I opened the beer and I stared at my watch). On the contrary, the wife is an Actor in 10 clauses, but her material behavior is active and goal-oriented, i.e., the refusal of suggestions, the search, sharing the objects, changing the positions, and anticipating the approaching attack. Interestingly, neither characters do not occur in any material clause of this section as Goal/Patient, that is, they are not acted upon materially yet. This assists in the interpretation that agency is action-based and not force-based, at the beginning of the story: characters act, but are not yet acted upon. The Actor roles of the wife are not as numerous, but they already demonstrate the tendency of intentional and stakes-based action, which predetermines her future dominance in the McDonald's scene.

**Table 4** McDonald's scene (2<sup>nd</sup> Phase)

Participant Role	Husband (n)	Wife (n)	Neutral / Other Entities (n)
Actor	28	21	6
Goal / Patient	0	0	3 (human) + multiple objects
Range (Circumstantial)	8	5	—

The new figures indicate a drastic increase in the agency of materials of the wife in the McDonald's assault sequence. Even though the husband continues to play more Actor roles in general (28 vs. 21), he is mostly passive (supportive), uncertain, or functional (e.g., holding the gun, unwrapping, leaning against appliances). The Actor roles of the wife, on the other hand, are strategic, high-stakes, and directive, such as taping the license plates, handing over weapons, counting inventory, paying for things, and physically holding down the workers. Notably, the sole example of a human being, being Goal/Patient in the whole first half of the second third of the story is in a sentence in which the wife does something on behalf of others (She tied the three workers to a post). This is good proof of the gendered agency: the wife not only does the decisive things but has material force on the other people, but neither of them is ever the one who is materially acted upon. Such trends prove the thesis that Murakami creates a reversal of conventional gendered agency with the help of systematic linguistic usage.



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

**Table 5** Final phase

<b>Participant Role</b>	<b>Husband (n)</b>	<b>Wife (n)</b>	<b>Neutral/Non-human (n)</b>
Actor	33	23	11
Goal / Patient (Human)	1	0	3
Goal / Patient (Objects)	many	many	—
Range / Circumstantial	11	6	—

The analysis of the actor-goal-range that has been completed shows the existence of a patterned asymmetry in material agency throughout the narrative. Even though the husband seems to be a more common Actor (33 clauses as compared to the wife and her 23 clauses), the material actions of the couple are distinctly different. The material processes of the husband are too low-impact, domestic, supportive, or bodily (e.g., eating, opening, leaning, holding). On the contrary, the Actor roles of the wife are those that are strategic, high-stakes, or narratively decisive, such as preparing weapons, taping license plates, planning the McDonald's attack, inventory control, and physically holding down the workers.

More importantly, the wife is not mentioned anywhere as the Goal/Patient in any material clause of the whole story. She does not get linguistically acted upon. It is only after the husband becomes Goal only once (the tide carried me), but only symbolically at the end of the narrative. The three workers of McDonald's are the sole human beings who are physically performed on, and that too, in a scene in which the wife is the Actor (She tied the three workers to a post).

These tendencies are good linguistic reasons to speak of gendered agency: the wife not only does more decisive material acts, she is never physically subordinated or influenced by anyone. Her Actor-only linguistic construction ends up granting her a sort of unidirectional agency, whereas the domestic Actor positions of the husband are scattered, and the single Goal realization position places him in a more passive, uncertain or acted-upon role.

In these examples, the mental process verbs (explain, guess, think) place him as the Senser and linguistically pointing out his psychological uncertainty and indecision. He may seem to play Actor in certain material processes, but these are usually statements about mundane or reactive behavior, not choices.

By comparison the role of the wife which becomes less common in the story is characterized by a high frequency of the material processes (42%). She constantly acts as an Actor in definite, decisive and aggressive acts like “She got dressed”, “she tied her hair”, “She drove to the bakery.” Such examples reflect on her engaging nature in goal-oriented action. Even when not speaking, her actions move the narrative forward.

In concluding, according to an SFL the wife is grammatically represented as the Actor and hence, as the agent of change. Her action or decisiveness in material clauses is what Halliday would describe as experiential agency, which is an important component in ideational meaning-making. In the meantime, grammatical passivity is seen in the fact that, although the husband dominates the narration, he is the most dominant in mental and verbal terms. This shows a stereotypical reversal of gender roles as The male narrator is emotionally confused and grammatically static. While, the woman character takes on real-life and hold narrative control, although she holds less clauses



**Interpersonal meaning and Psychological Positioning**

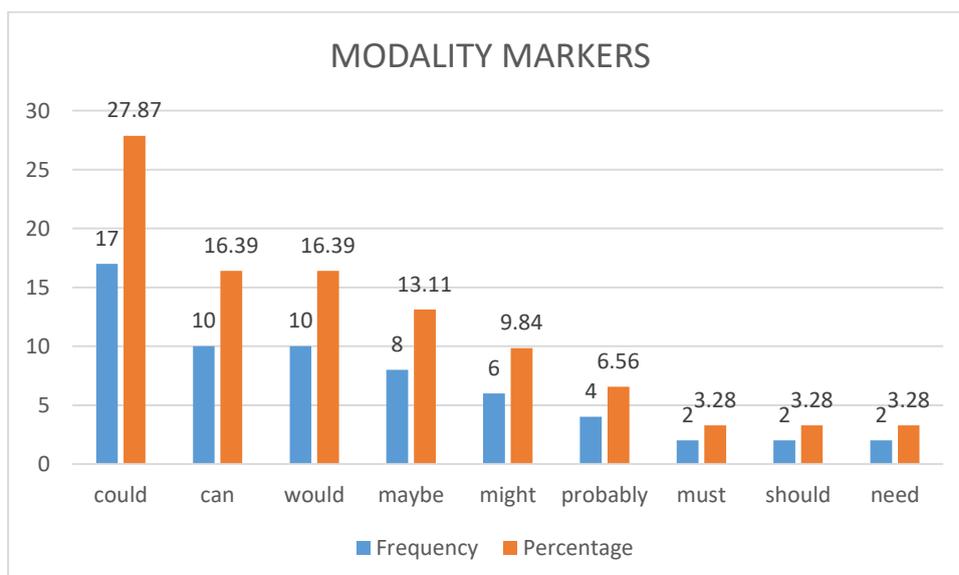
In SFL it is basically explores how language endorses relationships including the expressions of certainty, obligation, emotion and power with the help of mood and modality. In the story of The Second Bakery Attack, the use of declaratives, interrogatives, interrogatives and modal expressions which includes might, have to, should provide a firm base to draw a contrast between the husband’s psychological passivity and the wife’s interpersonal authority.

**Table 6** Mood Types In The Narratives

Mood Type	Total Frequency	Percentage	Attributed to Husband	Attributed to Wife
<b>Declarative</b>	334	95.16%	310	20
<b>Interrogative</b>	15	4.27%	13	2
<b>Imperative</b>	2	0.57%	0	2

The husband’s dependence on declaratives (95%) with epistemic hedging expose his internal stability. Phrases like “I think I’m hungry”, “May be it’s nothing” and “I suppose she thought it was okay”. These statements show low interpersonal assertiveness, indicated by modal verbs such as might, suppose and may be.

**Figure 2** Frequency Of Modality Markers



Halliday (1994) identifies these verbs as expressions of epistemic modality (55%), which shows speaker’s uncertainty about the projection of truth. However, in comparison the wife uses imperatives and deontic modals (44%) which highlight the strong interpersonal control phrases like “Let’s go rob a bakery”, “We have to do this”. This indicate the



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

notion of deontic modal that shows obligation and direction. Although she speaks less, her words contain decisive force, forming the story’s path.

**Table 7** Modality type

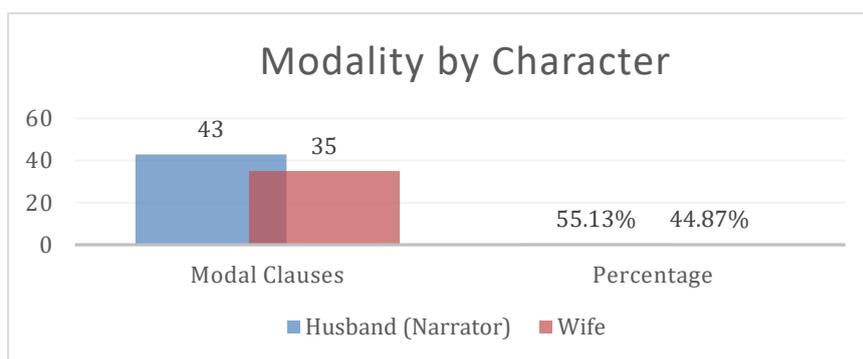
Modality Type	Frequency	Percentage
Epistemic	43	55.13%
Deontic	35	44.87%

**Table 8** Functions of Modality

Modality Type	Examples	Speaker	Function
Epistemic	might, maybe, guess	I Husband	Uncertainty, hesitation
Deontic	have to, need to, must	Wife	Necessity, obligation, direction

The husband’s epistemic modality frames him as disempowered (a weak link) while on the other hand the wife’s limited but explicit usage of deontic modality represents her as a figure of determination and control.

**Figure 3** Modality by character



Such a difference in mood and modality highlights the gender formation of agency. The frequency of the clauses used by the husband does not correspond to interpersonal control. Although, He is linguistically rich but operationally restrained. The wife, who hardly talks, employs language structures that are linked to authority, choice making, and initiative.

In this way, interpersonally, the story has a reversal of power where the man is the one narrating, but the woman is the one giving orders. Linguistically this reversal of gendered expectations presents how Murakami is encoding psychological imbalance and changing gender roles but not with the content, but with the grammatical form



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

### Textual Meaning and Character Positioning (Theme-Rheme)

The textual metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics examines the organization of clauses to identify the sense of how the information is structured in clauses under the term themes (what the clause is about) and rhemes (what is said about it). The first structural element is the Theme, which is the beginning of meaning (Halliday, 1994).

The Second Bakery Attack is in a first person narrative. so, in this regard Theme-Rheme, can both influence the level of cohesion as well as the flow, however it also reveals the dominance of characters, the area of their perception, and their command of information. This analysis explores frequency of occurrence of individual characters in the form of Theme and thematic changes in terms of power and psychological distinction. As per Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the theme is basically reflecting as the point of departure in a clause than just the topic; such structural positioning frames how readers interpret the Rheme and also helps to point out that whose perspective guides the narrative orientation.

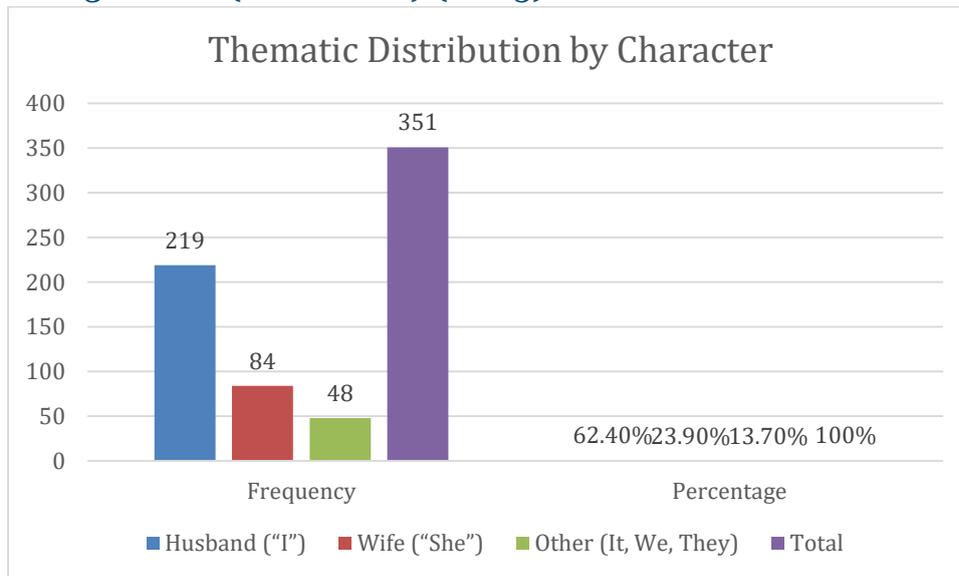
**Table 9** Thematic distribution

Theme Type	Frequency	Percentage	Character Example
Husband (“I”)	219	62.40%	“I got up slowly.”
Wife (“She”)	84	23.90%	“She pulled her coat on.”
Other (It, We, They)	48	13.70%	“It felt strange.”
<b>Total</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The husband appears as Theme in approx. 60% of the clauses, reflecting his dominance in clause-initial position statements like “I lay on the bed”, “I told her I didn’t feel right”, and “I thought about that first Bakery attack”. These topical themes reflect on the fact that despite appearing as theme, he often follows with mental or verbal process, stressing on internalization and fragmentation. While, when the wife appears as Theme, it usually indicates decisive turning points. Narrations like, “She got dressed”; “She tied her hair”, “She Started the car”.

These material clauses assign her agency as well as put her grammatically at the beginning of clauses in which change is carried out. Her thematic position is in coincides with plot movement. Besides, the story presents a tendency of thematic change i.e. shifting between “I” Themes to “She” Themes as the story approaches its climax. This minor linguistic clue is an indication of a shift in control with the wife slowly gaining narrative and physical control.

**Figure 4** Thematic distribution by character



Overall, across transitivity, mood/modality analysis and structures Murakami generates a gendered distribution of agency that challenges the typical roles. While the husband dominates in terms of clause quantity he does not have any functional authority that makes hi, a passive observer of events. In contrast, the wife whose narration is less prominent in the story constantly appeared as the one who acts, initiates and command often literally on the margin of grammar of the text. She is the real initiator of change through strategic positioning of material processes, use of imperative mood, and theme change. Not only is this reversal of the roles of the genders thematic, but also lies in the very linguistic structure of the narrative, in which the wife is put in a decisive position, whereas the husband is linguistically and psychologically inactive.

**Analysis of RQ2**

In this question, we summarize the findings of SFL ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions and tries to reveal how language captures power, gender ideologies, and psychological realities in the story that Murakami tells. Whereas RQ1 was concerned with grammatical patterns, RQ2 will concentrate on the ways in which grammatical patterns present social ideologies and hidden meanings.

Generally, Mood is attained in SFL, in the Subject + Finite structure, and constitutes the grammatical mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative). Although the majority of the clauses of the narrator are declarative, the epistemic modality (possibly, I think), which lies in the middle of them, suggests psychological vagueness. Conversely, the speech of the wife contains imperative clauses which are deontically modulated, which is the authoritative and obligatory speech (e.g., Let’s go rob a bakery).

**Power and Agency through Transitivity**

From the above analysis of RQ1 it is clearly evident that the husband has a numerical domination over the role of the clause but the wife representation in material process makes her the agent of action in real world. This works against the fixed gender conventions the action of male characters and the feeling or support of female characters, respectively. “She got Dressed”, “She tied he hair”, and “she started the car”.

The Actor is the wife, and her decisiveness linguistically rearranges the power relationship in the relationship. The fact that the husband is in control of the mental and verbal space is never an issue of power, but rather psychological stagnation and



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

impotence; which in many cultures is a trait of passivity or femininity. Therefore, transitivity formations reverse gender power roles.

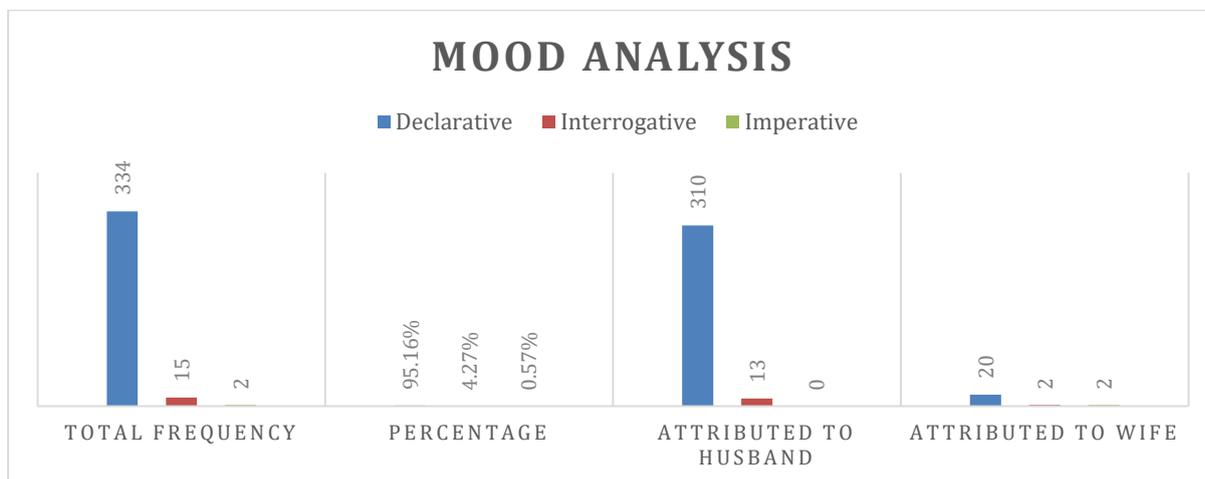
Mood and Modality as Indexes of Psychological State

Table 10 Mood Types by characters

Mood Type	Total Frequency	Percentage	Attributed to Husband	Attributed to Wife	Interpretation
Declarative	334	95.16%	310	20	Dominant mood type; husband uses them for narration, reflection, and hesitation. Wife uses few, but hers are decisive and directive.
Interrogative	15	4.27%	13	2	Husband asks rhetorical/self-doubting questions. Wife questions with clarity and control.
Imperative	2	0.57%	0	2	All imperatives issued by the wife (e.g., “Stop the car”, “Let’s go”) = direct exercise of agency.

The modal language (e.g., guess, maybe, probably) that is used by the husband indexes epistemic modality which shows the modality of uncertainty and tentativeness. Statements like “I guess I was Just Scared”, “May be its nothing”. These are linked with low-value modal operators, which project psychological hesitation in SFL. In the meantime, the necessity and control in the deontic modal in the imperative of the wife, when she says, Let’s go rob a bakery, serve as an imperative. Even the very few acts of speech she has still all are full of directional power, indicating her decisiveness.

Figure 5 Mood analysis





## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

This difference in modal use indicates internalized psychological conditions. The fragmented inner monologue of the husband shows perplexity and the feeling of guilt. Conversely, high-value modality by the wife is a sign of psychological clarity and initiative, which in the narrative is usually coded in the masculine form. Murakami breaks these norms in a rather subtle way, reversing the pattern.

### Theme-Rheme and Authorial Messaging

While the husband rules thematic positions (62.4%), his utterances serve as the anchor for mental and verbal process, which shows the cycle of continuous internal struggle like “I couldn’t think about that night”, “I couldn’t sleep”. On the contrary, it’s been observed that the wife’s theme often appears in material clauses that helps to push the plot forward statements like “She pulled on a sweater”, “She started the car”. This contrast supports the author’s messaging that shows that agency does not always exist in those who speak most in fact it is present those whose actions shape outcomes.

The application of linguistic elements by Murakami is a subtle way to challenge patriarchal demands. The husband is the narrator; he is not in control; the wife is a less-spoken action actor. With the help of Systemic linguistic choices of transitivity, modality, the arrangement of the themes creates a world in which psychological vulnerability and hesitation is a masculine trait, whereas clarity and authority are feminine.

### Analysis of RQ 3

**Table 11** Thematic progression across key narrative strategies

Narrative Moment	Clause	Theme Process	Interpretation
Opening	“I woke up hungry.”	I Mental/Behavioural	Husband-centered, psychological confusion.
Wife’s Entrance	“She turned on the light.”	She Material	Action shifts toward wife.
Decision Point	“She said we should go.”	She Verbal	Wife frames direction and initiates action.
McDonald’s Scene	“She ordered the food.”	She Material	Maintains control at climax.

The Second Bakery Attack by Haruki Murakami is written in lexico-grammatical structures that help the author produce the psychological zone of his characters, especially the emotionally schizophrenic narrator. Halliday’s Systemic metafunctions allow us to see in which way the system of language itself is turned into a means of encoding alienation and suppressed trauma. Mental and existential processes form the major shaping of the inner world of the central character, as we can be told from the phrases like “I could not explain what I was feeling. It was just there, a kind of hunger that had nothing to do with food”.”, and “Maybe it’s not curse. May be its just me”. “Do we really have to do this?” I asked half to her and half to myself” reflects upon a soul that is been caught in reflection rather than resolution. This is further strengthened by mood and modality patterns. The majority of declarative and interrogative forms and the use of epistemic expressions such as “maybe”, “I guess” and “I suppose” give the impression of a voice of narrative that is uncertain, self-critical and in a state of



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

emotional suspension.

On the contrary, the few but effective speech acts of a wife are noteworthy. Her compelling utterances like “Attack another bakery. Right now”, break the monotonous inner thoughts of the husband. By using deontic modality, she brings out clarity, control, and progress. This plain difference in modality makes the difference between agency and narrative dominance, as Murakami attempts to emphasize psychological resilience to agency, and not narrative dominance. Thematic structure as well shows this division. The narrator repetitively thematizes “I” or existential phrases, e.g., “there was”, in which he actively places himself in a world he lacks any control over. Wife on the other hand thematizes action: “We are going to take that McDonalds”, which solidifies her position as an agent of change.

The symbolic landscape is enhanced with existential clauses and metaphorical references such as “the volcano was gone” and “I leaned over the edge of my boat and looked down to the bottom of the sea”. These structures find reflection in the language of emotional repression and self-denial. Murakami exploits these structures as a way of reflecting the psychology of characters as well as discussing more existential emptiness themes such as alienation, how procedural healing is necessary and the search for meaning. These linguistic decisions can be viewed as a grammar of trauma and recovery through a prism of Systemic Functional Linguistics because they reveal the linguistic decisions within the text.

Table 12 Mental process type by character

Mental Process Type	Husband (n)	Wife (n)	Examples (from text)	Interpretation
<b>Cognition</b> (thinking, knowing, realising)	38	6	“I thought about the first bakery attack”; “I realized something was wrong”; “She figured out the quickest way.”	Husband’s cognition reflects internal confusion and self-questioning; wife’s cognition is strategic and solution-oriented.
<b>Perception</b> (seeing, noticing, hearing)	14	5	“I saw the empty streets”; “I noticed her shifting”; “She saw the anxiety sign.”	Husband’s perceptions show hyper-awareness and shifting; wife’s perceptions guide decision-making.
<b>Emotion</b> (feeling, fearing, liking)	12	3	“I felt uneasy”; “I feared it was a curse”; “She felt calm.”	Husband’s emotional index shows psychological instability; wife shows minimal emotional disturbance.
<b>Desideration</b> (wanting, needing, wishing)	8	2	“I wanted to explain”; “I needed to understand”; “She wanted food.”	Husband expresses unmet desires and hesitation; wife’s desires are action-focused.
<b>TOTAL Mental Processes</b>	72	16	—	Husband = psychologically overloaded; wife = psychologically steady and



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Mental Process Type	Husband (n)	Wife (n)	Examples (from text)	Interpretation
				goal-directed.

The distribution of mental processes includes the fact that the husband is the most dominant in all subtypes of mental activity, in particular, cognition (38) and emotion (12), which indicates his internal instability, overthinking, and emotional instability. His mental clauses often show doubt and uncertainty, whereas his emotional ones show stress over being hungry, about the marriage, the surreal curse, etc., meaning uncertainty over situations, not emotional instability. The wife is, in contrast, represented in significantly fewer mental clauses (16 in total), only in cognition and perception, which point to a lack of emotion, a situation awareness. These patterns together form two psychological modalities the husband introspective, uncertain and emotionally saturated and the wife focused, perceptive and psychologically composed, which, in combination with her, confirms her as an agentic stabilising force of the story.

Table 13 Phenomenon types in mental process

Character	Type of Phenomenon	Example from Story	Interpretation
Husband	Past Event	“I thought about the first bakery attack.”	His mental focus is backward-looking, showing unresolved conflict and psychological looping.
Husband	Internal State	“I felt uneasy for no reason.”	Emotion-based phenomenon reveals anxiety and instability.
Husband	Uncertainty Possibility	“I wondered if it was a curse.”	Cognition targets hypothetical states → psychological confusion.
Husband	Self-Evaluation	“I tried to understand why I couldn’t explain myself.”	Reflects self-doubt and introspective crisis.
Husband	Perceptual Trigger	“I noticed her shifting beside me.”	External perception that triggers internal meaning-making.
Wife	Immediate Situation	“She saw the lights of the McDonald’s.”	Perception linked directly to purposeful action.
Wife	Strategic Assessment	“She figured out the quickest way.”	Cognition oriented toward decision-making and control.
Wife	Practical Need	“She wanted something to eat.”	Her desideration is simple, concrete, and action-oriented.
Wife	Action-oriented perception	“She noticed the sign and moved quickly.”	Perception tied to material action; not emotional reaction.
Wife	Minimal emotional load	“She felt calm.” (implied in scene)	Indicates emotional stability compared to the husband.

The phenomenon type in mental process defines what each character think, feel or perceive that help to draw contrast more vividly between two characters. Phenomena of the husband are concerned with the past events, feelings, uncertainty, self-doubt, which



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

demonstrate psychologically unstable and introspective personality. Conversely, Phenomena in the wife are related to the immediate perception, strategic decision-making process, and utilitarian requirements, indicating that the wife has a stable, action-focused psychological analysis.

### Discussion

Previous literature has highlighted the promise of SFL to help bring out narrative depth and ideological activities in fiction (Vatandoost & Anvarhagigi, 2020; Elf et al., 2024). In line with this, the current study demonstrates how the three metafunctions by Halliday including ideational, interpersonal, and textual can be effectively used to reveal the invisible dynamics in narrative texts.

This research confirms, in accordance with Cheng (2024) and Harahap et al. (2024), that the ideational metafunction, which attained through the transitivity system, is key in describing character psychology and agency. The narrator-husband, who is mostly endowed by mental and verbal processes, turns out as emotionally suspended and grammatically passive. This is, a reflection of Nie (2023) and Ishaq et al. (2025) where women are usually portrayed via mental and relational processes, but in significant conversation, the character of the male takes those roles, indicating a subversion of the gendered expectations of language. In contrast, the role of Actor in material processes of the wife helps to strengthen the role of the wife as a narrative agent, reversing the classic feminine roles, which is also similar in the analysis by Alzahrani and Chaudhary (2024) of Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*.

The reversal of gendered power is brought out through the interpersonal metafunction by the mood and modality analysis. The epistemic modality used by the narrator is quite frequently epistemic, which reflects psychological uncertainty and this can be usually link with the female character traits (Haunt, 2025; Gursimsek, 2012). By comparison, the deontic modality of the wife (Let's go rob a bakery) and the imperatives imply linguistic approach, which confirms the opinion of Kato (2021) and Kadhim (2024) regarding mood as an indicator of the power within interpersonal relationships.

This asymmetry is also supported by the textual metafunction. The thematization of the narrator is based on a cycle of self-examination, with the use of the rhemes of mental or existential, with the initial application of the first person i.e "I". In the meantime, the thematic entries of the wife are correlated with plot change, which is an indication of the ideological prevalence (Xia and Ni, 2024; Alzahrani and Chaudhary, 2024). This is similar to the idea by Boz (2025) of the "liminal agency" whereby she still defers the narrative even though she does not talk much.

The following findings can fill the linguistic silence within the Murakami literature, in which gender critique is a common theme (Tasneem & Dwivedi, 2024; Dennis, 2025). SFL reveals that the character depictions by Murakami are formed with conscious clause-level designs. However, as opposed to the male-oriented framing as observed by Ahmed (2025), the female is both ideational and textual agent in this story.

Overall, the research confirms the findings of Quinn (2021), Sigsgaard and Jacobsen (2018), and Pedersen et al. (2022) and verifies that SFL is indeed a useful mapping tool to understand how agency, identity, and psychology are rooted in narrative grammar and provide more insight into the work of interpretation than just skimming through it.

### Conclusion

The study used the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to Haruki Murakami *The Second Bakery Attack* to expose how the linguistic choices formed gendered agency,



## Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

psychological depth, and implicit authorial message. The outcomes indicate that the male narrator is dominant in the quantity of the clause but grammatically, he is passive psychologically as expressed in the mental and epistemic structures. The wife on the other hand does not talk much, but through material processes, deontic modality and thematic placement, comes out as a narrative and interpersonal agent. Such subversion of traditional gender roles is not only thematic but structural, as well, in the text.

However, the study only includes one short story which prevents generalization of the research to the entire works of Murakami. Also, the subjectivity of interpretation might be introduced with the help of the manual character of the segmentation of clauses.

In future research SFL frameworks can be extended to other unexplored literature, in particular gender-based dynamics. Another vital aspect of this work is the necessity of including linguistic evidence in literary and feminist criticism as a way to escape the impressionistic approach (general feelings rather than facts) to the study of a text, and to work with the manner in which meaning can be grammatically produced.

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