A Comparative Study of English and Persian Proverbs Based on Halliday's Experiential Metafunction

Mandana Kolahdouz Mohamadi [1], Nesa Nabifar [2]

[1]*M.A. candidate in linguistics, Department of English Language and Linguistics,*
Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Islamic Azad University,*
Tabriz Branch, Tabriz, Iran

Abstract
The present paper comparatively analyzes Persian and English proverbs based on Halliday's systemic functional approach. The aim of research is to apply experiential meta-function on Persian and English proverbs and investigate that mostly which type of process is being used in Persian and English proverbs and what are the differences and similarities between these two languages from this point of view. For this purpose a descriptive – analytic research method has been used totally on 200 Persian and English proverbs and following results have been achieved, in both languages material process is the highest percent in Persian and English languages respectively. In comparing Persian and English proverbs from the process usage perspective, Persian proverbs had highest percent in process usage except in material and existential ones.

Key Words: Systemic Functional Grammar, Ideational Meta-function, Experiential Meta-function, Persian proverbs, English proverbs

I.Introduction

Halliday in his systemic functional linguistics identifies three meta-functions of language namely; Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual meta-functions. Ideational one is the 'content function of language' (2007) that realizes intransitivity and serves to represent outer world's situations and events and serves for the expression of speaker's experience of the real world including his own consciousness. Interpersonal function is the 'participatory function of language' (ibid) and allows for the expression and evaluation of attitudes and relation set up between the text-producer and the text-consumer .Textual function of language is an enabling one and is realized in information structure and cohesion (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999). In this function ideational and interpersonal meanings are actualized (Halliday 2007).

_____
*This paper is an excerpt from the author's M.A. thesis

A key concept in Halliday's approach is the "context of situation" which is obtained "through a systematic relationship between the social environments on one hand, and the functional organization of language on the other" (1985) which this key concept makes this approach suitable for analyzing proverbs since as Halliday (1994) cited that by using language to interact with people we clearly use language to talk about the world whether external or internal world, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, etc. when we look at how language works from this perspective we are focusing primarily on the content of a massage rather than the purpose for which the speaker has uttered it .So this study will attempt to comparatively analyze the processes of Persian and English proverbs within experiential meta-function framework of Halliday's systemic functional approach, aiming to show that mostly which type of process is being used in each of them and what are the similarities and differences between these two languages from this point of view.

Much work has been done in the area of proverb and functional grammar here we review some of them.

Estaji and Nakhavali (2012) in their paper analyze the Persian animal proverbs based on the semantic – cognitive frame. The main aim of their research is to determine if there is semantic derogation in Persian, and if there is, ascertain whether it applies equally to both sexes (male & female) terms. The analysis shows that sex and semantic derogation are not shown in Persian structures and proverbs as much as other languages, but in the cases with semantic derogation, the metaphorical meanings of the female proverbs connote worse qualities than those connoted by the male proverbs.

Bilal (2012) in his article stylistically analyze the short story of "Thank You M'am" by applying the three Metafunctions of Halliday, to find out if this analysis helps in better understanding of the text or not? He concludes that the examination of linguistics features of a text not only helps in understanding the structure of the text but also the deep meaning of it.

Zolfagari (2009) in his paper has studied Persian proverbs from lexical and syntactical approaches and satisfactorily tried to explain the parentage of barrowed, foreign and broken vocabularies in Persian proverbs and also the percentage of taboo vocabularies in those proverbs. In another section of his article he distinguishes the syntactic parts of proverbial sentences and their types like elimination in these sentences.

Meider (2004) defines proverbs as short, generally known sentence of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form, which are handed down from generation to generation and since they belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers they are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large.

According to Khoramshahi (2004) Persian and English proverbs based on their contrastive mood can be categorized into three groups:

a) SL proverbs which have an identical or similar equivalent with the same or almost the same meaning in TL language, i.e.

English: Carry coals to Newcastle.

Persian:زیره به کرمان بردن (Carry caraway to Kerman)

b) Proverbs which are available in SL but their equivalent cannot be found in formal or folklore literature of TL language, i.e.

English: (to be) in the same boat.

Persian: in Persian there is no current equivalent in the form of proverb for this English proverb.

c) SL and TL Proverbs have the same structures (at least mostly in main words) possibly in two or several languages, in other word proverbs are independently available in both languages and not adapted of any other, i.e.

English: No pain, no gain

Persian: نابرده رنج گنج میسر نمی شود (سعدی) (No pain, no gain)

In a study Ghazizadeh & Najafi (2010) contrastively analyze nearly five hundred Persian and English proverbs from semantic and lexical points of view based on khoramshahi's categorization and conclude that 55.20% of Persian and English proverbs have no lexical but complete semantics, 30.60% of compared proverbs have partial lexical but complete semantic, 8% have both lexical and semantics, 6.20% have neither lexical nor semantic correspondence.

II.   Methodology and Data Collection

knowing that 93% of Persian and English proverbs have complete semantics correspondence Ghazizadeh & Najafi (2010) findings has been used and proverbs were randomly categorized into twenty groups (Advice, Chance, Contentment, Criticism, Cure, Endeavor, Experience, Hope, Knowledge, Lie, Malevolent, Miserliness, Modesty, wealth, Participate, Patience, Sagacity, See, Time ,Verdict), then for each group five sample proverbs in Persian which had the equivalent content meaning with their sub category were written and their equivalent in English were found as well (the data were collected from the comprehensive dictionary of proverbs by Gorjian and Molonia (2004) and(2008), at the end one hundred Persian and English proverbs (totally two hundred) which had no lexical but complete semantics correspondence were collected and analyzed based on experimental meta-function. This article tests this null hypothesis:

1. There isn't any differences between Persian and English proverbs in the use of processes based on ideational meta-function

2. There isn't any similarities between Persian and English proverbs in the use of processes based on ideational meta-function

III.   Result and Analysis

According to (Thompson, 2004) three categories of Hallidayian functional grammar are used as the basis for exploring how meanings are created and understood, he summarizes them as follows:

a. Ideational meaning in which "we use language to talk about our experience of the world, including the worlds in our own minds, to describe events and states and the entities involved in them."

b. Interpersonal meaning in which "we use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behavior, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs." (ibid)

c. Textual Meaning in which by using language, we organize our message in ways that indicate how they fit in the other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing."(ibid)

Halliday (2003b) divides the ideational meta-function into two functions: the logical and the experiential functions. The logical function refers to the grammatical resources for building up grammatical units into complexes, for instance, for combining two or more clauses into a clause complex. Whereas the three meta-functions mainly to the meanings that we express in our massage, the logical one relates to the connections between the massages and to the ways in which we signal these connections (Thompson, 2004).

As said before Halliday refers to his functions of language as meta-function which is considered to be a property of all languages (2003a), so it can be applied on all languages and since the proverbs can be found in all languages so Hallidayian meta- functions are a good way to analyze them. Here is this article we just used ideational meta-function in general speaking and its sub category the experiential meta-functions to apply on our data.

The major component of clause in experiential function is transitivity that deals with the "transmission of ideas "representing 'processes' or 'experiences': actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations" (Halliday, 1985). In experiential function a clause can often be broken down into three functional constituents: Participant, process and circumstance. A Participant represents the concept that is being talked about, and in the grammar is most likely realized by a nominal group. Process, the essential ingredient, is about happening, doing, and being, saying and thinking. There are many types of processes, which are realized by verbal groups. Circumstance, realized by adverbial groups, prepositional phrases or nominal groups, is the circumstantial information about the process (Ning, 2008). It is believed that in experiential meta-function all human experiences (including outer and inner experience) can be instantiated into 6 different processes (material, mental, relational, behavioral, existential, and verbal) in any language, which first three are the main and three later are secondary, in other words, there is no verb and activity which cannot be classified in one of the processes in experiential function (Rostambeik and Ramezani, 2011). Concerning the type of process (verbs) all 200 proverbs (296 clauses) were analyzed and totally 166 and131 processes in Persian and English were found respectively, of course some of the processes were the omitted ones that restored by the co-text. The following is a brief description of the main and secondary processes introduced in experiential meta-function and some samples of collected data related to each process:

a. Material Process

The basic meaning of material processes is that some entity dose something or under take some action, this kind of process are doing ones and usually describe concrete, tangible actions and can be probed by asking *what did x do?* (Egins, 2004) material process involves physical actions such as running, throwing, scratching, cooking, sitting down and so on (Thompson, 2004) .Some material processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

1. **Hope Category:**

    Persian: بزك نمير بهار مياد ،كمبزه با خيار مياد.

    English: While the grass grows, the cow starves.

2. **Advice Category:**

    Persian: نرود ميخ آهنين بر سنگ.

    English: An iron nail does not go in to a stone.

In some cases like the above examples the process of two languages are material but in some other cases in one language it can be material but in other not; like the one below:

3. **Malevolent Category:**

    Persian: هر آن كس كه بد كرد كيفر برد.

    English: Every ill man has his ill day. (Relational)

Table 1. Material Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentment	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
4	1	2	0	2	3	5	4	4	2	3	2	7	1	6	5	2	2	4	3
Total number of material processes in the Persian proverbs is equal to **62** that constitute **37.34** percent of processes																			
5	3	3	0	2	4	3	3	2	3	5	4	4	0	6	8	2	3	7	2
Total number of material processes in the English proverbs is equal to **69** that constitute **52. 67** percent of processes																			

b. Mental Process

Mental processes are about what we think or feel, these processes can be probed by *what did x do to y?* When we probed mental processes we find that we are not asking about actions or doings in a tangible, physical sense but about mental relations about thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Egins, 2004). there are three classes of mental processes namely cognition, affection, perception but here in this article we take them all as mental processes. Some mental processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

4. **See Category:**

     Persian:یک بار دیدن بهتر از ده بار شنیدن.

     English: Seeing <u>is believing</u>.

5. **Verdict Category:**

     Persian:خر را از پالانش نمی‌شناسند

     English: <u>Don't judge</u> a horse by its harness.

6. **Criticism Category:**

     Persian: کسی عیب خود را نمی‌بیند.

     English: We <u>see not</u> what is in the wallet behind. (The process *is* not counted)

Table 2. Mental Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentmen	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
0	2	2	3	1	0	0	3	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
Total number of mental processes in the Persian proverbs is equal to **23** that constitute **13.85** percent of processes																			
0	2	0	3	1	1	0	1	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0
Total number of mental processes in the English proverbs is equal to **19** that constitute **14.50** percent of processes																			

c. Relational Process

Relational processes are being ones but not in an existing sense. They have two modes (attributive and identifying) and three main type intensive, circumstantial, possessive. The relational process is either identifying or attributive. An identifying process permits the

participants to be reversed e.g. *that man is my father ~ my father is that man*, but an attributive process generally does not allow the participants to be reversed e.g. *He is blessed ~ Blessed is he*. Relational processes usually involve the verb *be*, and are manifested in three ways (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004):

- "X is Y" (intensive)
- "X is at/in/under ... Y" (circumstantial)
- "X has Y" (possessive)

Some relational processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

7. **Knowledge Category:**

   Persian: توانا بود هرکه دانا بود.

   English: Knowledge is power.

8. **Cure Category:**

   Persian: پیشگیری بهتر از درمان است .

   English: An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

   Persian: شفا باید داروی تلخ نوش.

   English: Bitter pills may have wholesome effects.

9. **Money Category:**

   Persian: قربون بند کیفتم¹ تا پول داری رفیقتم.

   English: In times of prosperity friends are plentiful.

Table 3.Relational Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentme	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
1	2	2	3	3	3	2	4	0	2	3	4	0	8	2	4	1	3	2	3
Total number of relational processes in the Persian proverbs is equal to **52** that constitute **31. 32** percent of processes																			
1	0	3	0	4	0	3	1	1	0	1	2	2	4	0	0	1	2	1	2
Total number of relational processes in the English proverbs is equal to **28** that constitute **21. 37** percent of processes																			

d. **Behavioral Process**

1.lexical omission which is restored by the co-text

These processes are between material and mental processes since are partly about actions that has to be experienced by a conscious being. Some behavioral processes are breathing, cough, watch, frown and etc (ibid). Some behavioral processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

10. Contentment Category:

Persian:.پاتو با اندازه گلیمت دراز کن

English: Cut your coat, according to your clothes.

11. Time Category:

Persian:.سحر خیز باش تا کامروا باشی

English: early bird catches the worm.

As mentioned, in one language the processes are behavioral and on the other processes *cut, catches* are material.

Table4. Behavioral Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentmen	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
2	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total number of behavioral processes in the Persian proverbs are equal to **11** that constitute **6.62** percent of processes																			
0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total number of behavioral processes in the English proverbs are equal to **5** that constitute **3.81** percent of processes																			

e. Verbal Process

Verbal processes are the processes of verbal actions like saying and its all synonyms. This process is on the border line of the mental and relational processes (ibid). Some verbal processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

12. Criticism Category:

Persian: .دیگ به دیگ میگهروت سیاه(است)۲

English: The pot calls the kettle black.

---

2 . the omission of the relational verb

13. Endeavor Category:

Persian:با حلوا حلوا گفتن دهن شیرین نمیشه.

English: Wishes won't wash dishes.

Table 5. Verbal Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentmen	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
0	1	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Total number of verbal processes in the Persian proverbs is equal to **10** that constitute **6.02** percent of processes																			
0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total number of verbal processes in the English proverbs is equal to **6** that constitute **4.58** percent of processes																			

f. Existential Process

Existential processes represent experience by positing that *there was/is something*. These kinds of processes usually employ the verb be or its synonym such as exist, arise, occur and are on the borderline of the material and relational processes. These processes are easy to identify since their structure involves the use of *there* word (ibid). Some existential processes in Persian and English proverbs are:

14. Participate Category:

Persian:خانه ای را که دو کدبانوست ، خاک تا زانوست.

English: Two captains sink the ship.

15. Wealth Category:

Persian:زر را دوست بسیار است.

English: Rich man has many friends.

16. Hope Category:

Persian:در نامیدی بسی امید است

English: There is much hope in despair.

Table 6.Existential Process Table in Persian and English Proverbs

Time	Verdict	Contentment	Criticism	Patience	Participate	Chance	Sagacity	See	Lie	Cure	Knowledge	Miserliness	Wealth	Modesty	Endeavor	Experience	Advice	Malevolent	Hope
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total number of existential processes in the Persian proverbs is equal to **8** that constitute **4.81** percent of processes																			
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total number of existential processes in the English proverbs is equal to **6** that constitute **4.58** percent of processes																			

The results of Persian and English proverbs analysis from experimental functional grammar are as follows: according to the figure 1, the use of material process in Persian language is high approximately (37.34%) and it shows that people by using Persian proverbs mostly tend to express their ideas about the external world and what is going around them in the form of proverbs and the second highest process after material one is relational approximately (31.32%) and it seemingly shows that people by the use of this process type wanted to related two things, i.e. their own experiments and what is in the outer world. The mental (13.85%), behavioral (6.62%), verbal (6.02%) and existential (4.81%), processes respectively have the least percentage, of use after the ones mentioned previously, these results shows that Persian speakers use main process more than other process, due to their realistic perspectives to the outer world and tending to relate outer and inside world and mentioning what is going in their mind.

According to the figure 2, the use of material process in English language is higher than other processes approximately (52.67%), even higher than material process in Persian one, and it shows that people by using English proverbs mostly tend to speak about the external world and pay attention to realism more than Persian speakers, the second highest process after material one is relational approximately (21.37%) , less than Persian one, and it seemingly shows that English speakers pay less attention to social relations and compared to Persian speakers tend to relate external and internal worlds events less. The mental with (14.5%) is more than the one is in Persian proverbs and shows that English speakers pay more

attention to their feeling about other world, the existential (4.58%), verbal (4.58%) and behavioral (3.81%) processes respectively have the least percentage of use compared with Persian ones, this indicate that Persian speakers pay much more attention to secondary processes including human behavior, his expression of feeling and his own existence as a individual being. Also the findings of article about omission (lexical or verbal) which were restored by the co-text were consistent with the findings of Zolfagari (2009) about omission in proverbial sentences and showed that there are some process that are omitted mostly in Persian proverbs due to the pun and the rhythm of them in Persian language .

IV.   Conclusion

The analysis of proverbs from experiential perspective of functional grammar shows that in addition to Ghazizadeh & Najafi (2010) findings about complete semantics correspondence of Persian and English proverbs about (93%), there also are similarities and differences between Persian and English proverbs in the use of processes based on ideational meta-function and in this matter both of these languages have something in common.

1. For the similarities, the ratio of material, relational and mental processes are high in both Persian and English proverbs.

2. For the differences, the ratios of relational, behavioral, verbal processes in Persian proverbs are more than English ones.

3. Again For the differences, the ratios of material and existential processes in English proverbs are more than Persian ones.

Journal of
Academic and
Applied Studies

ISSN1925-931X
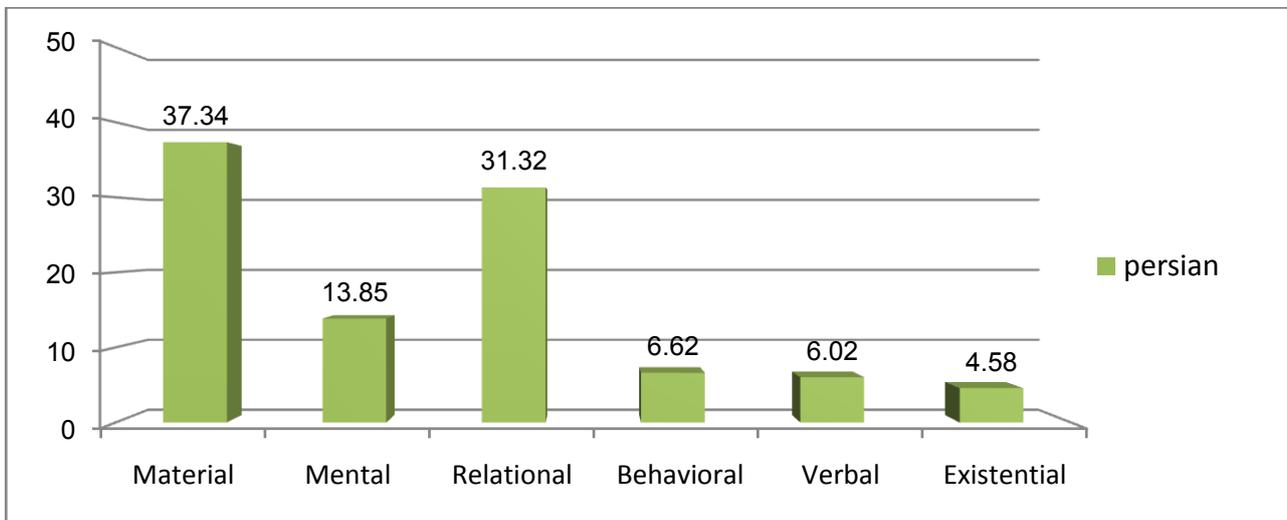
Figure1. The process percentage diagram of Persian proverbs
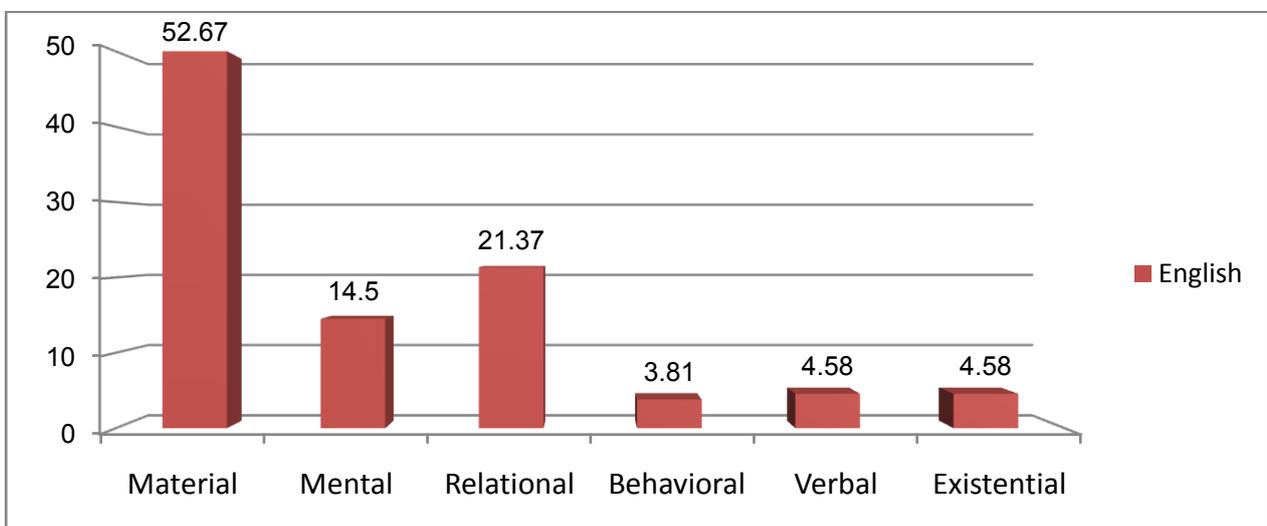
Figure2. The process percentage diagram of English proverbs

Acknowledgments

References

Bilal, H.A., 2012. *Analysis of Thank You Mom: Halliday's Meta-functions*, Academic Research International, Vol 2, No.1, January 2012

Egins, S., 2004. *An Introduction to systemic Functional linguistics*. London: Pinter publishers

Estaji, A., & Nakhavali , F.,2011. *Semantic Derogation in Persian Animal Proverbs*, Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol 1, No 9 (2011), 1213-1217, Sep 2011 doi:10.4304/tpls.1.9.1213-1217

Gorjian,B., and Molonia,SH., 2004.*Acomprehensive dictionary of proverbs, English pro Persian*. Moatabar publication

Halliday, M. A. K., 1973. *Explorations in the functions of language*, London: Edward Arnold

Halliday, M. A. K., 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 1-53.

Halliday, M. A. K., 1994. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Halliday, M.A.K., 2003a. *On Language and Linguistics: Volume 3 in the* Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday. *London: Continuum p. 436*

Halliday, M.A.K., 2003b. *On the "architecture" of human language*. In On Language and Linguistics. Volume 3 in the Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday. London and New York: Equinox. p. 18

Halliday, M. A. K., 2007. *Language and education*. London: Continuum

Halliday, M.A.K., 2009. *The Essential Halliday*. London and New York: Continuum. Chapter 11: Meta-functions

Halliday, M.A.K. and Matthiessen, C.M.I.M., 1999.*Construing Experience Through Meaning-A Language –Based Approach to Cognition*. London: Cassell

Halliday, M.A.K., & Matthiessen, C., 2004, *an Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 3rd edition, London, Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd

Ghazizadeh,K.& Najafi, A., 2010. *A contrastive analysis of English and Persian proverbs from semantic and lexical perspective*. Translation Studies .Volume7, Number 28, Winter2010

Khoramshahi. B., 2004. *One Hundred Same Proverbs in English and Persian*. Articles Collections of the 1st
    National Conference on Iranian Studies: Iranian literature. Vol 1st, Tehran: Iran Institute .pp 232-250

Mieder, W., 2004. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Greenwood Folklore Hand books. Greenwood
    Press.

Ning, GUO. 2008. *"Systemic Functional Grammar and its pedagogical implications"* in
    Sino-US English Teaching .Volume 5, No.10.

Rostambeik Tafreshi, A.,and Ramezani Vasookolaee, A.,2011. *An Analysis of Educable
    Mentally Retarded Students' Written Discourse based on Halliday's Systemic
    Functional Approach.* 2nd International Conference on New Trends in Education and
    Their Implications 27-29 April, 2011 Antalya-Turkey

Thompson, G., 2004. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.

Zolfagari, H. 2009. *A Lexical and Syntactic Study of Persian Proverbs.* University of
    Esfahan