

# A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CINDERELLA VERSIONS

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**Abstract:** *This paper uses Systemic Functional Linguistics to interpret ending texts of four Cinderella versions. The interpretation compares and highlights the ways how experiential and interpersonal meanings are shaped in these texts. As a result, it reveals the similarities and differences in cultural values embedded in the fairy tales. Convincing cultural and historical explanations for contemporary controversies about the different Cinderella versions in Vietnam are also provided.*

**Keywords:** *Fairy tales, Cinderella, Systematic Functional Linguistics, experiential meanings, interpersonal meanings.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper uses Systemic Functional Linguistics - a theory initially developed by Halliday (1985) to interpret ending texts of four Cinderella versions (one German, one French and two Vietnamese versions). The interpretation highlights different ways how meanings are shaped in the texts. This way, it is expected to further provide convincing cultural and historical explanations for the current controversies about this fairy tale.

Fairy tales are one of the most important discourse genres in traditional literature (Jones, 2011). They have significant contributions to the general knowledge, the social and moral development of generations. They are sites for the construction of appropriate gendered behaviours, are an integral part of the complex layering of cultural stories. However, some authors have negative appraisals on several fairy tales and raise controversies about their values. “Tam Cam” - a Vietnamese Cinderella version is one of the examples. With different endings among many versions of Cinderella around the world, the moral lessons and values of “Tam Cam” fairy tale have created controversies in Vietnam. The fairy tale has been examined in different aspects to explain and prove their “appropriate” views in the controversies.

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## **2. Fairy tales and Cinderella versions**

### ***2.1 Fairy tales and their functions***

Fairy tales have been thought by most folklorists to belong to wonder tales. Jarrar (2011, p. 13) states that wonder tales are the “spoken traditional narratives” that are meant to be told not read. From the Marxist viewpoint, at that time, wonder tales are tools to reflect social issues and “ideological concerns”. Moreover, in societies dominated by class struggles, they were used to express messages about desires and beliefs of the working classes. This is a “subversive potential” for Good to over win Evil (Jarrar 2011, p.13). The writers such as Charles Perrault (17<sup>th</sup> century), the Brothers Grimm (19<sup>th</sup> century) collected, edited and recorded wonder tales to serve purposes such as socialisation and acculturation. Then, they had become what are called as fairy tales today.

Fairy tales are materials providing “a clear picture of the effects that present behaviours will have on the future of our societies” (Doyle & Doyle, 2001). Reading them, children obtain ideological messages and then behave in the ways to address expectations of society. This is a way fairy tales serve the functions of socialising and acculturating. They are also called historical documents (Darnton, 1999), cultural barometers (Paul, 1998), and cultural artefacts (Gilbert, 1992) of which influence is still alive and important today.

In Vietnam, the very first function of fairy tales is “educational target of morals and normal standards” (Dang 2010, p.45). There are always messages, moral lessons and principles hiding in the struggles in Vietnamese fairy tales: class struggles; struggles between “Good” and “Evil”; struggles between Vietnam and invading countries. They are lessons of being optimistic, being patient, and showing solidarity.

### ***2.2. Cinderella and its versions***

Cinderella is the most famous fairy tale in the world (Iona & Opie, 1974). There have been more than 700 versions of it across all countries. In Europe, the first written Cinderella-type tale was published in 1634 in Italy under the name of “La Gatta Cenerentola” by Basile (Cashdan 1999, p.87). This story then appeared in English from the translation of “Cendrillon” in “Histories oucontes du temps” in 1697 by Charles Perrault (Iona & Opie, 1974). Many Western versions of Cinderella are typical examples for motifs of fairy tales (Tran, 2012). They are a story of a good, sweet and beautiful girl living with a wicked stepmother and two vain and selfish stepsisters. This girl has to withstand hardships and sit down under a stream of abuse by her stepmother and stepsisters. At the end, a fairy godmother magically helps her to become a Prince’s wife. In Vietnam, Cinderella version is “Tấm Cám”. It has two parts. In the first part, the title character - Tấm - an orphaned hardworking girl faces her stepmother and stepsister’s jealousy, and ultimately regains her position as bride of the King. In the second part, Tấm keeps being a victim of “Evil”, being murdered many times and then passing through many incarnations. At the end, she indirectly killed her stepsister and stepmother. This ending

separates “Tấm Cám” from other versions of Cinderella and raises a question: Can Tam with an action of killing Cam and her stepmother be a representative of “Good”?

The answer to that question can partly be found in this paper through analysing endings of four Cinderella versions. The 1<sup>st</sup> one (Text 1) is a German version recorded by Brothers Grimm (1857) which is very common in many countries. The 2<sup>nd</sup> one (Text 2) is from an early record of Cinderella in French by Perrault (1697). They are two significant examples of Western Cinderella. The third one (Text 3) is the ending of Tam Cam by Nguyen (1982) - the very first written form of Vietnamese Cinderella. The last text (Text 4) is also a Vietnamese one edited from Nguyen’s version and used in Grade 10 literature text-books. All these four texts are translated into English before analysing. They are forwards named Text 1, Text 2, Text 3 and Text 4.

### **3. Systemic Functional Linguistics approach**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) explores how language is used in social contexts to achieve particular goals. In terms of data, it looks at the discourses an interlocutor produces, and the contexts of the production of these texts. In other words, it places importance on language function rather than on language structure.

SFL introduces three simultaneous metafunctions of language. They are to represent experiences of the world (the ideational/experiential function), to negotiate relationships with others (the interpersonal function) and to organise the representation and negotiation as a meaningful text (the textual function). Each of these metafunctions is created from the choices and organisation of a certain grammatical system. Experiential meanings are construed through the system of transitivity which includes three aspects: Process, participants and Circumstances (Eggins, 1994, p.229). Modality (an intermediate range between extreme positive and negative) and Mood (roles of interlocutor and addressee) are often used to represent interpersonal meanings. Textual meanings are mostly expressed through Theme system and the development of Theme and Rheme.

Because this paper focuses on the experiential and interpersonal meanings of texts which can reveal social and cultural aspects in fairy tales clearly, the SFL theory of transitivity, modality and mood will be employed as a key guiding tool for the analysis.

### **4. Data analysis**

#### ***4.1. Experiential meanings***

Experiential meanings focus on the “content” of discourse: what kinds of activities are undertaken, and how participants in these activities are described, how they are classified and what are they composed of (Martin & Rose, 2003, p.66). These meanings of the four chosen texts is analysed through looking closely at the participants and processes they employ. Results of an examination on process types is summarised in Table 1.

*Table 1. Process types in four texts*

	Text 1		Text 2		Text 3		Text 4	
	QTY.	%	QTY.	%	QTY.	%	QTY.	%
Material	10	77	9	56	11	37	4	20
Mental	1	8	5	32	8	27	7	38
Relational	2	15	1	6	7	23	3	16
Verbal	0	0	1	6	3	10	5	26
Behavioural	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Existential	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Total	13	100	16	100	30	100	19	100

Texts 1 and 2 mostly use material process (77% and 56%). The world in these texts is revealed in terms of actions and doing. The stories thus are the reality of “the real world”. In contrast, there are four types of dominant processes in Texts 3 and 4: material, mental, relational and verbal processes. Hence, the Vietnamese fairy tales create a world of not only things that are happening but also what people are thinking and feeling, listening and talking. As a result, roles of participants in these texts are totally different (see Table 2).

*Table 2. Frequency of participant types in four texts*

Roles of participants	Text 1		Text 2		Text 3		Text 4	
	QTY.	%	QTY.	%	QTY.	%	QTY.	%
Actor	7	40	10	29	4	10	3	10
Goal	5	28	8	23	3	8	3	10
Beneficiary	1	5	2	6	1	2	0	0
Carrier	2	11	1	3	7	18	3	10
Attribute	2	11	1	3	7	18	3	10
Senser	1	5	5	15	4	10	5	18
Phenomenon	0	0	4	12	5	12	3	10
Sayer	0	0	0	0	2	5	4	14
Receiver	0	0	0	0	4	10	5	18
Verbiage	0	0	1	3	2	5	0	0
Behaver	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Behaviour	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Existent	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Total	18	100	34	100	39	100	29	100

Dominant roles of participants in these texts are actor (40% in Text 1; 29% in Text 2) and goal (28% in Text 1, 23 % in Text 2). Roles of participants in Texts 3 and 4 are more various than those in Texts 1 and 2. They include carrier, attribute, senser, receiver, sayer, phenomenon, actor and goal. Their usage percentage is moderately equal, from 10% to 18%. The difference in employment of these types of processes and participants can be seen as a result of differences in cultures. For example, in general, in Vietnamese culture, thoughts and feelings are expected to create vivid pictures of the real world. In contrast, western cultures place an emphasis on fact rather than feelings and opinions in revealing the world.

Significantly, although these texts convey and share the same field, they leave different messages and reveal different aspects in life. These differences can be examined in frequency of common participants in these texts, their activity consequences and taxonomic relation (see Table 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d).

*Table 3a. Frequency of common participants in Text 1*

<b>Roles of participants</b>	<b>The pigeons</b>	<b>Step-sisters</b>
Actor	2	6
Goal	0	1
Carrier	0	2
Senser	0	1
Total	2	10

*Table 3b. Frequency of common participants in Text 2*

<b>Roles of participants</b>	<b>Cinderella</b>	<b>Step - sisters</b>
Actor	2	2
Senser	2	2
Phenomenon	2	2
Goal	3	2
Carrier	1	0
Behaver	1	0
Behaviour	0	1
Beneficiary	0	1
Total	11	10

*Table 3c. Frequency of common participants in Text 3*

<b>Roles of participants</b>	<b>Tam</b>	<b>Cam</b>	<b>Step - mother</b>
Actor	1	1	2
Goal	1	2	0
Carrier	1	2	1

Beneficiary	0	0	1
Senser	0	0	2
Phenomenon	1	1	1
Receiver	1	0	1
Sayer	1	2	0
Attribute	1	0	0
Total	7	8	8

*Table 3d. Frequency of common participants in Text 4*

<b>Roles of participants</b>	<b>Tam</b>	<b>Cam</b>	<b>Step - mother</b>
Actor	2	0	0
Senser	0	4	2
Phenomenon	1	0	0
Sayer	2	1	0
Carrier	1	2	0
Receiver	1	2	0
Total	7	9	2

Table 3a shows that the most common participant of Text 1 is the two stepsisters with ten appearances. The participant appears with a sequence of activities such as “came”, “wanting to gain”, “to share”, “walked” and “punished”. This activity sequence focuses on describing an ending scene of the story and emphasizes on a punishment. “The pigeons” appears only twice, but plays an important role - a power to punish “Evil”. They are the doer of the repeated activities “pecked out the eyes of the step-sisters”. In terms of taxonomic relation, repetitions are exploited (false - falsehood; the older sister - the older one, the younger - the younger one, the pigeons - the pigeons) to keep track of participants through the text. Antonyms (false - good; fortune - punish; younger - older) are employed to reveal the opposite sides of “Good” and “Evil” with endings of forever happiness and punishment. Furthermore, synonyms (pecked out the eye - blindness) and hyponyms (two false sisters - the older one + the younger one) are also used to build the field of the story and show the equal treatment to each class member in the group. In summary, these ways, experiential meanings of Text 1 reveal the opposite of “Good” and “Evil” and place an emphasis on the indispensable punishment on “Evil”.

In Text 2, there is a parallel of employment of two main participants Cinderella and step-sisters (see Table 3b). The roles of the participants are varied and equally disposed. This makes the ending of the story resolve smoothly. In addition, these participants interact together in two main sequences of activities. The step-sisters are an agency of remorseful activities for their ill treatment with Cinderella such as “threw themselves at her feet” and

“beg pardon”. Cinderella is a doer of forgiven activities such as, “embraced them”, “forgave them”, and “matched them with two great lords in the court”. Therefore, the experiential picture in this text is remorse and forgiving.

Like Text 1, Texts 3 and 4 also place an emphasis on “Evil” and punishment. However, the significant difference between them is employment of key participants which represents different agency of punishment. Three main participants of Text 3 and 4 are Tam (Cinderella), Cam (stepsister) and the step-mother (See Tables 3c and 3d). They have sequences of struggling activities which explain how events in the story occur. The preceding events are conditions for the next events. For example, Tam’s coming back with much more beauty and Cam’s being curious and jealous explains for the next events: Cam’s asking Tam the way to become more beautiful, following what she said and then dying. This way, Tam - the representative of “Good” is the doer of killing Cam, and then played the main role in the step-mother’s death. She therefore becomes agency of punishment. Focusing on the harsh punishment, the activity consequences in these texts reveal violent aspects. Some examples of activities include: “jumped into boiling water”, “died”, “was cut” and “died of shock”. These activities are the key elements to distinguish between the endings of the Vietnamese Cinderella and the Western versions.

**4.2. Interpersonal meanings**

When conducting any piece of language, encoders not only convey experiential meanings but also make interaction with each other. The interaction is revealed in interpersonal function of language. This function is chiefly encoded in systems of appraisal and negotiation. There are three aspects of appraisal: attitudes, amplification, and source. Summary of analysis on these aspects in the four texts is illustrated in Table 4.

*Table 4. Appraisal in texts*

	Attitude			Amplification	Source
	Affect	Judgement	Appreciation		
Text 1	Wanting	False; Favour Wickedness; Falseness	Good fortune		
Text 2	Wanted ; Took up; Embrace; Forgave; With all her heart; Love	Fine; Beautiful; Young; Charming; Good; Beautiful; Great	Ill	More ...than; No less ... than; Very	Her two sister found; They had made; Cinderella...said; He thought

Text 3	Wanted; Enjoyed; Shock	Beautiful; Curious; Jealous; Beautiful; Angry	Delicious; Delicious; So delicious	Much more... than; So..; More...than; So...	(Cam) seeing Tam came back; She asked Tam; Tam told her; The mother thought; A crow... told; The mother ...told
Text 4	Loved ; Was afraid of; Neglected; Want; Agreed; Died of shock	Beautiful Dearest White and beautiful		Still; As ever; As you; Immediately	Cam released that ... ; She asked Tam; Tam responded; Tam then asked

Text 1 is more about people than things. Hence, in terms of attitudes, affect (people's feelings) and judgment (people's character) is naturally expected to be foregrounded than appreciation (the value of things). However, affect is expressed only once in the verb "wanting". The domain aspect of attitudes in Text 1 is judgment. Three negative judgments in this text (false, wickedness, falseness) are used to judge the stepsisters. In contrast, the other positive one (favour) is used to characterize Cinderella. Significantly, amplifications and sources of the attitudes are not expressed in the language of Text 1. It means the evaluations come from the narrator but the characters. To sum up, in terms of interpersonal meanings, Text 1 distinguishes "Good" and "Evil" by negotiating positive and negative judgements on them. However, the focus on these judgements are directly criticising the stepsisters as "Evil". This interpersonal meaning goes well with the experiential meaning of "Evil" and punishment discussed above.

Similarly, Text 2 is dominant in affect and judgement rather than in appreciation because it is more about people than things. However, attitudes in this text are conveyed in a wide range of aspects and with amplifications and sources. All the affects in Text 2 are used to reveal Cinderella's beauty in her behaviours, her soul and her heart. This way, "Good" in Cinderella is represented. Additionally, while most of judgments in Text 1 are negative on the stepsisters, those in Text 2 (fine, beautiful, charming, good) are used to evaluate Cinderella's characters. The sources of these attitudes are also introduced. They are stepsisters (Her two sisters found), Cinderella (Cinderella ...said) and the Prince (he thought). This means the attitudes and judgements are affirmed by different voices, even "Evil" - stepsisters. Stepsisters' positive attitudes towards Cinderella illustrate their remorse, and then are reasons for Cinderella's forgiving. Furthermore, the scale intensifiers such as "more ... than", "no less ... than" and "very" are exploited to make the attitudes and judgements stronger. They additionally emphasise Cinderella's beauty and nature of "Good". In summary, differently from Text 1, Text 2 focuses on the perfect of "Good" with the beauty in both appearance and personality and the remorse of "Evil" with the positive attitudes on "Good".

Text 3 employs both negative and positive affects and judgements. The negative ones such as “curious”, “jealous” and “angry” appraise Cam and stepmother. Oppositely, the positive ones, especially the repetition of judgements “beautiful” are used to describe Tam. Text 3, like Text 1, produces negative attitudes towards “Evil”. Like Text 2, it also has positive attitudes towards “Good”. The scale intensifiers such as “much more ... than” and “so ...” are also employed to give strong evaluations on the characters. In short, the opposite attitudes clearly illustrate love and respect to “Good”, and hatred and disdain to “Evil”.

The appraisal system in Text 4 is similar with that in Text 3. They also include both negative and positive affects which express feelings of Cam and the Prince. However, in terms of judgements, Text 4 employs only the positive ones to judge Tam. Additionally, there are no appreciations in Text 4 partly because it is a shortened version of Text 3 with the focus on people. Text 4 was used in a grade 10 literature text book when Many educators and writers believed that in the versions of Tam Cam like Text 3, the image of Tam at the end of the tale is concerned with violent aspects. That way, she could not a perfect representative for “Good”. Thus, some details about the deaths of Cam and the stepmother has been deleted and edited before introduce them in the textbook. As a result, negative judgements are used less in Text 4 than Text 3.

Another system of appraisal is negotiation which “is concerned with interaction as an exchange between speakers” (Martin & Rose 2009, p. 219). This system can be seen clearly in Texts 3 and 4 rather than in Texts 1 and 2. While Texts 1 and 2 are typical examples of narrative genre with all speech functions are statements of giving information, Texts 3 and 4 have dialogues with exchanging roles between speakers.

In Text 3, there appears negotiating information between Cam and Tam, and between a crow and the stepmother.

Demanding information: “***She asked Tam*** how she could be beautiful like that.”

Answering: “***Tam told her*** that taking a bath in boiling water had helped her.”

This interaction between Cam and Tam explain Cam’s death. Many authors usually accused Tam of killing Cam. However, the person who demands information is Cam. Tam plays the role of responding. This means the deep origin of her death is her greed and envy. Because of being jealous with Tam and wanting to attract the Prince and become his wife, Cam leads herself to the death.

The interaction between the crow and the stepmother are used as a metaphor. The crow appeared with three questions. However, these questions are used to give, not to demand information: inform the mother about her daughter’s death. Thus, the stepmother’s response is a kind of response only, not to give answers to these questions:

Initiating: “*Delicious? What is so delicious? The mother is eating her daughter’s flesh. Is there anything left for me?*”

Responding: “*The mother was angry and told it off.*”

In Text 4, there is no character like the crow informing the stepmother about her daughter’s death because the story is shortened. However, the interaction between Cam and Tam happened similarly.

Demanded information: *My dearest sister how could I become as white and beautiful as you?*

Response: *Do you want me to help?*

The speech of demanding information by Cam happens first. It means Cam died because of her greed and envy too. However, Tam's response is to offer goods - and - services. With this offer, the sense of Tam's initiative in killing Cam is raised. In addition, the negotiation between Tam and her servants further raises this sense: Tam demanded "goods and services" to kill Cam: "**Tam then asked her servants to dig a deep hole and told Cam to stand down in the hole. Then Tam asked the servants to pour boiling water into the hole**". Thus, when being edited to make the image of Tam become more perfect, Text 4 does not reach its aims. In contrast, Tam in Text 4 becomes even more "violent" than in Text 3.

## 5. The cultural values of the fairy tales

The ending texts of four Cinderella versions reveal some common cultural ideas and beliefs. First of all, it is the belief that "Good" will live "happily ever after" (Zipes, 1997) (Cinderella/ Tam married to the Prince and lived happily in a palace). Secondly "the witch must die" (Cashdan, 1999) or "Evil" must be punished (the stepsisters, Cam, and the stepmother became blind or died at the end).

Additionally, the way of creating characters in the tales partly presents the society in which they appeared. Heroine characters are representatives of Good with beauty in both appearance and personality. The anti-heroine characters, in contrast, are envy, haughty and wicked people. The relationship between these characters is stepdaughters and stepmothers or stepsisters. The struggles between "Good" and "Evil" are expressed in the struggles between these characters because in the past, stepmothers were believed to treat her stepchildren very badly. Thus, in many fairy tales, stepmothers may be associated with witch (Zipes 1997, p. 49) and usually are representatives of "Evil" and ugliness.

Although many authors argued of the entertainment and education value of the different versions, analysis on experiential and interpersonal meanings of four texts comes to the two following conclusions. For two Western versions, while Text 2 illustrates an idea on remorse and forgiving in fairy tales, Text 1 presents an idea of punishments "Evil" through violent scenes. Generally, people think that Text 2 is good for children in terms of giving moral lessons and entertaining. However, in terms of entertaining - one of the main purposes of Western fairy tales, some studies show that "even strengthen violence and cruelty causes anxiety in children" (Alcantud - Diaz, 2012). In terms of moral lesson, Text 1 belongs to "warning tales" (Degh, 1979) which are written to warn children of punishments when doing bad things. This way, the fairy tales may frighten them. As a result, they will not do the wrong things. The moral lessons embedded in this way are quite possible and may act effectively.

For the Vietnamese versions, Text 3 is believed to include too many violent activities. It has also raised questions of moral lessons and doubts about "Good". However, this ending is

quite explainable if people look back into its context of appearance. This fairy tale was created by the working class to express their desires and their wishes of having a better life; of having justice, and of over-wining higher classes and other powers who usually have ill treatments on them. When details of the fairy tales reveal that, “Evil” never turns into “Good” like in Text 2 (Cam and the stepmother killed Tam many times), the highest punishment on them - death is the most appropriate ending. It is because if they live, the struggles will never come to the end. Thus, there are no problems with the embedded moral lessons about the happy ending of “Good” and the harsh punishment on “Evil”.

The doubts of “Good” and the change of the ending from Text 3 into Text 4 also need to be re-examined. In fact, the language in Text 3 is carefully chosen to reveal messages. As analysed above, Cam actively asked Tam about the way to make her more beautiful, and then she jumped into the boiling water by herself. The actor of the violent actions is hidden by a passive voice: “*Cám’s body was then cut and put into a jar of food to send to her mother*”. It might not be Tam. Thus, this does not affect to the simile of Tam with “Good”. The change of Text 3 into Text 4 is expected to embed better moral lesson and make a more perfect simile of “Good”. However, from a perspective of discourse analysis mentioned above, it become worse. This is because in Text 4, Tam is the person who “demands goods-and-services” to kill Cam and her stepmother.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, the Vietnamese and Western versions of Cinderella share some similar functions and cultural aspects. However, the meanings are revealed differently inside language. Because Western cultures more highly evaluate facts than opinions and thoughts, in their discourses, the processes of behaviour or mental are less than in the Vietnamese discourses which expect language of opinions and thoughts to make language more vivid.

This paper does not evaluate the rightness or wrongness of controversies on the moral lessons, violent aspects and “Good” represented in Cinderella characters of different versions. Nevertheless, the analysis on languages the texts employed shows that the happy ending version is not always better than the unhappy ending with some violent scenes in terms of both entertaining and educating functions. In addition, to convey or change any message, the choices of language should be done carefully through applying different approaches in discourse analysis.

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