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Deciphering Patterns of Scammed Messages Using SFL's Interpersonal and Experiential Metafunctions

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic strategies in online scam communications through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on transitivity processes and mood choices in a scammer–target exchange. Using a qualitative approach, it analyzes how these linguistic features construct meaning, shape interaction dynamics, and establish roles. Findings reveal that scammers strategically use transitivity processes by employing material and relational processes to assert dominance, positioning the target as submissive, and reinforcing authority through declarative moods, while the target's interrogative moods highlight their subordinate role. By uncovering how scammers exploit language to manipulate victims, this study offers novel insights into the intersection of linguistics and online fraud prevention, recommending interdisciplinary research on the psychological impacts of such manipulation to strengthen anti-scam measures.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the communication age has brought unprecedented opportunities, alongside the rapid proliferation of online scams (Cross, 2022; Ma & McKinnon, 2021). Having personally encountered fraudulent messages, I became keenly interested in the linguistic strategies scammers use to manipulate targets. These experiences made me aware of how language, a tool meant for connection, can be deliberately crafted to deceive and harm. In evaluating such messages, I noticed recurring patterns such as invoking credible institutions and issuing step-by-step instructions that exploit cognitive biases like the sunk cost fallacy and anchoring effect (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2003). While previous research has assessed the forms and psychological impacts of scams, less attention has been devoted to how scammers' language functions experientially and interpersonally to influence victim compliance. This study addresses that gap by investigating the transitivity processes, mood choices, and appraisal patterns in scam conversations within an online messaging application, aiming to uncover how linguistic resources establish control, construct roles, and embed attitudes that lead to manipulation.

Scamming, as a deceptive activity, manifests in various forms, including phishing, identity theft, and scareware, with its rapid increase linked to the growing sophistication and systematic organization of scammers (Cross, 2022; Ma & McKinnon, 2021). Given this context, the present study evaluates the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions, as well as the appraisal of online scam conversations, to highlight recurring patterns in scammer interactions. Specifically, it examines the role of transitivity processes and the participants involved in shaping the exchanges between scammer and target, ultimately influencing the delivery of intended messages. It also investigates mood choices to reveal interaction dynamics and role construction in scam communications, and identifies recurring attitudes and positions embedded in scammer utterances that lead to manipulation and eventual submission. By addressing these objectives, this research offers a comprehensive linguistic perspective on scamming, contributing both theoretical insights and practical strategies for combating online fraud.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theory developed by Halliday (1994), provides a robust framework for exploring language as a social semiotic system. By examining how language constructs meaning within its social context, SFL identifies three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This study leverages these metafunctions to analyze scam messages, focusing on transitivity processes, mood choices, and the appraisal framework.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) emphasized the importance of transitivity processes, highlighting how linguistic choices shape narratives, assign agency, and construct experiences. For instance, studies like Harahap et al. (2024) demonstrated that material and verbal processes dominate narratives, reflecting specific roles and actions. This understanding is crucial in evaluating scam messages, where linguistic patterns are strategically crafted to manipulate targets.

Systems and functions that are incorporated in clauses may also convey subsequent meanings and context. Crake (2023) specifically explored spoken and monologic discourse with respect to grammatical intricacy and lexical density, two of the common types of prototypical speech and writing, through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The corpora studied involved the evaluation via articulation and between system and function, which can be represented through the social role and symbolic manifestation attached to them. Meanwhile, Nagao (2023) explained that using SFL and the genre-based approach in an EFL classroom, for instance, helps learners become more efficient and confident communicators by understanding how language works in different social and academic situations.

Meanwhile, Jasuma and Ijabah (2023) explored the transitivity system of the tourism destination brochure of *Dinas Kebudayaan*, where they discovered the dominance of the *process type* of the ideational metafunction in the language utilized in the discourse. The *ideational metafunction* depicts the class as a represent encounter of what is going on and what is happening. With the transitivity, it particularly depicted a sense of narrative from the story, given the specific domain of experience. The study might be helpful to depict the actual encounter of the researcher and the scammer, it may be material, mental, behavioral, verbal, existential, and relational, and eventually draw patterns on the currency, relevance, and flow of the conversation that could potentially gives light on how scammers frame their conversations and lead the victim to submitting with the scammers' agenda.

2.1.1. Mood Choices and Appraisal in Scam Communications

The interpersonal metafunction, specifically mood analysis, is central to understanding how scammers interact with their targets. Mood refers to the grammatical structure that encodes the speaker's role and the expected response from the recipient. Muhammad (2024) demonstrated how mood analysis in public health messages emphasized instructions through the imperative mood, a pattern likely mirrored in scam communications to guide victims. His study, which examined COVID-19 health messages, found that 70% used the imperative mood to deliver clear instructions, manage public vulnerability, and convey risk. This finding provides a methodological basis for analyzing scammers' sentence structures, clause types, and contextual usage, revealing how mood choices shape the dynamics between scammer and target. Patterns of declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses can establish authority, elicit compliance, or prompt engagement.

In addition, the appraisal framework described by Martin and White (2005) offers insights into the affective and attitudinal aspects of scam language. Appraisal analysis focuses on evaluative language and how it influences recipients by constructing social relationships. Applied to scam messages, this framework helps identify how scammers manipulate emotions and attitudes to maintain engagement and control.

2.1.2. The Prevalence and Evolving Tactics of Scamming

Recent cases present the alarming sophistication of modern scams. For example, scammers used AI-generated voice and images to impersonate a company's CFO, deceiving Hong Kong finance employees into transferring USD 25.6 million to fraudulent accounts (Ianzito, 2024). Such situations reflect the growing challenge of detecting authenticity in the face of AI-enabled deception (Ianzito, 2024; Bethea, 2024). The Federal Trade Commission (2023) reported that scams account for 85% of investment-related losses, with evolving methods that exploit vulnerabilities in digital interactions.

As internet use grows, so do opportunities for motivated offenders (Kigerl, 2011; Felson & Cohen, 1979; Miró, 2014). The rise of cryptocurrency-related scams illustrates this shift, with digital payment systems, remote work, and online shopping providing scammers with new channels for exploitation (Federal Trade Commission, 2023; Ranjan, pp. 59–70). Scammers operate through phone calls, emails, social media, and messaging apps, often targeting emotional vulnerabilities that impair rational decision-making (Dove, 2020) and exploiting cognitive biases like the sunk cost fallacy (van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2003).

Despite significant financial and psychological impacts, including stress and emotional harm (Munton & McLeod, 2023), scams remain underreported (DeLiema, Shadel, & Pak, 2019). The use of AI further complicates detection, as malicious accounts multiply across online platforms (Yao et al., 2024). In several cases, cybercriminals impersonate trusted organizations to elicit personal information such as credit card numbers and passwords. Given these challenges, there remains a lack of research on the linguistic strategies underlying scam messages, particularly how these strategies affect victims' cognitive and emotional states (Dove, 2020; Jung et al., 2014).

2.1.3. SFL and Scam Messages

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a valuable lens for examining how scammers use language to construct meaning and manipulate targets. Anofo (2017) analyzed forty scam emails and found that relational processes create credible identities, material processes portray scammers as negotiable or generous, and mental clauses convey feigned commitment. Verbal processes express gratitude or blessings, behavioral processes prompt engagement, and existential processes reinforce interaction. These transitivity patterns demonstrate deliberate linguistic manipulation.

Social engineering remains a critical vulnerability in cybersecurity. Human-centered strategies, such as training individuals to identify manipulative language, can supplement technical defenses (Tabron, 2016). Forensic linguistics has already shown promise in detecting fraud; analyses of IRS scam calls have identified features such as polar tag questions, topic control, and irregular narratives as potential red flags. However, a research gap persists in applying integrated frameworks, combining transitivity, appraisal, and mood analysis, to uncover deeper linguistic patterns in scams.

In the Nigerian scam context, linguistic research has examined discourse strategies, slang, and persuasive tactics, but less attention has been given to media representations. A study of 45 news articles (2019–2021) applied Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Van Leeuwen's social actor framework, identifying ten portrayals of Nigerian scammers from "educated role models" to "money ritualists", often framed negatively within ideological narratives.

Olajimbiti (2018) examined 60 English-language spam emails from Nigeria, using Halliday and Hasan's Generic Structure Potential and Fetzer's cognitive context model. The study identified six discourse stages, which include salutation, initiation, enticing information, mild business conscription, request, and subscription, mainly rooted in business and religious contexts. These stages employed pragmatic strategies such as adversatives, evocation of business ideas, religious affinity, and messianic figures, illustrating scammers' reliance on familiar cultural frames to build trust and extract resources.

2.1.4. Data Privacy and Cybersecurity Context

Concerns over data protection trace back to the mid-20th century, prompted by automated data processing systems and privacy debates. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights recognized the right to privacy and family life, while post–9/11 legislation, such as the USA Patriot Act (2001), intensified surveillance powers, sparking debates over the balance between privacy and security (Katkuri & Vijayalaxmi, 2024).

International frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 12), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the UN Convention on Migrant Workers affirm privacy as a fundamental right. Data protection encompasses safeguarding sensitive information against unauthorized access (Hassan, 2012), with modern regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (1994) mandating strict compliance (Paul, 2024).

In the Philippines, the Data Privacy Act of 2012 established the National Privacy Commission to oversee public and private compliance. The Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 (RA 10175) criminalizes certain online activities, requiring entities that process or transmit large volumes of personal data to register with the Commission (Presbitero & Ching, 2018). These laws form a critical backdrop for understanding the legal and regulatory environment in which online scamming occurs.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews the theoretical framework that served as a guide in investigating the Interpersonal Metafunction of Scammers in an online messaging app. Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, developed by Halliday (1994), gave a suitable framework for studying language as a social semiotic framework. By examining how language constructs meaning within its social context, SFL identifies three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This study leverages these metafunctions to analyze scam messages, focusing on transitivity processes, mood choices, and the appraisal framework.

2.2.1. Michael Halliday Transitivity Process (1985)

The Ideational Metafunction in Systemic functional Linguistics (SFL) analyzed the corpora and examined the way language is use to understand how language functions in creating meaning about the world, involving the processes, participants, and circumstances.

Transitivity process, as a field of Systematic Functional Linguistics, analyzes verbs and circumstances to provide and indicate a process that reflects the action and experience of the speaker. In this process, the function of a verb is not only to do physically, but also to sense, be, feel, want, etc. Additionally, the transitivity approach seeks to understand the system of linguistic spin among political leaders so as to reveal the hidden ideological standpoint that acts to intensify the manipulation of the people's mind (Mohammed EL Hadifi, 2023). Essentially, the transitivity analysis explains viewpoints as to how actions, situations, and experiences are linguistically applied and presented in different contexts. In 1971, Halliday was at the forefront of using transitivity in evaluating Golding's *The Interior*. As this framework gives a comprehensive discussion, evaluation, and assessment of how the speaker encodes his experiences, it serves as the baseline for understanding the semantic organization of experiences (Halliday, 1985). Significantly, through the identification of the dominant type of processes used by *scammers* to manipulate and control the target, the approach may be able to help in making sense of the pattern regarding the things that go on inside and outside the speakers. Apparently, also described the processes that contribution to the further understanding of power relations and dynamics.

2.2.2. Mood Choices

Interpersonal Metafunction encompasses *mood choices* & *modality* as composes of two most essential elements, acting as the 'tenor' assisting in giving information, clarifying queries, giving a command, making an offer and expressing the behavior, attitude and appraisal towards the speaker or participants being addressed specifically that 'language is always portraying our personal and social engagements; and that the grammar clause does not only depict some processes but also proposals and propositions (Halliday, 2012:30). Through the evaluation of the mood types, which serves as the grammatical structure of clauses, it aids in negotiating between scammers and targets and how do opposing parties position and frame themselves to enact social relationships and express behaviors. Eventually, the approach aids in identifying the lexicogrammar choices utilized by the scammer and the target in their conversation exchanges.

With the transitivity and mood choices from the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), it gives a comprehensive lens for evaluating scam communications, presenting how scammers control targets linguistically to attain their objectives. Scammers utilize transitivity processes to employ dominance and manipulate, applying material to direct actions and manipulate the target's behavior and relational processes to position themselves as authority figures in charge of decisions and guidelines in the scam activity. On the other hand, targets predominantly engage in mental processes, revealing something about their dependence and submission as they react to the scammer's directives. This event positions the scammer as a controlling figure and places the target in a subordinate, reactive role. Meanwhile, mood choices further reinforce the power imbalance, with scammers predominantly using declarative moods to assert authority, manipulate conversations, and project professionalism and trustworthiness, compelling the target to comply without resistance. Conversely, the target's frequent use of interrogative moods to express doubt and seek clarification emphasized their subordinate position, while their occasional declaratives signify compliance and a willingness to meet the scammer's expectations. The scammers' linguistic strategies reflect how scammers construct narratives, manipulate interactions, and exploit vulnerabilities, resulting in manipulation and compliance, fulfilling the research objectives effectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.Data

The corpus for this study consists of five text-based exchanges that occurred between 2023 and 2024. These conversations were initiated by scammers who all offered project-based jobs, with the target acting as the recipient of their messages. The data reflected the actual exchanges of conversation, ensuring that the conversations reflect diverse scamming strategies and linguistic patterns. To maintain consistency and accuracy, the raw text was extracted from the Messenger platform, transcribed or rewritten into textual format, and organized for analysis in a conservative coding table. Any identifying information was removed to preserve anonymity and confidentiality and adhere to the *Data Privacy Act*.

3.2.Method

In this investigation, a qualitative approach was specifically chosen to present qualitative data from the utilized corpora efficiently. This method enabled the identification of scamming message patterns through the lens of SFL in the online conversation between the target and the *online scammer* from 2023-2024. Guided by the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study utilized qualitative methods to explore the linguistic strategies and patterns scammers use to control conversations. Specifically, the research focuses on two main aspects of analysis: transitivity processes and mood choices. By focusing on transitivity and mood choices, the research uncovered how scammers used language to establish control and manipulate targets.

3.3.Data Analysis

The researcher read and understood the theories and concepts that are suited to answer further questions and explain the research objectives. Data collection techniques involved extracting all the conversations between the target and the *online scammer* in different messaging applications. The initial step of the present study's analytical framework centers on the three metafunctional dimensions of SFL, beginning with transitivity analysis, which assesses the processes, participants, and circumstances within the online messages. Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) categorization of process types—material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential—serves as the basis for identifying how scammers construct actions and frame their propositions. This approach allows the study to uncover patterns in how scammers portray agency, responsibility, and the nature of their propositions.

The study also applied mood analysis to analyze the grammatical patterns of the scam messages, focusing on mood types (declarative, interrogative, and imperative) and modality choices (probability, usuality, obligation, and inclination). By identifying mood types and examining modality markers, the study explored how scammers create power dynamics and elicit specific responses from their targets. Meanwhile, the mood analysis expressed how the interpersonal metafunction functions in the interactions that reveal something about the scammers' strategies for control and manipulation.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, all the data and the conversation exchange were systematically coded for transitivity, mood, and appraisal features, and patterns were tabulated to uncover patterns of scamming messages. The coding process was cross-referenced with established SFL studies, such as Muhammad's (2024) work on mood analysis in health communication and Harahap et al.'s (2024) exploration of transitivity in narrative texts, to ensure alignment with recognized methodologies.

Ethical considerations were strictly considered throughout the investigation. Participants' identities were anonymized. Furthermore, the researcher assured compliance with data protection guidelines to secure the privacy and confidentiality of the data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A strategic dominance of both Material and Relational processes has been revealed in the conversation, realizing the power dynamics between the scammer and target. Subsequently, the less dominant processes—Mental**,** Verbal**,** and Existential—are applied selectively to collect specific responses or to control the target.

Apparently, the material processes dominate the scammer's discourse as they usually pinpoint actions and steps that need to be executed, such as making accounts, submitting details, and processing payments to attain the purported goal of deceiving and taking advantage of the client. These action processes are used to structure the scam, making it appear procedural and legitimate, as depicted from the exchange #1 below:

You'll create your wallet account	***Materials***	***Actor: Your (Target); Goal: Wallet Account***	***None***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"Payment will be made to your wallet so you can withdraw to your local bank account."	***Material***	***Actor: Unspecified Goal: Payment***	***Location: to your local bank***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"Details will be generated for you to make payment."	***Material***	***Actor: Unspecified Goal: Details***	***None***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance

Specifically, since several actions are performed including creating accounts, submitting details, and sending payment, material processes dominate the conversation. Extract from the exchange #2 were provided below:

"Submit this details to me immediately"	***Materials***	***Actor: Target; Goal: Details***	***Time (immediately)***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"Click on this link, create an account"	***Material***	***Actor: Target; Goal: Account***	***Means (this link)***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance

The dominance of the material processes is linked to how actions serve as the focus in expressing human engagements (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The scammer employs these processes to establish a sense of actionability and progress, sustaining the target to feel engaged and lead toward the scam's main goal—payment of the exchange fee.

For instance, the clause *"Please provide your Phone Number"* positions the scammer as the implied actor directing the target, the goal, to disclose their phone number. Similarly, the statement *"You need to recharge 944* to complete this order" frames the target as the actor responsible for fulfilling the goal of recharging funds.

When the scammer outlines tasks and financial incentives in exchange #5 as stated in the clause, *"We are offering $100 per video,"* it successfully employs a creative material process that brings about a tangible reward (Goal). Through this clause, the scammer continues to lead the target to engage and frames the scammer (Actor) as a benefactor, pushing the target by presenting financial compensation as attainable. Furthermore, the clause, *"We will provide you with our institute guarantee form,"* positions the scammer as an Actor facilitating the procedural aspects of the interaction. The procedural aspect then creates an illusion of professionalism and institutional support, leading the target's participation.

The target, in turn, uses material processes to demonstrate their active engagement in the tasks. For instance, the clause, *"I already uploaded 28 videos,"* positions the target as an Actor fulfilling their obligations. This shows compliance and trust in the process, reflecting the scammer's success in manipulating the target's behavior.

When the scammer establishes attributions or justifications to legitimize their requests, Relational processes became prevalent. These attributions aid in establishing a sense of credibility and trustworthiness by the scammer as mentioned below:

"Each video is compensated at $100."	***Relational***	***Carrier: Video; Attribute: $100 value***	***None***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"The IMF has recently increased the exchange fee."	***Relational***	***Carrier: Exchange fee; Attribute: Increase***	***Time (recently)***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"Third party details are provided to make payment easier."	***Relational***	***Carrier: Third-party details; Attribute: Payment facilitation***	***Purpose (to make payment easier)***
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance

Halliday describes Relational clauses as tools for defining and identifying relationships or attributes, often used to establish facts or perceived truths (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The scammer uses these processes to reinforce the legitimacy of their claims and the necessity of the steps they outline. For example, the clause taken from exchange #4, *"The money is yours*" frames the target as the carrier of ownership, in order to leave a sense of control and security. Similarly, in the same exchange "*Your balance: 905*" uses relational processes to present factual-sounding information, to intensify credibility to the interaction. With the factsounding idea, it enabled a reduced skepticism and align the target's perception with the scammer's narrative, creating an atmosphere of mutual benefit, as seen in "*This process is a win-win*."

Moreover, by grounding their identity in a concrete and reliable context, the scammer displays trust and authority. Similarly, the clause, *"At UW-Madison, we are dedicated to enhancing student knowledge and standards of learning,"* employs an attributive relational process to position the institution as a Carrier aligned with positive values such as education and development. the clause, *"Our institution is located in southwestern Wisconsin in Madison, USA,"* uses an identifying relational process to connect the institution (Token) to a prestigious location (Value).

This strategic alignment appeals to the target's perception of legitimacy, creating an environment where compliance appears rational.

On the other hand, other types of processes are seldom used. For instance, Mental processes are primarily utilized by the target, to showcase their internal states of doubt, perception, or concern. The clarification reveals the target's engagement in evaluating the situation and put emphasis on their vulnerability similar to what has been stated below:

"I just want to know the security of my payment."	***Mental***	***Senser: Target; Phenomenon: Payment security***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"I will count on that."	***Mental***	***Senser: Target; Phenomenon: Assurance***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance

It is noticeable that the scammer barely used mental processes since it might activate the target's critical thinking. This connect to Halliday discussion that mental processes reflect the internal world and can disrupt manipulative intentions if over-engaged (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

For example, the clause "*You can earn 554 from this order, very good*" encourages the target, implicitly positioned as the senser, to look forward a financial gain. This strategy exploits the target's desire for positive outcomes and encourages further compliance with the scammer's demands and request.

Despite the scammer's full control of the conversation, instances of the target being in doubt can also be sensed, trying to logically process the situation similar to what has been mentioned by the target in Exchange #2:

"I didn't receive."	***Mental***	***Senser: Target; Phenomenon: Non-receipt***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance
"Did you really send it?"	***Mental***	***Senser: Target; Phenomenon:***	

		Sending confirmation	
Clause	Process Type	Participant’s Role	Circumstance

Though less frequent, verbal processes came out when the target asks queries or the scammer provides elaborations. These exchanges serve to maintain communication and control.

"What do you mean by third party details?"	***Verbal***	***Sayer: Target; Verbiage: Third-party details***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant’s Role	Circumstance
"The IMF will be responsible for that."	***Verbal***	***Carrier: IMF; Attribute: Responsibility***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant’s Role	Circumstance

In the above extract, verbal processes are specifically applied by the scammer to sustain the conversational flow while avoiding opportunities for the target to express significant doubt or challenge the scam. Likewise, verbal clauses in the conversation express a persuasive strategy by the scammer to get information as shown below:

"How much is your payment?"	***Verbal***	***Sayer: Scammer; Verbiage: Payment amount***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant’s Role	Circumstance

For a couple of times, the target passively agree to the scammers’ instructions as depicted from the lines below from exchange #2 to show compliance and interest to move further to the next step:

"Will wait for your response."	***Verbal***	***Sayer: Target; Verbiage: Response***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant’s Role	Circumstance

Verbal processes in the clauses such as *"After reading, let’s proceed to the next step"* put the scammer as the sayer triggering the target's verbal acknowledgment, thereby ensuring their continued involvement to sustain engagement a conversational dynamic.

Meanwhile, Existential processes are almost absent, as the conversation focuses on actions and attributes rather than asserting the existence of entities. However, although behavioral and existential processes are less prominent, they act a supportive role in maintaining a personal connection and rationalizing inconsistencies in the process. For instance, the behavioral clause "*Good morning*!" adds a human element to the interaction, fostering rapport, while the existential clause "*The order is random*" justifies inconsistencies in the scam’s procedure. These processes subtly mitigate suspicion and sustain the target's engagement.

The noticeable dominance of both the material and relational processes in the scam describes the action-oriented nature of the engagement, created to guide the target through a series of steps leading to payment. Material processes align naturally with this goal, creating a step-by-step framework that minimizes hesitation and fosters compliance. Relational processes establish legitimacy by attributing actions to credible institutions like the IMF and justifying fees as standard procedures, making an illusion of authenticity. Meanwhile, the limited use of mental and verbal processes ensures the target remains focused on actions rather than critically analyzing the situation, supporting Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) observation that reducing mental engagement can lower resistance in manipulative interactions. This strategic dominance reinforces power dynamics, with the scammer controlling the discourse and dictating the terms while restricting the target's agency. This analysis aligns with Halliday's framework, highlighting how process selection in discourse reflects the speaker's goals and the power dynamics within an interaction

Accordingly, the circumstantial elements in the conversations are used to improve credibility and lead the target's actions. In the clause, *"The review team diligently monitors all submissions received,"* portrays a manner circumstance ("diligently") that reinforces the professionalism of the scammer's institution. Similarly, the clause, *"Once you have met the minimum payment threshold,"* utilize a conditional circumstance to establish the process as transparent and fair, further fostering trust.

Utilizing Halliday's framework, it is apparent that the repetitive use of Declarative and Interrogative moods creates control and collect responses in order to establish interpersonal relationships within the dialogue.

In the conversation, the scammer predominantly utilizes declarative statements to express authority, manipulate and control the flow of information, and establish a professional image. Halliday (1994) reiterated that Declarative Mood is typically used to convey information or make statements. In the conversation, the scammer uses it intentionally to simulate professionalism and manipulate the target into compliance. All throughout, the scammer attempts to build trust and maintain dominance in the interaction which is shown from an extract in Exchange #1:

"Will wait for your response."	***Verbal***	***Sayer: Target; Verbiage: Response***	
Clause	Process Type	Participant's Role	Circumstance

"We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the remarkable display of diligence and professionalism evident in the videos we have recently viewed."

The use of declarative statement to praise the remarkable job of the target is intended to elicit trust and sustain interaction by the scammer portraying himself as *appreciative* and *supportive.* Meanwhile, aspiring to have a continued conversation, instances of conditional statements was also provided to embed future engagements and gain control over the target's expectations as shown from another extract taken from Exchange #1 (Scammer) as shown below:

"We are diligently maintaining a record of the videos you have produced thus far, and once you attain the minimum threshold, we will seek your guidance on whether to proceed with your

initial payment."

Statements uttered by the scammer "The IMF will be in charge of providing a third party account..." emphasize the scammer's control over the transaction and the target's next steps. This way, the conversation continues to be manipulated by the scammer until such time that the target give in to the bait of sending money.

Apparently, the declarative tone provides thorough "instructions," which creates an illusion of legitimacy while guiding the target's expectations similar to what has been uttered below from exchange #2 (Scammer):

This is the fastest international wire transfer Bank will send you your payment here...	Declarative	Explanation	Positive	Payment method details
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

To further intensify the planned manipulation, the scammer used imperatives to seek for immediate actions and intensify compliance as shown below:

Do not forget to ask for details cause detail generated...	Imperative	Reminder	Neutral	Detail confirmation reminder
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

Through the imperatives, the scammer intensifies their power and keeps the target aligned with his/her objectives. These directives position the scammer as the authoritative figure, controlling the process while minimizing the target's agency. Apart, from securing assurance, the target consistent order discourages skepticism as depicted on the Exchange #2:

Be patient you will get your payment in 2hrs	Imperative	Assurance	Positive	Payment timing
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

To assert control and compel, imperatives are used by the scammer to lead the target into compliance without room for negotiation.

Kindly provide me with this details below	Imperative	Request	Positive	Account details request
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**
Click on transfer to withdraw	Imperative	Instruction	Positive	Withdrawal instruction
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

The use of polite terms like "kindly" hides the coercive nature of the imperatives, making them appear professional and courteous on the end of the target.

The series of interrogative questions combined alternately between Declarative and Interrogative moods, depicting the target's dual role as an engaged participant and an information seeker. More so, the target uses interrogatives to clarify uncertainties and declaratives to confirm actions or provide updates, as shown below:

Then, what's the number to attain the minimum threshold?	Interrogative	Inquiry	Neutral	Threshold number inquiry
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

Oftentimes, declarative also implies a factual update to depict the target's compliance and efforts to achieve the scammer's expectations. In the extract, you'll see that the use of the verb *'informing'* primarily signals the target informing the scammer about his progress in the task given as stated below:

Hi. Good day! Just informing you that I uploaded a total of 18 videos already. Thanks ☺	Declarative	Update	Positive	Video upload status
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

The target's use of interrogatives expresses not only clarification but also subordinate position, as they depend on the scammer for validation and next steps. In contrast, their declaratives, reveals their commitment to fulfilling tasks, a technique intended at getting the promised reward. The target's frequent interrogatives showcase something about the target's dependence on the scammer's guidance as depicted on the extract below:

May I get your email so I can give you the access also...	Interrogative	Request	Neutral	Email request
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

The abovementioned query puts emphasis on the target's effort to comply while seeking clarity, indicating their limited control in the interaction.

Furthermore, the interplay between mood choices illustrates the imbalance power dynamic between the scammer and the target. It is apparent that scammer's dominance is strengthened through the use of declarative statements that give detailed responses, maintain professionalism, and establish authority. In the extract below, the declarative statement seem factual and authoritative specifying an exact amount computed which look it organized and systematic, then concealing a manipulative intent.

Each video is compensated at \$100, so for all 30 videos, the total is \$3000...	Declarative	Statement	Neutral	Compensation breakdown
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

Furthermore, the scammer includes low and medium modality to appear accommodating yet firm in some of the extracts below:

We sincerely appreciate your continuous efforts...	Declarative	Gratitude	Positive	Acknowledgment
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**
We will review all the videos before proceeding with the payment	Declarative	Update	Neutral	Payment step
Clause	**Mood Choice**	**Speech Role**	**Polarity**	**Residue**

In contrast, the target's use of modality reflects uncertainty and a desire for validation:

"I just want to know the security of my payment because you know there are a lot of bad situations happening."

In this interaction, the Scammer's Declarative Mood constructs a façade of professionalism and authority, guiding the target toward compliance. The Target's Interrogative Mood, interspersed with declaratives, reveals their dependent and subordinate position. These mood choices, underpinned by Halliday's SFL framework, demonstrate how language functions to negotiate interpersonal roles and power dynamics in deceptive communication.

Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), mood functions in this interaction as a tool for enacting social roles and power relations. Declaratives emphasize control and legitimacy, imperatives enforce compliance, and interrogatives either gather information (scammer) or signal resistance (target). Together, these mood choices construct a narrative of dominance and submission, with the scammer maintaining control over the interaction through calculated linguistic strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

Target manipulation and the assertion of control by the scammer are realized through the interaction of both the transitivity and mood choices, which operate to create the scammer's authority within the conversation. Primarily, material processes, as an aspect of the experiential metafunction, are leveraged to create a reality where the scammer directs the target's responses, behavior, and expectations. In this way, transitivity functions to represent the actions and events that build the scammer's dominant narrative. The scammer uses transitivity processes primarily to assert dominance and control the target's behavior. With the combinations of the material processes, such as directing actions, the scammer manipulates the target's actions and responses, positioning themselves as the authority figure.

Meanwhile, the relational processes further position the scammer's power, presenting themselves as in control of major decisions and guidelines. The target, on the other hand, predominantly got involved in mental processes, revealing their dependence and submission as they respond to the scammer's directives. With the transitivity processes scammer frames himself as a controlling figure, while putting the target in a subordinate, reactive position.

Meanwhile, mood choices are employed to control the flow of information and secure authority, aligning with the interpersonal metafunction. The predominant use of declarative moods by the scammer depicts a veneer of professionalism and legitimacy, as repeated declaratives place the scammer as a knowledgeable and authoritative figure. On the contrary, the target's use of interrogative moods showcased uncertainty and passivity, while their declarative responses signal compliance, thereby strengthening their subordinate role within the interaction. The dominant and less dominant mood choices in the conversation reflect the power imbalance between the scammer and the target. With the scammer's predominant used of declarative moods, he was then able to assert authority, manipulate the conversation, and control the target into compliance and submission. This strategy creates an illusion of professionalism and trustworthiness, urging the target to follow directives without resistance. In contrast, the target frequently employs interrogative moods to express doubt and ask clarification, marking their subordinate position. The target's occasional use of declarative moods often signifies compliance and a desire to achieve the scammer's expectations, strengthening the power dynamic in favor of the scammer.

Generally, the interweaving of these experiential and interpersonal metafunctions creates patterns of linguistic choice that triggers a significant power imbalance. The scammer's strategic deployment of language thus controls the target's perceptions, emotions, and actions, resulting in dominance and ensuring submission. Beyond this theoretical insight, these findings have practical implications: they can inform the public in the development of AI-assisted scam detection tools capable of flagging suspicious mood and process patterns in real time, as well as guide and direct public awareness campaigns that train individuals to recognize linguistic red flags in unsolicited communications. Future research should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, integrating and incorporating linguistic analysis with behavioral psychology to further evaluate how language-based manipulation exploits cognitive biases and emotional vulnerabilities. Such collaborative work can deepen understanding of scammer–target dynamics and improve both technological and educational defenses against online fraud.

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