

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The link among cinema studies and linguistics is an interesting way to look at how people react to media, especially now that people frequently communicate their reactions online. Language doesn't just describe a movie; it also affects how people talk to each other, share their thoughts, and understand what they've seen. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which Halliday came up with in 1978, is a good way to think about this. SFL doesn't just see language as a way to talk to people; it also sees it as a way to make sense of things. There are three main functions that make up this system: the ideational (how we talk about our experiences), the textual (how we organize messages), and the interpersonal (how we interact and relate to others). The main focus of this study is the interpersonal function, that assists us understand how language shows feelings, attitudes, and the social ties that people make in online communities.

In the last few years, horror movies have made people very emotional online. For example, Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019) have made fans think deeply and write long comments. Psychological, cinematic, and cultural studies have long looked at horror, but there hasn't been as much focus on how language, especially in digital spaces, records and shapes these experiences. Comments from fans on sites like RogerEbert.com frequently extend beyond just giving their opinion; they indicate how people feel about the movies, how they connect with each other, and how they see the movies. The use of mood is an important part of this interaction. People who watch frequently apply declarative sentences to present their own opinions as facts, interrogatives to ask for meaning, and imperatives to tell people what to do or enforce community rules. There have been studies, like Zappavigna's (2011), that look at how language creates online connections, but not many have used the Systemic

Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework to look at fan comments in the horror genre. This study fills that gap by using SFL to look at how viewers reacted to *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*, focusing on how mood and modality show emotional alignment, evaluation, and identity in fan communities. In this way, it adds to the larger body of research on digital communication and Shows how language functions as a tool for expressing emotional reactions and fostering shared viewing experiences within horror fan communities.

The research gap in this area is evident in the lack of studies applying SFL, specifically the interpersonal metafunction, to the online discourse surrounding contemporary horror films. Most existing research on horror fandoms focuses on general audience responses, and few studies systematically analyze how mood and modality are used in viewer comments to express emotional alignment and identity positioning. Furthermore, while Systemic Functional Linguistics has been applied in media studies, its use in exploring the social dynamics of online fan communities remains largely unexplored. Studies on digital fan communities often examine textual content and plot analysis, but the linguistic strategies used by fans to construct social roles and negotiate communal identity through comments is an area that has not been extensively studied (Zappavigna, 2011).

Preliminary analysis of online comments about *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* shows that most people express their thoughts using straightforward statements. These declarative sentences are the main way viewers share how they feel and what they think about the films. For example, in comment **H003**, someone writes, “It sustains dread masterfully,” making a confident emotional judgment without any hesitation. Similarly, comment **M021** says, “The cinematography is absolutely stunning,” ramping up the excitement and admiration with strong, positive language.

The writer also see that people use different kinds of language to show how certain they feel. In comment **H021**, “Maybe it’s better to watch blind,” the word “maybe” softens the suggestion, showing some doubt or caution. On the other hand, in

comment M035, “You can definitely feel the grief in every scene,” the phrase “can definitely” stacks up certainty, making the emotional claim even stronger.

Imperatives, sentences that give instructions, aren’t as common, but when they show up, they serve a special purpose. They help set the ground rules or suggest how to watch these movies. For instance, **H009**’s “Don’t spoil the ending!” is a friendly warning, reminding everyone to respect each other’s experience. Another, M030, says, “Watch it during the day, it’s worse that way,” giving advice that taps into the shared understanding of what makes a horror movie even scarier.

The way fans use declarations, questions, and even directions in their comments shows a lot about how they talk to each other online. It’s not just about talking about horror movies; it’s also about making people feel like they belong, changing how they watch and understand these movies, and creating a shared experience. This study uses Systemic Functional Linguistics to look closely at the language fans apply to determine how mood and modality, or how people show certainty, feelings, and intention, help shape group identity and shared emotional responses in online horror communities..

1.2 Identification of the Study

This study will views at how fans interact with each other through their comments in online horror film communities, focusing on *Hereditary* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019) on RogerEbert.com. It explores the interpersonal role of language in these discussions, examining the specific strategies commenters use to express themselves, connect with others, and engage with the films. The research applies Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on the interpersonal metafunction, which explores how language enacts social relationships, negotiates attitudes, and builds community. The primary aim is to examine how mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative) are employed in online viewer commentary to express emotional alignment, evaluative stances, and identity positioning within the horror film fandom.

1.3 Problems of the Study

The writer formulates the problems as below:

1. What are the mood types used on online comments on hereditary and midsommar films to express evaluative stances among viewers?
2. How are the mood realized in viewers online comments on hereditary and midsommar films to position their identities and give sense of community within the horror film fandom?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the research is to answer the questions mentioned above, which are:

1. Analyzing the types of mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative) used in online viewer comments on *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* to explore how audiences express evaluative stances toward the films.
2. Examining how mood choices in these comments function as linguistic strategies for positioning viewers' identities and establishing a sense of community within the online horror film fandom.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to the analysis of the interpersonal metafunction of mood as defined in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically in online viewer comments responding to the horror films *Hereditary* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019), both directed by Ari Aster. The analysis focuses solely on how mood types, declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses, are employed in viewer commentary to:

1. Selection of the Films

The study is based on viewer responses to two contemporary psychological horror films: *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*. These films were chosen because of their complex narrative structures, emotional intensity, and cultural symbolism, which

frequently elicit rich viewer commentary. Rather than analyzing the films' internal dialogue, this study examines how external viewers engage with and interpret the films through their own language choices.

2. Focus on Interpersonal Metafunction

The core focus is on the interpersonal metafunction, as defined by Halliday (2004), which explores how language is used to negotiate social relationships, express attitudes, and position identities. Within this metafunction, the study specifically investigates Mood including declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses, as a means of asserting opinion, inviting interpretation, or enforcing community norms.

3. SFL Framework

The study employs the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, focusing on how mood function in authentic, user-generated text. While SFL has traditionally been used to study literary, spoken, or subtitled texts, this research extends its application to online viewer commentary, analyzing viewer comments posted on RogerEbert.com.

4. Data Source

The data consists of 100 viewer comments (50 for each film) collected from RogerEbert.com between 2019 and 2024. These comments were selected based on their length, relevance, and linguistic richness. They are analyzed to uncover how fans interact with the film content and with each other, particularly in terms of emotional response, evaluative judgment, and community engagement through language.

5. Limitations

There are a few important limitations to keep in mind when looking at this study. First off, the research only looks at what viewers are saying in their comments, it doesn't analyze the actual scripts or the dialogue between characters in *Hereditary* or *Midsommar*. Even though things like cinematography, sound, and all the visual

details play a big role in how these movies make us feel, those aspects aren't part of this particular analysis. Instead, the focus here is purely on the language people use when they react to the films online. In other words, this study isn't about interpreting the movies themselves, but rather about exploring how fans express their feelings and opinions through their comments, especially looking at the kinds of sentences they use and how they show certainty or emotion.

Second, the data source is limited to comments posted on RogerEbert.com, a relatively formal and moderated film review platform. As such, the language observed in these comments may reflect a more thoughtful and structured style than what might be found on other platforms such as Reddit, YouTube, or Twitter, where audience interactions tend to be shorter, more spontaneous, and often more diverse in tone and register. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to online horror fandom commentaries as a whole.

Third, the study focuses exclusively on interpersonal metafunctional features, specifically, mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative). While these categories are effective for analyzing how viewers express stance and construct identity, the study does not engage with other aspects of commentaries such as ideational meanings, thematic progression, genre structure, or multimodality, which could also provide valuable insights into online fan communication.

Lastly, the research is conducted using English-language comments only, and the demographic background of the commenters remains unknown. This presents a limitation in terms of cultural representation and interpretive diversity, as viewers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may engage differently with horror films and online fan communities. Therefore, while the study offers rich insights into the interpersonal strategies used in online horror film viewer commentaries, its conclusions must be understood within the specific linguistic, cultural, and platform-based context in which the data was generated.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study on the interpersonal metafunction of mood and modality in viewer comments on *Heredity* and *Midsommar* contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of linguistics and film studies. By focusing on the language used in online discussions surrounding these films, the study aims to deepen our understanding of how interpersonal meaning is constructed in digital communication and its impact on audience engagement.

1. Theoretical Significance

This study applies Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine how viewers use language, specifically mood, in online film reviews. While SFL has traditionally been applied to written texts, this study explores its potential in understanding the linguistic features in digital comments, providing a framework for analyzing spoken and written interpersonal communication in popular media. Also, the study deepens our understanding of how the interpersonal metafunction operates in viewer-generated language on online film platforms. By focusing on mood, this study explores how language helps shape social connections, emotional responses, and a sense of identity among viewers in online spaces. It shows how specific word choices can bring commenters closer to, or distance them from, the films and each other, offering insight into how people use language to emotionally engage with cinema and with fellow fans.

2. Practical Significance

This study has practical implications for the field of digital communication, particularly in understanding how audiences participate in online discussions and express their emotional and psychological engagement with media. By examining how language shapes the viewer-community dynamic, the study could inform the design of digital platforms (like film review sites) to foster more meaningful, nuanced discussions. Practically, the study highlights the importance of understanding linguistic

features such as mood and modality in social media discourse. It opens up possibilities for future research on media communication, where linguistics can be used to study how users engage with content, shape public opinion, and construct identity within specific media genres. This could be particularly useful in analyzing public sentiment or audience responses in real-time media review

