

## BETWEEN CONTEXT AND TEXT IN THE DA VINCI CODE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The development towards a dialogical perspective in SFL is reflected in the conception of the relationship between context and text: from the unidirectional and monological relations, according to which context determines text, to the bidirectional and cogenetic logical interaction, within which the perception of context activates the choice of meaning, and meaning in text construes context. Given this bidirectional perspective, the main concern of this study is the interaction between context and text, and the specific question is: can we trace the development of social distance, as described in terms of Hasan's idea of it as related to the interactive biography of participants (Hasan 1985)? My investigation is based on the popular novel, the Da Vinci Code, and the focus is on interactions between the two principal characters Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu. The genre of novel construes a variety of contexts, usually presented in the non-dialogic descriptive part, while we may think of the dialogues between characters as texts; these two ways of narrating are blended together into one unified narrative. Given the aim of my paper, the development of social distance between the two major characters will be measured both in terms of Bogardus' Social Distance Scale (Bogardus 1959) based on sociological theories, and on the concept of interactive biography based on Hasan's model of text analysis. For the analysis of the dialogues, the MOOD system of English is used, because this is the principal grammatical system relevant to the creating and maintaining of relationships and this is of interest in a study concerning the development of social distance.*

**KEY-WORDS:** *context of situation, field, transitivity, mood, social distance, interactive biography.*

### 1. Introduction

When first introduced by Malinowski (1923), context of situation was regarded as the environment that determined the production of speech. The relationship between context and text was considered unidirectional and monological. With development of SFL towards the dialogical

perspective, the relation, with SFL theoretical framework, has become bidirectional and cogenetic, in which the perception of context activates the choice of meaning, and meaning in text construes context (Halliday and Hasan 1989). Comprehensive theories and descriptive networks have been developed for the metafunctions of language, but “the conceptualization of the category of context proves descriptively inadequate”, and context remains to be “a theoretical issue most fundamental to linguistic theory remains in need of elaboration.” (Hasan 1999: 219).

Given this bidirectional perspective, the main concern of this study is the interaction between context and text, with an aim of applying the context theory in a practical perspective. The focus on the relationship between context and text is delimited to that between field of discourse and the ideational meaning of language. The specific question is: with the help of field realization, can we trace the development of social distance, as related to the interactive biography of participants (Hasan 1985)?

## **2. Novel as the discourse**

The discourse of a particular novel is used for analysis, and it is separated into two parts: the non-dialogic part – contents which dialogues among characters are excluded, and the remaining dialogic part. One of the significant contributions of the non-dialogic part to the novel is to describe what is going on, who are involved and how are they involved. Thus this part can be seen as the author’s narrative description of context that characters are engaged in. The dialogue between characters can then be considered as ‘texts’ produced by the characters in particular contexts.

If real-life conversation is used for contextual analysis, it is difficult to determine how relevant an environmental feature is to the interaction, in other words, it is difficult to define the material situational setting (Hasan 1995) of that context. In the genre of the novel, with the author’s intention of telling the overall story, material situational setting is well delimited as the author(s) tends to be selective and only include what is most relevant in the non-dialogic part. Furthermore, the novel provides a variety of contexts and texts, blended together as one unified narrative, so the relationship between context and language of text can be expected to be tight.

It is true that the author creates context and the corresponding text, and

so they are ‘artificial’. One might argue that analysis based on artificial data cannot adequately account for what transpires in real-life conversation. In considering this, Dan Brown’s popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* was chosen for the study. The novel has remained among the top five of the *New York Times* Bestsellers for more than three years, reflecting its success in communicating with readers. The acceptability of a novel suggests that “it speaks to the readers”, which means readers are able to construe context and text along the lines, similar to that in everyday life interactions. Also, Brown’s narrative writing style tends to be descriptive – the non-dialogic part is mostly about what is seen and heard, or about immediate physical sensations, which speaks to its relevancy in terms of contextual description.

### 3. Methodology

This study starts with the realization of ideational meaning in the field of discourse, i.e. the realization of the transitivity network (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) and field network (Hasan 1999). This does not presuppose language determines context of situation, rather the study takes as its major premise that there exists a bidirectional relationship between context and text. Field realization is applied as representation for interactive biography, which is related to social distance – a feature in tenor. Furthermore the development of interactive biography is compared with changes MOOD in the discourse of the characters. This shows how the change of contexts, in terms of tenor for this instance, activates different choices of meaning in terms of MOOD.

#### 3.1. Discourse preparation

With the concern of studying social distance in later stage of this study, the analysis is focused on the interaction between the two main characters, Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon. Clauses included in the first five spatial scenes<sup>i</sup> are first extracted out and arranged by temporal sequence<sup>ii</sup>. It is important to first clarify that the spatial scene does not directly correspond to the field: two people can start with discussion about what to eat in a restaurant and end up sharing their recent life experiences over the course of a shared meal.

Clauses enclosed by quotation marks and clauses of reported speech are included as the dialogic part. Only when the interlocutor and addressee are the interactants (the concerned characters – Sophie and Langdon), a dialogic clause is included in the analysis. Identification of the

interlocutor and addressee is decided on the basis of the description of the non-dialogic part or from the flow of conversation. As mentioned, clauses not included in the dialogic part are considered as non-dialogic. A non-dialogic clause is included in the analysis if the interactants are engaged as participants of the process, and when there are animate participants who are not the interactants, both the interactants have to be as participants.<sup>iii</sup> This forms a total of 1,671 clauses.

### **3.2. Transitivity realization**

A transitivity network is concerned with PROCESS TYPE and AGENCY. AGENCY is about the relationship between participants of process(es), so it is more related to tenor, instead of field. Therefore, only PROCESS TYPE is considered in this study. Both the dialogic and non-dialogic clauses serve to determine the selections made in the PROCESS TYPE network. Since realization is based on lexicogrammar, determination of PROCESS TYPE is based on behavior of process and nature of participants, both in grammatical sense, as stated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). In brief, mental, verbal, relational identifying, relational attributive, behavioral, material and existential processes are differentiated and their corresponding participants roles are determined, which are for the use of field realization.

### **3.3. Field realization**

MATERIAL ACTION, VERBAL ACTION and SPHERE OF ACTION in Hasan's network of field (1999) have been studied based on the non-dialogic and dialogic parts. Since the five spatial scenes as a whole are too lengthy to be presented here, Chapter 61 of the novel (in the Appendix), which is used for illustration, describes a short exchange between Sophie and Langdon, about Sophie's doubts on the background of her family.

Realization of field is based on a collection of clauses, instead of considering the clauses one by one. When a series of clauses possess common features in terms of meaning (transitivity in particular for the analysis at this moment) with respect to field, they are considered to be one single field. If certain features change, then it is considered to be switching to another field, and this forms the criteria of delimiting a field. Chapter 61, although brief, is considered to have two fields<sup>iv</sup>, with the first containing only 36 clauses. These fields are in the same spatial scene.

Before the illustration of field realization, a modification of Hasan's MATERIAL ACTION network is proposed first. In the system of MATERIAL ACTION, immediate material action should be *ever* present. Even when interactants are not face-to-face (e.g. talking over the phone), or they are not interacting immediately (e.g. a reader reading a book), material action still plays a part in the communication and is significant, even if it has no direct relationship with the contents of verbal action going on (Hasan, 1999). Hasan's network suggests that the presence and non-presence of material action is an 'either or' relationship. Along with this logic, no deferred material action should be possible. Therefore, the system of MATERIAL ACTION is suggested to be modified as follows:

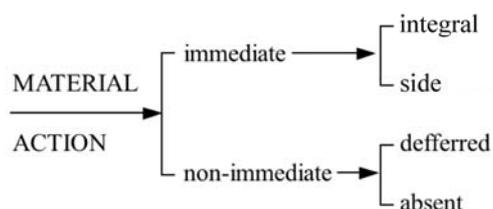


Figure 1: Modified MATERIAL ACTION network

For material action, the feature is replaced by [immediate], with options [integral] and [side]. [Integral] refers to a situation in which material action has direct influence on the social activity the interactants are engaged in (e.g. two people cooperate in repairing a machine); whereas side material action has no direct relationship with the social activity (e.g. a teacher stands up in the classroom when teaching). The feature [non-immediate] corresponds to [non-present] in Hasan's network. The default dependencies (Hasan 1999) of immediate material action are: (1) if material action [immediate: integral], then material action must be [ancillary]; and (2) if material action [immediate: side], then material action must be [constitutive].

Consider the excerpt of the first field in Chapter 61, material processes are present in the non-dialogic part, but those material processes are not the same as those in the dialogic part. This reflects what the interactants are talking about, and is not associated with what they are physically doing. Since the social activity is anchored in verbal action, immediate material action is [side]. None of the material processes in dialogic part are in future aspect, modified by modal words, or in the form of imperative, so no material action is entailed or introduced by the field

and therefore no deferred material action is present.

By default dependency, VERBAL ACTION is considered as constitutive. In the absence of deferred material action, again by default dependency this constitutive verbal action is conceptual instead of practical. Three simultaneous selections have to be made for conceptual verbal action. First, the field must be relation based, because in the dialogic part, personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' are frequently used as first participants of processes, reflecting the interactants' awareness of being differentiated from each other. This is one of the clearest markers to delimit this field from the following one. From the perspective of Langdon, in the next field, he uses inclusive personal pronoun 'we', and not 'I' or 'you', while Sophie still keeps using 'I'. This can be described, from Langdon's perspective, as the next field being switched into reflection based, while for Sophie remaining relation based. Thus it is necessary to differentiate selection expressions triggered by different interactants with regards to differences in their language.<sup>v</sup>

Second, among the choices of conceptual verbal action, the verbal action is considered as in second order, since participants other than interactants are frequently engaged in processes in dialogic part, this means the verbal action is not immediately related to the interactants themselves. The high proportion of relational processes in the dialogic part realize the third choice of conceptual verbal action as informing, as interactants are concerned with process of defining and categorizing through verbal action.

In terms of SPHERE OF ACTION, the field is considered to be quotidian, as the clauses in dialogic part are not complex clause, and nominalization does not occur. While quotidian refers to the un-technicality of the way interactants speak, institutional/individuated refers to the contents of the speaking. This choice is not clear in this field. But considering earlier fields in the novel, many of them are institutional, as a lot of relational processes are related to nouns that have just appeared, in both non-dialogic and dialogic parts. This means the author and 'the characters' always explain and define newly introduced terms, suggesting that general public is not expected to know much about them. The combination of quotidian and institutional sphere of action reflects the author's intention of trying to use everyday language to talk about specialized things, which is a writing style quite consistent throughout the whole novel.

Selection expressions in this field can be expressed as:

MATERIAL [immediate: side; non-immediate: absent]

VERBAL [constitutive: conceptual: relation based; second order;  
informing] SPHERE [quotidian]

It may appear that the dialogic part is more significant in determining field-realization, but in fact dialogic part and non-dialogic parts are equally significant in field determination. If we consider the dialogues alone:

666 (Sophie) There's an emergency  
stairwell about  
fifty meters back into the Grand  
Gallery,  
668 (Sophie) Now that the guards are  
leaving the  
perimeter,  
669 (Sophie) we can get out of here.

The relational:attributive clause (669) showing ability may seem to be a flag of Sophie planning how to escape from the Grand Gallery. In such case non-immediate material action should be [deferred] and verbal action [constitutive: practical: plan]. However, with the help of the immediate non-dialogic description:

674 Emerging from the shadows,  
675 Langdon and Sophie moved stealthily  
up the  
deserted Grand Gallery corridor  
toward the  
emergency exit stairwell.

It is clear that clause 669 actually functions as Sophie's instruction for their movement, as the processes and participants are associated in the dialogic and non-dialogic parts. Thus non-immediate material action is [absent] and verbal action [ancillary].

The above is a brief illustration of how network selection of field is realized by transitivity and lexicogrammar. The relationship between field and transitivity is clarified in such a way that realization statements of field network are made up in terms of transitivity selection and

lexicogrammar. Each of the fields in the novel provides justification for these realization statements. The justification procedure also helps test whether choices of a certain system need to be modified (as the modification of MATERIAL ACTION system mentioned above), or more options should be available. <sup>vi</sup>

#### **4. Application**

In the first five spatial scenes, there are totally 30 fields identified by the methodology illustrated above. These realized fields are then brought to application in the study of social distance.

##### **4.1. Social Distance**

Starting from Bogardus (1959), social distance has been one of the main concerns for sociologists and is “one of the most successful concepts in international sociology, extensively used today in studies of ethnic, class, gender, status, and many other kinds of relations” (Ethington 1995). Pabjan’s recent research on measuring social distance (2005) suggests how this conception has evolved from 1959 to present. Ignoring the fact that the research was done in an extremely restricted environment, Pabjan’s approach is still along the line of what Bogardus suggested.

Social distance is defined as the degree of sympathetic understanding between people (Bogardus 1959), or degree of interpersonal dependence (Pabjan 2005). The famous Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus 1933) for measuring social distance uses certain criterion to ‘quantify’ social distance. Such definitions and scale for social distance is highly subjective. Moreover, such scaling cannot act as explicit description handling the complications of social distance development.

Hasan defines social distance as the degree of knowing and understanding between interactants, and it can be reflected by an interactive biography, which roughly consists of two dimensions: frequency of having common activities, interests and fields shared among the characters, and the variety of activities, interests and fields among them. (Hasan 1985) As mentioned, this study represents the biography in terms of realization statements of field.

## 4.2. Representation of interactive biography

One tends to remember the kind of interactions, instead of exactly what interactions, he or she has engaged in with a certain person. Therefore, field, but not transitivity, is used for interactive biography representation. An interactive biography lists out all the choices of the field network that are selected by a series of fields, and the frequencies of selection are also indicated. So by looking at the choices with frequencies greater than zero, the variety of fields that interactants experience is shown. Frequencies for repeated fields are reflected in the frequencies of certain features. The interactive biography of the 30 fields in the first five spatial scenes (in terms of material and verbal actions) is as in Figure 2.

With limited delicacy of the network, it is not surprising the biography covers most of the less delicate features. But still the biography shows the interactants are

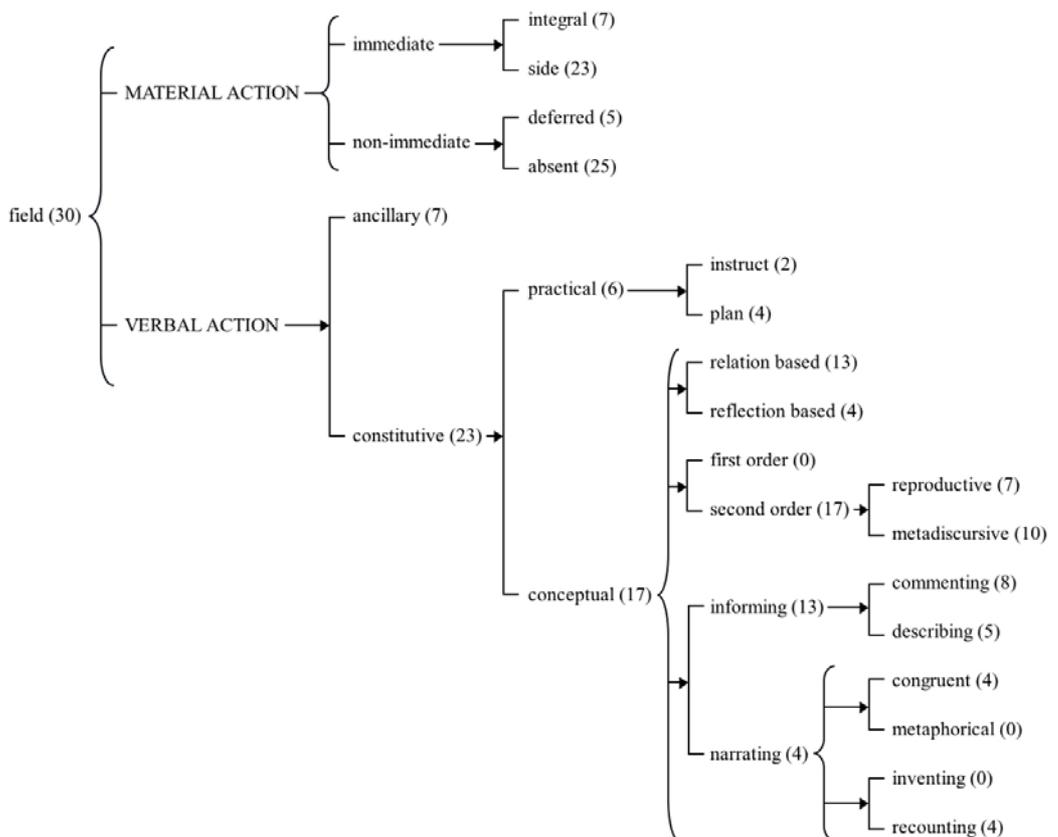


Figure 2: Interactive biography of interaction in the first five spatial scenes

engaged in quite a variety of fields. Concerning the frequencies of features, for example, the proportion of practical verbal action to conceptual verbal action is 6:17. This shows that the interactants are much less concerned with the physical environment they are engaged in.

#### 4.3. Development of social distance, with consideration of MOOD

The “richer”, both in terms of frequency and variety, the interactive biography, the shorter the social distance. The above interactive biography is structured by a series of fields, if temporal sequence is considered, the development of social distance can be traced.

13 fields of the conceptual verbal actions are relation based while only 4 of them are reflection based. All fields with reflection based verbal actions occur later (the 19<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> fields) in the whole development of this biography. In this regard, the 18<sup>th</sup> field and 19<sup>th</sup> field form the turning point in which the interactants take the flight from figuring out the social relationship among them to sharing knowledge with each other, a step of development in terms of *tenor*. Going back to the novel, Langdon now realizes what kind of situation he is in and what kind of person Sophie is, and so he starts sharing his own knowledge about the secret society which he finds significant for the situation. Such a description may be too much like a novel commentary, but linguistic cues do exist. Below are *all* the clauses spoken by Langdon in the first three fields.

51 Thank you,  
 54 Where do I find a phone?  
 74 I'm sorry, Ms. Neveu?  
 75 I think  
 76 you may have given me—  
 85 But—  
 150 But... why?  
 179 What the...?  
 204 Why would I run!  
 206 I'm innocent!  
 231 How the hell could Fache actually  
 believe  
 232 I killed Jacques Saunière!

281 Why would Saunière write this?  
 284 Why would I want  
 285 to kill Jacques Saunière?  
 294 This is impossible,  
 296 I have an alibi.  
 297 I went directly back to my hotel  
 after my lecture.  
 298 You can ask the hotel desk.  
 304 This is insanity!  
 305 Fache has no evidence!  
 316 I didn't do this.  
 331 Why are you telling me all this?  
 337 I'm sorry?  
 338 It's your fault  
 339 Saunière is trying  
 340 to frame me?  
 347 I beg your pardon?  
 373 But why do you think  
 374 his message was for you?

With reference to the MOOD system network (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 23), Langdon's speech at this stage is heavily interrogative, while Sophie's is heavily declarative. While Langdon only produces 30 clauses in these three fields, Sophie produces almost a hundred. Such suggests Langdon's strong intention of demanding information, and he is not actively engaged in the communication. In other words, he has not much knowledge about both Sophie and the situation, thus the social distance at this stage is almost maximal.

As the story progress Langdon produces more and more clauses, though most of them are still interrogative. At the turning point of the 18<sup>th</sup> field, he takes an active role in the communication by pressing Sophie with questions<sup>vii</sup>:

1004 There you are!  
 1011 Where were you?  
 1016 Sophie, listen.  
 1019 The letters P.S.... do they mean  
 anything  
 else to you?

- 1020 Anything at all?  
 1027 I know,  
 1028 but did you ever see them  
 anywhere else?  
 1029 Did your grandfather ever use P.S.  
 in any  
         other way?  
 1030 As a monogram, or maybe on  
 stationary or a  
         personal item?  
 1036 The initials,  
 1039 Have you seen them?  
 1052 Where?  
 1056 Sophie, this is crucial.  
 1057 Can you tell me  
 1058 if the initials appeared with a  
 symbol?  
 1059 A fleur-de-lis?

From the 19<sup>th</sup> field onwards, Sophie and Langdon's tendencies in MOOD interchange – Langdon's clauses are mostly declarative while Sophie's speech contains more and more interrogative clauses. Besides, number of clauses produced by these two interactants is more balanced. These reflect Langdon has gained certain knowledge about Sophie and the situation so he shifts to a sharing role in the communication, i.e., social distance has been decreased. Take Langdon's speech in the 29<sup>th</sup> field as examples:

- 1479 Sophie,  
 1481 this is the seal  
 1482 I told you about!  
 1483 The official device of the Priory of  
 Sion.  
 1504 Do you know what  
 1505 it opens?  
 1518 Sophie,  
 1520 all I can tell you is  
 1521 that equal-armed crosses like this  
 one are  
         considered peaceful crosses.  
 1522 Their square configurations make  
 them

impractical  
 1523 for use in crucifixion,  
 1524 and their balanced vertical and  
 horizontal  
 elements convey a natural union of  
 male and  
 female,  
 1525 making them symbolically  
 consistent with  
 Priory philosophy."

## 5. Concluding remarks

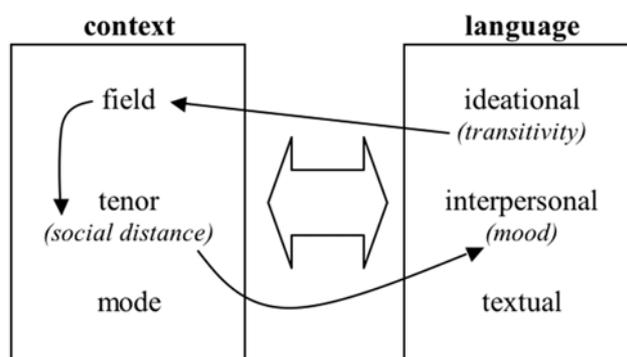


Figure 3: Steps and elements in the study of context and text

As illustrated by Figure 3, this study is concerned with the relationship between context and text. Beginning with the realization of transitivity in text, we then attempt to construe the field. Gradually an interactive biography may be constructed and the development of social distance, as an element of tenor, is traced. Finally, the corresponding change of MOOD activated by the change of tenor is determined. This not only reveals the bidirectional relationship between context and text, but also the interrelationship between features of context (field and tenor).

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## APPENDIX

### Excerpt from Chapter 61 of “the Da Vinci Code” by Dan Brown

Clauses in italics are dialogues, indicated by “L” (Langdon) and “S” (Sophie) for the interlocutors.

#### Field One

- 61.1 Princess Sophie.
- 61.2 Sophie felt hollow
- 61.3 as she listened to the clicking of Teabing's crutches fade down the hallway.
- 61.4 Numb, she turned
- 61.5 and faced Langdon in the deserted ballroom.
- 61.6 He was already shaking his head
- 61.7 as if reading her mind.
- 61.8 L: *No, Sophie,*
- 61.9 he whispered,
- 61.10 his eyes reassuring.
- 61.11 L: *The same thought crossed my mind*
- 61.12 L: *when I realized*
- 61.13 L: *your grandfather was in the Priory,*
- 61.14 L: *and you said*

- 61.15 L: *he wanted*  
 61.16 L: *to tell you a secret about your family.*  
 61.17 L: *But it's impossible.*  
 61.18 Langdon paused.  
 61.19 L: *Sauniere is not a Merovingian name.*  
 61.20 Sophie wasn't sure  
 61.21 whether to feel relieved or disappointed.  
 61.22 Earlier, Langdon had asked an unusual passing question  
 about Sophie's mother's maiden name. Chauvel.  
 61.23 The question now made sense.  
 61.24 S: *And Chauvel?*  
 61.25 she asked, anxious.  
 61.26 Again he shook his head.  
 61.27 L: *I'm sorry.*  
 61.28 L: *I know*  
 61.29 L: *that would have answered some questions for you.*  
 61.30 L: *Only two direct lines of Merovingians remain.*  
 61.31 L: *Their family names are Plantard and Saint-Clair.*  
 61.32 L: *Both families live in hiding,*  
 61.33 L: *probably protected by the Priory.*  
 61.34 Sophie repeated the names silently in her mind  
 61.35 and then shook her head.  
 61.36 There was no one in her family named Plantard or Saint-Clair.

## Field Two

- 61.37 Sophie turned quietly back to The Last Supper  
 61.38 and gazed at Mary Magdalene's long red hair and quiet eyes.  
 61.39 There was something in the woman's expression that echoed the  
 loss  
 of a loved one.  
 61.40 Sophie could feel it too.  
 61.41 S: *Robert?*  
 61.42 she said softly.  
 61.43 He stepped closer.  
 61.44 S: *I know*  
 61.45 S: *Leigh said*  
 61.46 S: *the Grail story is all around us,*  
 61.47 S: *but tonight is the first time*  
 61.48 S: *I've ever heard any of this.*  
 61.49 Langdon looked  
 61.50 as if he wanted

- 61.51 to put a comforting hand on her shoulder,  
 61.52 but he refrained.  
 61.53 L: *You've heard her story before, Sophie.*  
 61.54 L: *Everyone has.*  
 61.55 L: *We just don't realize it*  
 61.56 L: *when we hear it.*  
 61.57 S: *I don't understand.*  
 61.58 L: *The Grail story is everywhere,*  
 61.59 L: *but it is hidden.*  
 61.60 L: *When the Church outlawed speaking of the shunned Mary*  
*Magdalene,*  
 61.61 L: *her story and importance had to be passed on through more*  
*discreet*  
*channels... channels that supported metaphor and symbolism.*  
 61.62 S: *Of course.*  
 61.63 S: *The arts.*  
 61.64 Langdon motioned to The Last Supper.  
 61.65 L: *A perfect example.*  
 61.66 L: *Some of today's most enduring art, literature, and music*  
*secretly tell*  
*the history of Mary Magdalene and Jesus.*

<sup>i</sup> When Sophie and Langdon move from one place to another, that means moving from one spatial scene to another. The first five spatial scenes happens in Grand Gallery of Louvre Museum, the men's room, the emergency stairwell, the Salle des Etats, and Sophie's SmartCar. The decision of including the first five spatial scenes is for the sake of the number of clauses analyzed.

<sup>ii</sup> Clauses are arranged in temporal sequence because real-life interactions occur in such sequence. Sequence of events is often not arranged according to temporal sequence in a novel. Such mismatch always increases dramatic sense. This is related to mode of discourse as in context of communication between readers and the author.

<sup>iii</sup> There are several occasions in which the interactants are not engaged in the same social action. For example, in the Salle des Etats, Sophie is trying to break Jacques Saunière's code while Langdon is lying on the floor at gunpoint. Clauses of such situations in the first five spatial scenes are excluded even they may satisfy the criterion of being included in the analysis.

<sup>iv</sup> Only in terms of interactions between Sophie and Langdon, if interactions involving other characters are also taken into consideration, there will be more than two fields in this chapter.

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<sup>v</sup> As not to complicate the illustration too much, such consideration of different interactants' perspectives is not taken into consideration for the moment. If the perspectives of interactants contradict with each other in a field, the judgment is done based on the interactant who speaks more.

<sup>vi</sup> In the first field of the five spatial scenes, Sophie gives instructions to Langdon for him to make a phone call. The verbal action is [constitutive: practical: instruct: manage], but no choices under 'manage' (i.e. install, maintain and repair) are suitable, so another choice 'accomplish' is added under 'manage'.

<sup>vii</sup> This is realized by his failure in building up information structure with Sophie, i.e., he is not addressing what Sophie is saying.