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A LEXICO-SEMANTIC STUDY OF “ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND”

M. A. Thesis in Linguistics

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Abstract

Recognising coherent structure of a text is an essential task in natural language understanding. It is necessary, for example, to resolve anaphora, ellipsis, and ambiguity. One of the dominant factors of coherence of the text structure is lexical cohesion, namely the dependency relationship between words based on associative relations in common knowledge.

This thesis proposes an objective method for measuring lexical cohesion, especially semantic relations, between words. In this thesis, the researcher discusses how to apply the analysis of lexical cohesion in texts to the problem of evaluating text coherence.

In this work, we have two goals; one is to investigate the problem of lexical cohesion as an indicator of text coherence. The other is to increase our knowledge about cohesion in general, which is an interesting research area in its own right. The researcher starts with a specific point of view, considering cohesion and coherence as separate but related phenomena. Coherence is concerned with what makes sense in an utterance. Therefore, the semantics of discourse is the most important aspect of text from the coherence point of view.

Cohesion, on the other hand, is concerned mainly with how various parts of the text fit together, independent of semantics or discourse. In other words, the contents are less important than the links between text constituents. Cohesion plays an important supporting role for coherence. When two text constituents make sense together, that is, when they are coherent, they always have cohesive ties in common. One such a tie is lexical. Hence, lexical cohesion usually appears when coherence is present.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), there are five major classes of cohesive ties, some of which are realised through grammar and others through vocabulary. The latter is the main concern of this study which focuses on lexical cohesion.

Lexical cohesion is said to be the cohesive effect realised by the selection of vocabulary and it helps in connecting unrelated structures into a coherent whole. It is described as a problematic type of cohesion mainly because it deals with ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’ class items. The former includes lexical words which are unlimited in number and are subject to what linguists term ‘diachronic change’, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Unlike grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion makes use of semantic information to choose a proper replacement for an item. It also differs in that it “regularly leaps over a number of sentences to pick up an element that has not figured in the intervening text” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Consequently, Halliday in 1985 claims that “lexical cohesion may be maintained over long passages by the presence of keywords, words having special significance for the meaning of the particular text”.

As for the purpose of the study, it is threefold:

1. not enough work has been done in this field, especially in Egypt.
2. it contributes towards a better understanding of one aspect of text structure, namely lexical semantics.

3. it examines a number of passages from Lewis Carroll's: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland that have not received much attention from the critics so far, or that were only analyzed from a literary perspective. It shows that certain utterances may receive different interpretations depending on the scope context.

To achieve this aim, sample passages are taken from the story to indicate how lexico-semantic cohesive relations between words are created. Therefore, the more a lexico-semantic form is frequent, the more it is cohesive, and the more it is cohesive the more significant it is to the theme of the text.

The overall findings are: 1) all types of lexical cohesive devices that have been studied were used by the writer, which leads to a coherent text; 2) the ranking of the frequency of use of the different lexical cohesive devices is as follows, in a descending order: repetitions, followed by collocations, antonyms, synonyms, hyponyms, meronyms and homonyms with polysems being the least.

The thesis therefore provides important new research within the field of linguistics on how a representation of the cohesion of a text provides an understanding of the coherence of that text.

Key Words: Lexical Semantics; Lexical Cohesion; Lexical Relations

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Chapter One

Linguistics and Literature

1.1 Introduction

Language is a tool of communication and it cannot be separated from people's life. It is used to express our ideas, emotions and desires. It is how we share information. Linguistics is the study of language and Lexical Semantics is the branch of linguistics that is interested in how meaning is expressed in language.

Language is defined by Halliday (1978:21) as a unit of semantics. He views language as follows:

Language is being regarded as the encoding of a 'behaviour potential' into a 'meaning potential'; that is, as a means of expressing what the human organism 'can do', in interaction with other human organisms, by turning it into what he 'can mean'. What he can mean (the semantic system) is, in turn, encoded into what he 'can say' (the lexico-grammatical system, or grammar and vocabulary): to use our own folk linguistic terminology, meanings are expressed in wordings. Wordings are finally recoded into sounds or spellings (the phonological and orthographic system).

This thesis is a literary text-based study from a linguistic perspective. It is proved that any comprehensive understanding, evaluation or criticism of any literary text cannot be realized unless it is studied from a linguistic perspective among other things. A linguistic analysis of a literary text aims at the interpretation and evaluation of that text.

Therefore, how coherent and expressive a writer's language is depends basically on his unique employment of cohesive devices in his literary work. The analysis of cohesion, in general, adds something new to the interpretation of a text. It shows why a text is interpreted in a certain way. It explains the nature of conversational inferences, the meaning that the reader gets out of the text implicitly, i.e. presuppositions from the shared experience of the participants, and from the context, be linguistic or social. It is the text forming or textual component of the semantic system that specially provides the linguistic means through which such presuppositions are made.

A novel is a literary work. It uses medium to convey the information or message to the reader. Jacob and Illan, (2003:3), in their book The New Encyclopedia Britannica, state that: "novel is an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in specific setting". By reading fiction, we can get meaning. In this thesis, based on the statement above, the writer is interested in analyzing meaning, especially meaning relations in words in the literary text: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Carroll, 1994).

Klug (2000:3) mentions in the introduction of his papers that Lewis Carroll's novel Alice's Adventures in Wonderland "was often regarded as 'light reading' without communicating moralistic ideas, and generally not teaching anything". Although it is a book for children, it attracts linguists and critics because of its use of language. Helmut notes that

It is this use of language that is most interesting both from a linguistic and literary point of view, as both sciences are closely connected through language: for linguistics, language is the subject of analysis, and for literature, it is a tool to be used. In contrast to linguistics, literary studies go one-step further and interpret analytic results in the context of the work as a whole.

This thesis is a study of word semantic properties in context. It covers various theories of the structure of words, meaning relationships between words and the relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning. It draws upon Lewis Carroll's language in his literary text: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. It provides an analysis of his use of the cohesive ties, be lexical or syntactic, and the semantic relationships that hold between lexical forms.

The main aim is to introduce some basic terms and concepts in the analysis of vocabulary. The emphasis is on an exploration of what constitutes a word. The area of linguistics, which covers the study, is generally known as lexical semantics. Word-level semantic analysis features constitute the core of this field. It is the aim of this study to explore the lexical and syntactic choices of the writer that contribute to his expressiveness, and that serve him to achieve his communicative and

aesthetic goal. A selection is made of those features of lexical semantics that seem most relevant to an understanding of some selected contexts of language use.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The objective of this thesis is to provide an analysis of some lexico-semantic cohesive forms in a literary discourse. It provides an analysis of Lewis Carroll's literary text: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland from a lexico-semantic perspective. It deals mainly with lexical and semantic connections based on word choice. It also indicates how lexico-semantic cohesive relations between words are created.

Therefore, the study hypothesises that the more a lexico-semantic form is frequent, the more it is cohesive, and the more it is cohesive the more significant it is to the theme of the text. It proposes to prove that we can state the meaning of words in terms of their association with other words.

The present study also helps to develop students' appreciation of the variety and range of uses of English and the role of linguistic analysis in the interpretation of literary texts. It develops students' skills in detailed descriptive and analytical studies of a range of written English texts.

1.3 Rationale of the study

There are a number of reasons behind the choice of lexical semantics as the main concern of the study. Firstly, not enough work has been done in this field, especially in Egypt. Secondly, the present study contributes towards a better understanding of one aspect of text structure, namely lexical semantics. Thirdly, this thesis examines a number of passages from Lewis Carroll's: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland that have not received much attention from the critics so far, or that are only analyzed from a literary perspective. It is shown that certain utterances may receive different interpretations depending on the scope context.

1.4 Procedure

1. Stating hypotheses

- a) We can state the meaning of words in terms of their association with other words.
- b) We can also provide an analysis of some lexico-semantic cohesive devices in a literary discourse.

2. Source of data

Lewis Carroll's literary text: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

3. Analyzing data

The analysis of data in the thesis depends on an eclectic approach. (For more details, see 'Theoretical Framework', Chapter three.)

4. Validating data

The results of the research are compared with its hypotheses.

5. Findings & Conclusion

1.5 The relationship between language and literature

Linguistics might be defined as that branch of learning which builds models of texts and languages on the basis of theories of language, and which evaluates the success of such models with the aid of explicit criteria. The relationship between linguistics and literature can be set in different ways. Obviously, the increase in attention to textual detail is apt to bring literary criticism closer to linguistics. Curiously enough, the gap between these two disciplines is not bridged, perhaps because contemporary linguists are preoccupied with small units such as phonemes and morphemes, which are particularly amenable to the methods of taxonomic structuralism.

Style is defined as that kind of linguistic variation that correlates with context, and if elements of literary structures are viewed as contextual categories, they become relevant to stylolinguistics as well. They give a more taxonomy of literary contexts than distinctions between dialogue and description.

The quest for such universals of narrative structure has been more recently continued by Barthes (1966), and applied to some English themes by Chatman (1969). According to the neo-structuralist theory, narrative

consists of story and discourse. The story is formed by the action and by the characters, whereas the discourse consists of the relations between narrator and reader such as the time scale, the aspect, and the mode of the narrative. The story can be split up into minimal narrative units called functions. These functions combine into larger units or actions, which together form the narrative. Functions are either kernels, that is, branching points in the story in which choice between alternative courses of behaviour take place. Another type of functions is the indices which do not link a function to the events proper in the narrative, but which refer to character or atmosphere. Thus, a description of a knife in a person's belt is a catalyst if the knife is actually used in the story, but remains an index if it merely illustrates the appearance and character of its owner. Proportions between kernels, catalysts, and indices can be regarded as characteristics of a writer's narrative structure, and in that sense of his narrative style. But such universals might also be viewed as stylolinguistics context categories. They make it theoretically possible to study and contrast for instance the language of kernels and catalysts with the language of indices, and to find out whether a given writer might be said to have a different style for the expression of each of these functions.

Various attitudes have been voiced about the relations between linguistics and literary study, and they have even acquired political overtones. In practical work, such problems tend to solve themselves pragmatically, as long as each investigator allows himself the freedom of choosing and shaping his methods as they best help him to achieve his particular goals.