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Linguistic analysis of literary data



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To
Our Brave Martyrs in Iraq
Who Fought for Freedom

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Preface

Literary data are supposed to reflect real life situations and written with styles of writing that are considered as highly elevated ones. Such reasons have prompted the contributors to this book to deal with this type of data. Such attempts range from semantics to stylistics and pragmatics. This book introduces linguistic analyses of literary data from different angles. This involves dealing with various linguistic topics and different types of literary data. Hence, many models are presented to analyze the linguistic aspects of those topics in the light of the genre in which those topics are undertaken. Accordingly, different results are yielded from those analyses and this makes each type of analysis distinct from the other ones.

It is hoped that this work will be a useful source to all those, whether theoretically or practically, or both, interested in linguistics, pragmatics of literature, applied linguistics and literary stylistics.

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CHAPTER ONE

A STYLISTIC STUDY OF SYNONYMY IN W. WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

Fareed H. H. Al-Hindawi

Musaab A. Raheem Al-Khazaali

1.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the role of synonyms in propounding the main themes in Wordsworth's poetry that is considered one of the best representatives of the romantic poets. Thus, his style can be a portrait for this movement.

Wordsworth's poetry generally reacts against the thought and literary practices of the preceding century. His major subject, like most Romanticists, matter is the beauty and satisfactions derive from nature. Romanticists believe in naturalism and realism in the place of morality. They believe that man should not be conformed or stereotyped to one norm of code rather derive pleasure from what he derives from nature (see Abrams, 1953; Moulin, 2005: 1-2). His style, thus, is worth researching because it is a picture of his age.

The hypotheses of this work are built upon the belief that Wordsworth attempts to make his poetry coherent mainly by using synonyms, and this coherence is mainly a thematic one. Verschueren (1999: 135-6) points out that thematic coherence, in certain cases, is called 'relevance'. It is connected with the study of information structure and/or thematic structure. Following van Dijk (1977), this coherence can also be classified into two types: local (which deals with thematic unity at the level of stanza) and global (which deals with that unity at the level of a whole poem).

To test the hypothesis, componential analysis, which is thought, here, to be a useful tool in this regard, is conducted.

Moreover, the work provides a theoretical background on synonymy and the approaches of analyzing it. The selected approach is applied to a number of poems randomly selected to verify or reject the hypothesis adopted. In so doing, the current research attempts to answer the following questions:

- a. What is the role of synonymy in creating coherence in Wordsworth's poetry?
- b. Is synonymy a stylistic marker in his poetry?
- c. Can the componential analysis approach be usefully applied to literary texts?

1.2. Synonymy

When it comes to giving a clear, precise and correct definition of synonymy, many difficulties arise. There are numerous approaches with numerous definitions of synonymy and types of synonyms, because synonyms may differ in many ways.

Thus, it would be imprecise to define synonymy as identity of meaning since there are no two terms with completely identical meaning. Hence, other definitions have emerged. Generally speaking, synonymy denotes the phenomenon of two or more different linguistic forms with the same meaning. Those linguistic forms are called synonyms, e.g. peace and tranquility, or capacity and ability can be substituted for one another in certain contexts (For more details, see Crystal, 2003: s.v. synonymy).

However, for some other scholars, synonymy is the relation that holds between bound morphemes, lexemes, lexical units, phrases, clauses, sentences and propositions. Thus, synonymy can be classified either into lexical and propositional synonymy, or into lexical, phrasal and propositional synonymy. The first division, in which lexical synonymy comprises phrasal synonymy, can be explained in the following manner (see O'Grady *et. al.*, 2005: 55).

1.2.1 Lexical synonymy

Lexical synonymy is concerned with bound morphemes, lexemes, lexical units and phrases. It is a sense relation that holds between two or more lexical units with the same sense in the given contexts in which they are interchangeable (Crystal, 2003: s.v. synonymy).

Cruse (2000:157) asserts that a level of synonymity can be recognized through a scale which consists of absolute synonymy, cognitive synonymy and near-synonymy. Absolute synonymy is set as the complete identity of all meanings of two or more lexemes in all contexts. However, it is unnatural for a language to have absolute synonyms, or lexemes with exactly the same meaning. Firstly, the function or use of one of them would gradually become unnecessary or unmotivated and, as a result, it would soon be abandoned or dropped out. Secondly, their interchangeability in all the contexts can neither be demonstrated nor proved, for, on the one hand, the number of contexts is infinite, and, on the other hand, the exceptions from absolute interchangeability are inevitable.

Therefore, the lexicons of natural languages do not have absolute synonymy as their feature. It is generally accepted that absolute synonymy is impossible or unreal. It is regarded only as a referential point on the alleged scale of synonymity or the initial criterion for the defining of synonymy (Ibid: 157).

As there are no two lexemes with completely the same meaning and no real synonyms, cognitive synonymy is what most semanticists would regard as synonymy. Lyons (1996: 63) claims that many theories of semantics would confine the notion of synonymy to what he calls descriptive or cognitive synonymy, which is the characteristic of descriptive meaning. Near-synonyms are lexemes whose meaning is relatively close or more or less similar (mist/fog, stream/brook, dive/plunge). However, the given definition of near-synonymy is vague, because there isn't a precise correlation between synonymy and semantic similarity. Near-synonymy is associated with overlapping of meaning and senses. The senses of near-synonyms overlap to a great degree, but not completely (Murphy, 2003: 155). Moreover, unlike cognitive synonyms, near-synonyms can contrast in certain contexts:

He was killed, but I can assure you he was NOT murdered, madam. (Cruse, 2000: 159)

1.2.2 Propositional and Cognitive Synonymy

It deals with clauses, sentences and propositions. It can be explained by means of paraphrase when the propositional contents of sentences are identical:

Mary fed the cat.

The cat was fed by Mary.

It was the cat that Mary fed. (Cann et al., 2009: 9)

Such similar meanings are different only in stylistic syntactic structures. The core content is the same.

Synonymy is a paradigmatic relation that enables lexically simple units to have the same meaning as lexically complex units, and vice versa, e.g. ophthalmologist and eye specialist.

Hurford and Heasley (1983:104) assert that synonymy is possible between words belonging to different parts of speech (as between the verb sleeping and adjective asleep).

To put it in simple terms there exists a synonymy relation between two words if they share the same meaning. We will give an example of what the lexico-semantic resource considers to be synonyms. The (near-) synonymy is represented by means of a so-called synset. Synsets are groupings of synonyms. For example nature, universe, creation, world, cosmos, and macrocosm form one synset. One word can belong to more than one synset, if it

has more than one sense. There is another sense of the word nature, which is part of the synset that comprises nature, wild, natural state, and state of nature.

In literature, there is a debate about the definition of synonymy. A summary of some views in this regard will be introduced in addition to an explanation of which notion accords with the objectives of this.

Cruse (1986) proposes a scale of synonymy. He argues that since the point of semantic identity, i.e. absolute synonymy is well-defined and the other end-point, the notion of zero synonymy, is far more diffuse, a scale of semantic difference is more satisfactory. The definition of absolute synonyms Cruse (Ibid: 30) provides is as follows: "Two lexical units would be absolute synonyms if and only if all their contextual relations (...) were identical." He then continues with examining an illustrative sample of possible candidates for absolute synonymy. None of the pairs satisfies the criteria. He (Ibid) concludes by stating that "if they exist at all, they are extremely uncommon." Only in technical domains one can find absolute synonyms, for example bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and mad cow diseases are two names for the same thing. Next on the scale are the so-called cognitive synonyms.

Thus, cognitive synonyms must be identical in respect of propositional traits, i.e. they must yield the same truth-value, but they may differ in respect of expressive traits. Examples are father-daddy, cat-pussy, and infant-baby. Cognitive synonyms arise where certain linguistic items are restricted to certain sentences or discourses. Their cognitive counterparts (synonyms) take their place in other sentences and discourses.

Cruse (Ibid: 33) introduces these precincts under two headings: (i) pre-supposed meaning and (ii) evoked meaning. Presupposed meaning refers to the semantic traits of a lexical item that place restrictions on its normal syntagmatic companions. Drink takes for granted an object that has the property of being liquid. Grilling is usually used for raw food such as meat or green peppers, and toasting for bread. In the above example the collocational restriction is systematic. In other cases the restrictions can only be described by listing all collocants. These restrictions are referred to with the term idiosyncratic collocational restrictions. An example is the pair umpire-referee. Evoked meaning is a consequence of different dialects and different registers in a language. Examples of geographical variety are autumn and fall, lift and elevator. Difference in register gives rise to cognitive synonyms such as matrimony and marriage. Both absolute synonyms and plesionyms (near-synonyms) are distinguished from cognitive synonyms by the fact that they yield sentences with different truth-conditions. Two sentences which differ only in respect of plesionyms are not mutually entailing but there

may well be unilateral entailment. Cruse (Ibid) hence categorises hyponyms/hypernyms under the plesionym.

Zgusta (1971) considers absolute synonymy as characteristic of all three basic components of meaning: designatum, connotation, and range of application. The term designatum refers to a referent of a single word in the extralinguistic world. Synonyms should have agreement in designatum. Connotation is a semantic term referring to the feeling or attitudinal value that a lexical element such as pass away distinguishes from dies. The term range of application refers to the fact that certain words are used in certain contexts. If there is a difference in one or more of the components, words are near-synonyms only.

1.3. Palmer's (1981) Conception of Synonymy

According to Palmer (1981: 89-91), there are no real synonyms, i.e. no two words with the same meaning. Thus, there are five basic ways in which synonyms can be considered as different:

- a. Some of the synonyms belong to different dialects of language. Fall, for instance, is used in the U.S.A for the British equivalence autumn.
- b. The different words used for the same meaning are due to the change in style. Degrees of formality and colloquiality will affect the use of synonyms. For instance, gentleman is more formal than man.
- c. Some words can be said to be distinct in their emotive or evaluative meanings, and their cognitive meaning remains the same. The function of such words is to influence attitudes. For example, the words politician=statesman and the like.
- d. Some words, which are similar in meaning, may differ in their collocational contexts. Thus, 'rancid' collocates with butter and bacon, and added with eggs or brains.
- e. Some words are regarded as similar by lexicographer and dictionary maker. This is a loose sense of synonymy.

Crystal (2003: 450) summarizes the definition of synonymy as “ a term used in semantics to refer to a major type of sense relation between lexical items[...]if items are close enough in their meaning to allow a choice to be made between them in *some contexts*”.

1.4. Approaches for Analyzing Synonymy

1.4.1 Traditional Truth-conditional Approach

This approach depends on relating truth-conditional equivalence to mutual entailment. It results in the notion of cognitive synonymy. It is mainly a propositional relationship. Cognitive synonymy can be explained by virtue of relations that hold between sentences or propositions that contain pairs of cognitive synonyms. Cognitive synonyms require truth-conditional equivalence of the sentences which contain them.

Propositions are abstract entities which represent the semantic structure of sentences, and they are characterized by truth values (while sentences are characterized by truth conditions), i.e. they express something true or false. Cognitive synonymy can be described through implication (Lyons, 1996: 63) and entailment (Cruse, 2000: 158). Implication is a logical operation. It is the relation between two assertions that can be true or false. X is the cognitive synonym of Y if, and only if, the proposition containing one of the synonyms X implies the proposition with identical syntactic structure in which X is replaced with Y. As a result, such propositions only differ in the presence of the given synonyms and they are mutually implied, for synonymy itself is a symmetrical relation (if X is synonymous with Y, then Y is synonymous with X, and vice versa). In other words, cognitive synonyms are propositionally equivalent. Given that statesman and politician are cognitive synonyms, a substitution test, which is a diagnostic test for judging synonymy and contextual restrictiveness of lexemes, can be applied. Namely, interchangeability of synonymous pairs is tested by means of substitution of one synonym with another in the same context. Synonyms are interchangeable only in certain environments, so this test can be utilized to illustrate the difficulties in finding the pairs of absolute synonyms. The proposition *The statesman spoke at the conference* implies the proposition *The politician spoke at the conference*. Since the first proposition is true, the second one must necessarily be true, and vice versa.

Entailment is the relation between two sentences or propositions where "the propositional content of one proposition includes that of the other. Mutual entailment is the relation in which the propositional contents of sentences are identical, so the truth of one requires the truth of the other, and vice versa" (Cann et al., 2009: 8). A proposition containing one synonym is mutually entailed by the same proposition containing the other. The following propositions are "mutually entailing: John bought a violin entails and is entailed by John bought a fiddle; I heard him tuning his fiddle entails and is entailed by I heard him tuning his violin; She is going to play a violin concerto entails and

is entailed by She is going to play a fiddle concerto. Notice that fiddle is less normal in the last example, while leaving truth conditions intact, which shows that fiddle and violin are not absolute synonyms." (Cruse, 2000: 158).

In that respect, considering different argumentations, cognitive synonyms might be differentiated on the basis of different registers, styles or dialects they belong to, or by virtue of different connotations, collocations, etc. What they have in common is the same sense.

This approach will not be adopted in this study because of the following reasons:

- a. It deals only with the cognitive aspects of the words rather than the stylistic or social aspects.
- b. It is basically related to propositions neglecting single lexemes.
- c. It relies on the semantic process of 'entailment' rather than other linguistic processes.

1.4.2 Componential Analysis and Semantic Features Approach

Lexical meaning is arguably at least as relational as it is referential. A very different theoretical approach to the analysis of lexemes, especially synonyms, developed in linguistics rather than philosophy, exploits the systematic relationships among words by breaking their meaning into distinctive features, and then words can be categorized according to their shared and opposing features. This is the tenet of what is called Componential Analysis (See Curzan & Adams, 2009: 224). The problems of Componential Analysis, which include those of semantic features, are discussed in Lyons (1977: 317-335) and re-examined in Leech (1981: 117-122). The latter argues that Componential Analysis has the goal of explaining word sense, not encyclopedic knowledge, and that prototypic categories should be contained in a psychologically realistic theory of reference. In order to deal with the fuzziness of meaning, he proposes an extension of the analysis of word-meaning which includes Componential Analysis and has three levels:

1. 'Word-sense', as the entire 'conceptual unit'.
2. 'Components or features' by Componential Analysis.
3. On the third level both word senses and features, seen as prototypic categories, are 'broken down into fuzzy sets of attributes' (Ibid:121, cf. 117).

An obvious advantage of semantic feature decomposition approach is that it allows us to group entities into natural classes (much as we do in phonology). Hence, *man* and *boy* could be grouped together as [+human, +male] while *man* and *woman* could be put in a class

defined by features [+human, +adult] (O'Grady *et. al.*, 2005: 207). Thus, this is very useful for the analysis of the deep features shared by synonymous words and expressions.

According to the componential model, Kim (2008: 2) asserts that words display what is called distinctive features (or distinctive semes), which are, in a way, the building blocks that words consist of and can be broken down into. The distinctive features are binary in the sense that they can be either X or not X (indicated by +/-). This applies to all aspects of a word, including its semantic content. Thus, the semantic difference between 'man' and 'boy' is a matter of a couple of semantic components:

'man'	'boy'	
+	+	male
+	+	human
+	-	adult
-	+	child

This is a very useful method of distinguishing members of a lexical set (words that are semantically related such that they overlap): clean pure unadulterated (+ unmixed).

To sum up, componential analysis is “a semantic theory which has developed from a technique for the analysis of kinship vocabulary [...] It claims that all lexical items can be analyzed using a finite set of components (or ‘semantic features’), which may, it is felt, be universal” (Crystal, 2003:91). This approach will be adopted for the data analysis of this work because it focuses on the deep features of the words that can be shared by other words in the linguistic system. Moreover, it can be applied to both single lexical items and propositions. The selected model for analysis can be represented in Fig. 1 below.

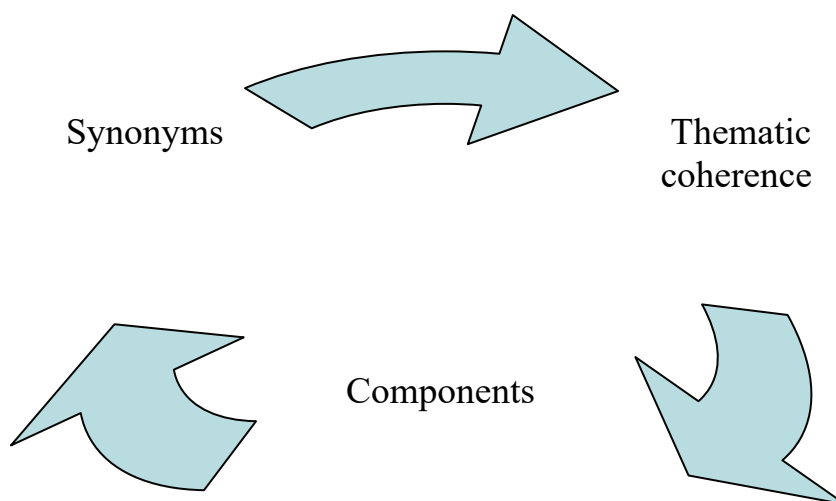


Fig. (1): A Model for Analysis

1.5. Data Collection, Description and Analysis

1.5.1 Data Collection and Description

The data are collected from various poems written by W. Wordsworth. They are randomly selected to be more representative for the results of the study. The first poem is *The Solitary Reaper*. Wordsworth's preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* argues that poetry "contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents." It oughtn't to be judged by the presence of artificial, poetic diction. Rather, "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" can be its medium. "The Solitary Reaper" exemplifies these beliefs. Written seven years after *Lyrical Ballads*, it describes a nameless listener's delight in a young woman's melancholy song in an unknown language as, working by herself in a Scottish valley, she swings a sickle, reaping grain. Four eight-line stanzas, each closing with two couplets and all written in octosyllabic lines, have a musical lilt. Short lines deliver the rhymes at a quick pace. Sentences normally need two or more such short lines to complete, so that few lines are strongly end-stopped; most freely enjamb (see McSweeney, 1996: 22).

The other poems are selected from the lyrical *Lucy*. The Lucy poems provoked a lot of speculations about William Wordsworth's life none of which were made conclusive. The Lucy Poems are elegiac about a person unknown but many critics believe that Lucy was Wordsworth's sister Dorothy and the poems express his fear of losing her (Cutajar, 2010: 15).

1.5.2 Data Analysis

The following examples are presented to illustrate the results of the analysis conducted in the data via using the "Componential Approach". Some reference to the contextual features and views, however, will be introduced to provide a clear idea about the analysis.

(1)

The Solitary Reaper

Behold her, single in the field,

Yon solitary Highland Lass!

Reaping and singing by herself;

Stop here, or gently pass!

Alone she cuts and binds the grain,

*And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.*

*No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.*

*Will no one tell me what she sings?--
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?*

*Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,*

And o'er the sickle bending;--
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

In this poem, one can find that the poet attempts to make use of synonymy to show or represent one of his basic themes, i. e., the theme of isolation and loneliness. This theme is one of the recurrent notions in the romantic poetry, in general and W. Wordsworth, in particular (see Preston, 1960)

The lexical definitions of the words that are used to indicate this theme will be given according to Hornby (2007) (see Table (1)).

- a. Solitary: adj. done alone/ enjoying being alone/ alone (person, place, animal...)/ single.
- b. By herself: alone/ without anyone else.
- c. Farthest: at the greatest distance in space, direction or time.
- d. Far-off: distant/ far away/remote.

According to the componential analysis approach, these words can have the mutual features [+ isolation] and [+ loneliness]. These synonyms help building up the thematic coherence of the poem because they are related to one of the main themes of the poem. This proves what Abrams (1953: 23) asserts that “although, Wordsworth sang of joy and love, he did not avert his eyes from anguish or evil, but often represents a “dark world”. He (Ibid) mentions that “Wordsworth is pre-eminently the poet of solitude... no poet is more emphatically the poet of community”. Wordsworth, therefore, has an acute sense of his own being that sharpens his awareness of other beings, and his intention is to require us his audience to acknowledge the being of his narrative personae and so to bring them within the range of conscience and of natural sympathy.

Rural loneliness has been described as the proper environment or condition for the right contemplation of nature. The Romantic poets prefer the tranquility and serenity of the rural environment to the contamination and complexity of the city life by implied contrast. The poet, his life in the rural environment makes the poet think deeply and have a right view of life.

Table (1): Componential Analysis of Isolation Items.

Lexical item	Number of features	Recurrent features
Solitary	4	[+loneliness]
By herself	2	[+isolation]
Farthest	2	
Far-off	3	

(2)

From “Lucy”

Strange fits of passion have I known:

And I will dare to tell,

But in the lover's ear alone,

What once to me befell.

When she I loved look'd every day

Fresh as a rose in June,

I to her cottage bent my way,

Beneath an evening moon.

Upon the moon I fix'd my eye,

All over the wide lea;

With quickening pace my horse drew nigh

Those paths so dear to me.

And now we reach'd the orchard-plot;

And, as we climb'd the hill,

The sinking moon to Lucy's cot

Came near and nearer still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,

Kind Nature's gentlest boon!

And all the while my eyes I kept

On the descending moon.