

# Cognitive Language Representation of Sleary's Mind Style in *Hard Times*\*

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**Abstract**—*Hard Times* was written by Dickens in 1854, who is one of the most representative realistic writers. In this novel, Sleary is the leader of the circus and one of the minor characters in this novel. Viewed from the language representation, Dickens gives this minor character distinct language style. Based on his peculiar phonetics, syntax and grammar, the paper tries to analyze Sleary's mind style from the cognitive perception by using foregrounding theory, one of the cognitive approaches.

**Index Terms**—mind style, cognitive approach, foregrounding, deviation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sleary, owner of a horse-riding in Dickens' *Hard Times*, is a minor character who could not attract much attention. He is a kind, humorous, quick-witted and grateful person. Even though Sleary only appears three times with relatively few words in this work of 37 chapters or three parts, Dickens gives him a distinct language style. In literary works, language style of a character has been closely related to his/her mind style and role. From the perspective of plot, Sleary is not a main character. However, he is an indispensable key plot point for the story development no matter when he persuaded Gradgrind to take in Sissy, daughter of a member of the horse-riding named Jupe at the beginning of the story or when he tried his best to help Tom escape who stole money from banks near the end of the story. From the perspective of the subject of this work, it makes labor contradiction to be its main contents and anti-capitalism and anti-benthamism its main thread. Different from Gradgrind who sticks to facts and the inhumane benthamism, Sleary encourages individuality and fancy so that his horse-riding is full of tenderness and humanity. Different from other characters as labor leader, the labor representative and mother of Mr. Bounderby, Sleary does not revolt and criticize the cold-blooded benthamism face to face. He is rather compromising and circuitous. Throughout the whole story, the tenderness and humanity from Sleary and his horse-riding is just like the green leaves that set off flowers, further reflecting the ugly face of the marble bourgeoisies of benthamism and Dickens' good wishes to reform benthamism in a peaceful manner.

For novels, all writers will strengthen subject and aesthetic effect by character language. In *Hard Times*, in order to make sure Sleary's role reflect the subject, Dickens will definitely reach this purpose by Sleary's distinct language style. Making a general survey of literary circles' study on Dickens's works, we will found that people's attention is mainly on critical realism, the inflated writing techniques and individuality analysis of the main characters in the work such as Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa and so on. Few people will show interest in such minor characters as Sleary. Needless to say, someone will analyze them by pragmatistic approach from the language level. *Hard Times* follows the tragic life of Louisa and Tom so as to criticize benthamism of new bourgeoisies such as Gradgrind and Bounderby. However, it does not ignore to well design and arrange such minor characters as Sleary, which could be noticed by Sleary's language individuation. This kind of distinct language style reflects that the mind style of the common people in the bottom represented by Sleary is totally different from that of Gradgrind's kind of people. Distinct mind style of minor characters that entirely different from that of main characters discloses a kind of emotional tendency of Dickens – his profound sympathy to those oppressed toiling masses in 1850s.

## II. MIND STYLE AND COGNITIVE STYLISTICS

### A. Mind Style

Mind style was introduced by Roger Fowler "to refer to the way in which linguistic patterns in part of a text can project a particular world-view, a characteristic way of perceiving and making sense of the textual world" (Semino, 2002, p.95). Fowler, a famous Britain stylistician, first puts forward the concept of "mind style" in 1977 in his *Linguistics and the Novel. Cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented the world to one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world-view, what I shall call a "mind style"* (Fowler, 1977, p.73). We may coin the term "mind style" to refer to any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self (Fowler, 1977, p.103). Fowler (1986) explicitly presents the notion of mind style as equivalent to those of world view and of "point of view on the ideological plane": discussing this phenomenon in literary fictions, I have called it mind style: the world-view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the ideational structure of the text. From

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now on, I shall prefer this term to the cumbersome point of view on the ideological plane ... the notions are equivalent. (Fowler, 1986, p.150). Semino (2002) uses world view as the most general term, referring to the overall view of reality or of the text actual world. He uses the terms ideological point of view and mind style to capture different aspects of the world views projected by texts. The term of ideological point of view is most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are social, cultural, religious or political in origin; the notion of mind style, on the other hand, is most apt to capture those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics (Semino, 2002, p.97). These aspects include an individual's characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations, and any beliefs and values that may arise from them. And this is consistent with Fowler's reference to any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self. Leech & Short define mind style as "the way in which the fictional world is apprehended, or conceptualized, and relate it to what they call conceptual variation" (Leech & Short, 1981, p.191) and they suggest a cline from natural and uncontrived mind styles to those which clearly impose an unorthodox conception of the fictional world (Semino, 2002, p.98). Bockting (1994) defines mind style as being concerned with the construction and expression in language of the conceptualization of reality in a particular mind (Bockting, 1994, p.159).

### B. *Relevance of Cognitive Stylistics*

Early discussions of mind style tended to be exclusively linguistics in nature, or more precisely, they used linguistic theories and linguistic analysis as a basis for inferences structure and cognition (e.g. Halliday, 1971; Fowler, 1977). Later, a cognitive stylistic approach is relevant to analysis of mind style. Semino and Swindlehurst (1996), Black (1993) and Semino (2002) apply cognitive metaphor theory, schema theory and blending theory to the analysis of the mind styles. Foregrounding theory is another cognitive approach which can be used to analyze the process of meaning construction and mind style of characters in novels. The term "foregrounding" comes originally from the visual arts and refers to those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way. The purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarize the familiar, and by defamiliarizing a work of art or text, we make it stand out from the norm – it becomes foregrounded. Foregrounding theory was seen as a means of explaining the difference between the literal language and everyday language, which can be achieved in one of two ways, either via parallelism or by deviation from the norm of phonology, words, grammar and syntax of language. The term "deviation" in language was originally used by the Prague School linguist Jan Mukarovsky (1932) to describe the ways in which literary language can be said to differ from more everyday, non-literary language. For literary language, it is often distinguished from other, more ordinary, forms of language use. This difference, or deviation from what are taken to be the structural norms of non-literary language can only be described and accounted for once we are able to identify the grammatical structures of the languages.

If it is common for all the writers to describe the peculiar appearance of fictional characters, Dickens has a particular liking for Sleary in the language depiction. It is not only different from the main characters but also those minor characters who are in the same classes and social position with him through various aspects such as phonetics, grammar and syntax. In this article, I apply some of the basic concepts of the foregrounding theory to analyze the mind style of Sleary in *Hard Times*, one of the novels by Dickens, one of the most representative realistic writers.

## III. THE MIND STYLE OF SLEARY IN DICKENS' *HARD TIMES*

### A. *Sleary's Mind Style Reflected by Phonetic Feature*

Phonetic feature, grammatical habit and partial syntactic structure of a character in novel are critical to revealing his/her mind style. We could interpret his/her method of and attitude to understanding and conceptualizing the world, which is of great advantage to understand this character's position and effect in the novel. Dickens is one of the most representative realistic writers. By combining organically the odd side and original side of life, he is used to revealing character's mind style by humorous and exaggerated language in a spicy way, which is also his important creative feature. In *Hard Times*, we will find many usages of this technique when describing the macroscopic features of a character. For example, the first appearance of Sleary is described interestingly: a stout man as already mentioned, with one fixed eye, and one loose eye, a voice (if it can be called so) like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows, a flabby surface, and a muddled head which was never sober and never drunk (Dickens, 2006, p.49). It is really vivid characterization.

Sleary appeared for the first time in the image of a language freak. The most striking and attractive one is his pronunciation variation. His speech is submerged under brandy-and-water, his voice like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows so that some consonants with the letter of "s" could not be voiced. Besides, all the "s", "ts", "ch", "sh", and "z" are all pronounced to the sound spelled "th". Please look at the first words after his appearance:

"Thquire!" "Your thervant! Thith ith a bad piethe of birthnith, thith ith. You've heard of my Clown and hith dog being thuppothed to have morrithed?" (Dickens, 2006, p.49)

The whole sentence in standard English should be as following:

Squire! Your servant! This is a bad piece of business, this is. You've heard of my Clown and his dog being supposed to have morrised?

Here is another example:

It doth me good to thee you. You wath alwayth a favourite with tuth, and you've done uth credit thinth the old timeth

I'm thure. (It does me good to see you. You were always a favourite with us, and you've done us credit things the old times I'm sure.) (Dickens, 2006, p.385)

Calculated by the author of this paper, Sleary spoke 174 sentences (2634 words) in total in his three times of appearances in this story. As much as 212 words with the pronunciation of "s", "ts", "z", "ch" and "sh" are pronounced to the lisp "th", taking a percentage of 23%. It will be 593 words if the repeated ones are included. Among them, 9 words are repeated for more than 10 times as follows:

Sleary's Language	Standard Language	Number of Usage
thquire	squire	53
hith	his	30
wath	was	24
ith	its/is	22
thee	see	21
ath	as	19
thith	this	15
horthe	horse	14
Thethilia	Sethilia	11

It is easy for readers to understand and accept Sleary's physiologic pronunciation variation through the text explanation in the novel. He was troubled with asthma, and whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter "s". As a result, years of stormy, harsh and hard life in the horse-riding are the direct reason of his physiologic pronunciation imperfection, which could be explained by Sleary's own words that "if you'd been chilled and heated, heated and chilled, chilled and heated in the ring when you wath young, ath often ath I have been, your voithe wouldn't have lathted out, Thquire, no more than mine" (Dickens, 2006, p.50). However, even though many people lived the same life with Sleary, why did Dickens only keep Sleary's language so distinct from the first beginning? Obviously, the writer wants to demonstrate the distinction of Sleary style to a deeper level, especially its huge difference both from main characters like Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa and from the minor characters like Slackbridge, Stephen Blackpool, Harthouse and Sissy. Any type of writing will care whether it is smooth, fluent or rhythmic. Many implications and overtones need to be expressed by virtue of phonetics. Sleary's coarse pronunciation not only agrees to his lower identity but also indicates that he is not alike to Gradgrind's kind of people even though he has to complicatedly deal with them. This is a perfect interpretation to one characteristic of Dickens' works that they include many characters, clues and plots and are capable of combining them together with unity.

Shklovsky (1965) thinks that art aims to make people perceive things and artistry aims to increase the difficulty of the perception process in more complicated forms so as to prolong and strengthen the process which is the purpose of aesthetic on the contrary. The idiolect is insistently defamiliarizing: it makes form difficult ... increases the difficulty and length of perception (Shklovsky, 1965, p.12). Dickens makes Sleary's language full of strange phonetic variation, the completeness and the whimsicality of the phonological transformation. Readers have to understand those weird, inherent and inconsistent words. He changes some common words into temporarily unrecognizable spellings which is quite different from everyday English words. The prevalence of these so much in the novel can be seen as reinforcing the difficult way in which life is making. This makes it difficult to determine what Sleary is saying. These difficulties do not guarantee that what Sleary says is of any great interest; but indicates that Sleary is meant to be listened to, that he is designed as a significant voice against Gradgrindism in this book. The reason why Dickens put these obscure words in front of readers is that, at least, Sleary is so constituted as to attract people's attention.

#### B. *Sleary's Mind Style Reflected by Grammatical Feature*

Grammar can be used to refer to the knowledge that every speaker has of the language that they speak. In practice, most people use language in various ways depending on who is being addressed, where they are, and what kind of effect they want to produce. In literary language particularly, the structures of grammar can be stretched or disrupted in various ways to produce different effects, in the following examples, the prescriptive rules are being broken quite deliberately. In *Hard Times*, apart from the phonetic feature, Dickens also takes advantage of some grammatical technique to describe Sleary. As the owner of a horse-riding, Sleary is capable to keep it enduring and make living together with other grassroots, which tells us that he is not only righteous but also has a quick wit. Both entrusting Sissy to Gradgrind and rescuing Tom could heighten this characteristic of Sleary. It is difficult for Sleary to express himself by language. Besides, there are many grammar errors for many times since he only received lower education. These errors could be divided as follows:

The first one is the inconformity of subject and predicate verb. For example:

1. We wath getting up our children in the Wood one morning, when there cometh into our Ring, by the thtgate door, a dog. (Dickens, 2006, p.401)

2. It theemth to prethent two thingth to a perthon, don't it, Thquire? (Dickens, 2006, p.402)

3. You don't need to be told that dogth ith wonderful animalth. (Dickens, 2006, p.400)

Sleary turns a blind eye to the number of personal pronoun when it is used as a subject. In addition, the predicate verb after the subject is chosen at random. All of this could indicate that he received little formal education at school on the one hand and he is straightforward and has no head for detail on the other hand. The second kind of error is the

tense confusion of verbs. For example:

4. ....as if he wath a theeking for a child he know'd; and then he come to me and throwd hithelf up behind, and thtood on hith two forelegth ..... (Dickens, 2006, p.401)

5. If you haven't took your feed yet, have a glath of bitterth. (Dickens, 2006, p.50)

6. They can't be always a learning, nor yet they can't be always a working. (Dickens, 2006, p.49)

7. .... the dog hung on to his neck-hankercher with all four legs in the air..... (Dickens, 2006, p.399)

Sleary not only confuses the usage of a verb's past tense and past participle, but also used to add an 'a' before present participle (refer to example 4 and 6). As a result, it is easy for us to find that what Sleary valued is not the grammatical details and gorgeousness of language but the expression of meaning and emotion like other grassroots with a lower education level.

Another grammatical error is the mismatch of article and other words. For example:

8. ...ith a ill-convenienth to have the dog out of the billth. (Dickens, 2006, p.55)

9. He was throw'd a heavy back-fall off a elephant... (Dickens, 2006, p.386)

In English-speaking countries, it is common to use articles unconventionally for small tradesmen and porters and other grassroots, which is an important method for writers to reflect the identity of such an ordinary people as Sleary or those at the bottom in English works.

### C. *Sleary's Mind Style Reflected by Syntactical Feature*

From the perspective of syntax level, syntactic structure is one of the important methods of revealing subjects, describing characters or achieving an artistic effect. In order to illustrate that Sleary is simple, flexible, decisive, straightforward, inarticulate and ill-educated, Dickens makes Sleary's language succinct in syntactic structures, which could be reflected by more simple, short and incomplete sentences but few complex, long and complete sentences. According to calculation, Sleary spoke 174 sentences in his three times of appearances in total. Among them, there are 102 simple sentences, taking a percentage of 58.6% and the rest complex sentences are mainly compound ones connected by "and", "but", "not...nor..." and so on. Please look at the following examples:

10. ... one, that there ith a love in the world, not all thelf-interethth after all, but thomething very different; t'other, that it hath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leathth ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith! (Dickens, 2006, p.402)

11. If you wath to thee our children in the wind, with their father and mother both a dyin' on a horthie – their uncle a retheiving of 'em ath hith wardth, upon a horthie – themthelvtth both a goin' a blackberryin' on a horthie – and the Robinth a coming in to coer 'em with leavth, upon a horthie – you'd thay it wath the completethth thing ath ever you thet your eyeth on. (Dickens, 2006, p.385)

12. Thquire, you know perfectly well, and your daughter knowth perfectly well (better than you, becauthe I thed it to her), that I didn't know what your thon had done, and that I didn't want to know – I thed it wath better not, though I only thought, then, it wath thome thkylarking. (Dickens, 2006, p.397)

Since Sleary's sentences are mainly simple and short, and short sentences less than ten words could be found everywhere. For examples:

13. Thath agreed, Thquire. (Dickens, 2006, p.52)

14. Thick to that! (Dickens, 2006, p.52)

15. Don't thay nothing, Thquire. (Dickens, 2006, p.50)

16. Make the bethth of uth; not the wurthth. (Dickens, 2006, p.56)

The average sentence length is 15 words, far shorter than that of other characters and the average length of 17.8 words of modern English. Compared with other main character's incessant harangue, Sleary's language is brief and incisive.

Apart from using the above techniques of phonetics, grammar and syntax to reflect character's mind style, in order to further describe Sleary, Dickens takes advantage of dialects and slangs to indicate his simplicity, amiability and humor. For example:

17. I never wath much of a Cackler, Thquire, and I have thed my thay. (Dickens, 2006, p.53)

18. Thay farewell to your family, and tharp'th the word. (Dickens, 2006, p.391)

To sum up, throughout the whole novel, Sleary is the only character who was described by Dickens in phonetic, grammatical and syntactical level to reflect his mind style in a distinct manner. In stylistic study, the conventional usage of vocabulary, sentence and expressive methods in common core constitutes norm and those special usage beyond common core becomes deviation. In literary works, writers often take advantage of language deviation/foregrounding to high lighten some characters and subject. Theoretically speaking, anyone who is cultivated, well-educated and of high social status will not make so many errors in language expression. The reason why Dickens makes Sleary's language full of foregrounding and deviation beyond common core is to project Sleary's distinctiveness from all the other characters in the flashy era of capitalism. He tries to make Sleary a typical character by the method of foregrounding so that the hypocritical and philistine faces of emerging bourgeoisie could be reflected silently by Sleary who is like a plain, clear, kind and intelligent mirror.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Sleary is kind, simple, humorous and quick-witted. In the plot and thematic structure of *Hard Times*, he functions as not only a comic drunk. Under the idiolect there are symbols which suggest a social dialect. Sleary's speech implies of working-class morphology, lexis, slang and oaths which suggest deviance from those of the middle-class, but obscurely. These characteristics make us know that Sleary is just the working-class in this novel, relate him to the interests of the workers and with the circus fraternity, the spokespeople for fancy. What he said and what he did reflect the commendable humanitarianism and spirit of gratitude in the mid-nineteenth century represented by Dickens. Apart from his actions, Dickens also describes vividly Sleary's mind style by phonetic, grammatical and syntactical feature, which left an unforgettable impression to readers. Even though it is unrealistic to carry on a thorough reform depending upon such grassroots as Sleary under the historical conditions at that time, we could see the first light of humanitarianism at that confused and difficult era of benthamism.

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