

Psychogrammatical Utilization of the Definite Article ‘the’ in the Story ‘Lamb to the Slaughter’

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Abstract—Function words, the same as, content words will have some connotative meanings based on the contexts in which they appear. This study aimed at addressing some of the connotative meanings pertinent to shades of meanings of the definite article ‘the’ in the short story ‘Lamb to the slaughter’. The results of the reflection on the use of the definite article ‘the’ illustrated that in some contexts the same as one motioned in the story where ‘the’ has been used without any prementioned entity to which it can refer, it can carry some shades of meaning beyond the context itself. Accordingly, the definite article would associate the following meanings: 1- It is separate from you. 2- It is far from you. 3- It is dependent. 4- It is a complete entity 5- it conveys the sense of focalization by the camera man.

Index Terms—shades of meaning, contextualization, genitive pronoun, definite article

I. INTRODUCTION

Words of language could gain functions and shades of meaning(s) beyond the linguistic one(s) studied in dictionaries. Viewed within the discourse, articles and content words get sense(s) which need to be studied in an in-context situation; a very instructive practice to get a clear vision of these senses, we imagine, would be the study of literature and especially fiction and poetry. There we see and feel the language as contextualized. And that is again where we see the fact that lexicography is not sufficient alone for a holistic/broader view of language. People use their language naturally; writers apply the same structures in their fiction and poetry. The same lexicography situation is/could be true for grammar books. Probably we cannot expect these senses/meanings to be studied in there as these books’ primary focus is on the linguistic or sociolinguistic meanings and functions of language. Yet for people dealing with discourse, the senses beyond the linguistic ones are vital to think about. That’s the right place to deal with these, although we are aware that these studies are infinite.

In this paper it has been tried to show an organic, tight connection between the choice of lexis and the mind in a simple language. This study is aimed at proving the fact that as our minds enter the conscious and unconscious layers, the choice of lexis will shift to be in harmony with those layers. Thus a new perspective is offered as we attempted to throw a new light on the way writers use the language to give hidden parts of the mind a projection. We are aware that the definite article “The” has been treated from various angles by others, yet in this paper, it has been looked at within the context of the short story as we believe it can be “felt” better.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The usage of function words such as pronouns, articles, and prepositions has begun in the past few years. Since the function words are so difficult to control, their use in natural language samples has provided a non-reactive way to explore social and personality processes (Chung & Pennebaker 2007). Based on the related contexts and communication goals, different function words may be used. The link between the psychological states of the mind and the use of the function words is correlational. Moreover, this is a novel issue which has not much been the focus of the study before. Yet, some pieces of research have been conducted by gathering the samples of the authors or speakers under study where they were not aware of the dependent variable under investigation (Fazio & Olson, 2003).

There are some pieces of empirical evidence pertinent to the usage of function words in different contexts. The first piece of evidence is that related to Biological Activity. Surprisingly, the links between the biological activity and the function words has been examined by few researchers. Scherwitz, Berton, and Leventhal (1978), for example, found that coronary-prone Type A interviewees who used first person singular pronouns more frequently exhibited higher blood pressure than did those who referred to themselves less frequently. Type B interviewees, who are not prone to coronary heart disease (CHD), did not exhibit a relationship between self-references and any of the measures taken. In a later prospective study, neither density nor frequency of self-references could predict CHD, but the relationship for frequency of self-references and Type A personality remained significant (Graham, Scherwitz, & Brand, 1989).

The second piece of evidence is that of Depression. Reviewing of multiple studies has shown that the use of first person singular is associated with negative affective state (see also Weintraub, 1989). When some pupils were asked to write about their coming to college, currently depressed students used more first person singular pronouns than either formerly depressed or never depressed ones. In addition, formerly depressed students use more first person singular pronouns than never depressed students (Rude, Gortner, & Pennebaker, 2004). In natural speech captured over several days of tape recordings, use of "I" is more frequent among those with high depression scores than those with low depression scores (Mehl, 2004).

Deception is another piece of empirical evidence in the use of the function words. The utilization of pronouns and other function words will reveal hints about the truthfulness of statements. Negations, conjunctions, and certain prepositions are used to make important distinctions about categories. A particularly interesting class of words is exclusive words. These include words like "but", "except", "without", "exclude". Factor analytically, these words typically load with negations (no, not, never), and are associated with greater cognitive complexity (Pennebaker & King, 1999). Across multiple experiments where people have been induced to describe or explain something honestly or deceptively, the combined use of first person singular pronouns and exclusive words predicts honesty (Newman, Pennebaker, Berry, & Richards, 2003).

As the next piece of evidence of the use of function words, one can name State. Of all the function words, the relative use of first person singular pronouns is a particularly robust marker of the status of two interlocutors in an interaction. Within dyads, we have found that the person whose use of "I" words is lower tends to be the higher status participant. In the analysis of the incoming and outgoing emails of 11 undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, the rated status of the interactant was correlated -0.40 with the relative use of "I" words (Pennebaker & Davis, 2006).

Demographics: Sex and Age would be the next piece of evidence. There are sex differences in the use of virtually all function words: prepositions, articles, pronouns, and auxiliary verbs. In a study of over 10,000 text files, Newman et al. (2003) found that females tend to use first person singular pronouns at a consistently higher rate than do males.

III. SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Firstly, it would be advisable to provide the reader with a summary of the story so that he will have a clear vision of the whole discussion. The story is that of a kind and caring woman "Mary Maloney", awaiting her husband "Patrick Maloney", a police officer to come back home. She is pregnant and absolutely beautiful! The story starts with a calm and tranquil scene where everything is set for him to arrive. As Patrick is arriving, she gets happy to meet him at the door, but from the onset of his arrival an imperceptible yet vital contrast is drawn between them. Patrick talks less, while Mary does more; he is cold and distant while she is full of life, and he is unfriendly while she is friendly in her tone and talk. Gradually we come to the point where Patrick asks her to sit down and listen to him for a short while as he is going to tell her some shocking news. And yet this shocking piece of news is not revealed to the reader to give him a chance to develop his own imagination and have more involvement in the process of analysis. As Mary is listening to him, she becomes more and more shocked as it is fully revealed to him to the point where she is in a total state of shock. As Patrick finishes, she manages to get up, with however difficulty, to make dinner. She comes back from the cellar with a frozen leg of lamb, and in her shocked state of mind hits Patrick hard on the head killing him there on the spot. After running some errands at the local grocery store, she comes back home to find him lying dead on the floor. She calls the police, and they arrive at the crime scene to begin their investigations. As they become a little tired of work, Mary offers them to have the now fully developed leg of the lamb as dinner. They help themselves to it in the kitchen while talking about the murder as it dawns on them who the murderer was. That is where Mary giggles and the story ends.

IV. REFLECTION ON THE DEFINITE ARTICLE 'THE'

So the story rotates around an angel of a woman turning into a murderer, a loving and would-be mother turning into a cold-blooded killer committing the most hideous crime.

What this paper deals with is the shift from one mental state into another one projected through a fine and subtle shift of the choice of lexis. What we mean by this statement is a total shift from controlled, conscious actions into those of utter unconscious ones, which are out of control. As seen in the story, Mary commits the crime in an absolutely unconscious state of mind. She is not aware at all of what she is doing then.

The theoretic mental frame we have adopted is as follows: we imagine that the [The +N. phrase] leads to a separate entity. The phrase creates a different world of life where the thing functions on its own; a world where things get new forms of "mind" and frames of function(s). The fact remains to say that a phrase like "the hand" creates a whole new, unusual feeling where you are sent to new ambiances as the reader. The linguistic meaning(s) stands/stand opposite the one(s) created here. And yet it remains to say that the discourse meaning(s)/senses are created here through the "the + N." phrase where they stand in a face-face situation to the dictionary/linguistic meanings.

Let's read some excerpts from the story to help us have a clear picture of this mental shift: "She couldn't feel her feet touching the floor.... She couldn't feel anything at all.....Everything was automatic now....." That is the point where we see the story bursting with phrases such as, "the stairs, the cellar, the light, the deep freeze." (The emphases are

ours). These lead the reader to the (almost) climax where we read: “The hand inside the cabinet.....” (Again the emphasis is ours).

Now the question the reader could logically ask would be: “Why the hand?” and not “Her hand?” That is the pivot point of the story, we believe, where the genitive pronoun is substituted by the definite article “The”; this in turn signals the shift from one state of mind into another one. That is where the modules of syntax and mind meet. In fact, the opposite poles of the genitive pronoun and that of the definite article “The” lead us into two sets of worlds.

We believe it would be a good idea to begin with the opposite pole of “Her hand”, and look for its possible mental connotations and then proceed with the “The hand”.

The genitive pronoun “Her.....” would connote, we believe, the followings:

1: It “belongs” to you.

2: You have control over it.

3: It is “close” to you.

4: It is inseparable and “dependent” on you. By this we mean that the body part proceeds and moves as you do as an independent entity. The part can make no movements on its own. So the part finds itself in total harmony with you as a conscious agent. The part finds itself impractical unless used through a conscious agent. The part lacks any sense if operated on its own. It finds its use when used with the whole.

5: The part and many a time would carry positive implications. By this we mean as it is dependent on you, so it is in a state of conscious movements. The part makes movements out of a totally planned thought.

6: There is a possibility of anticipation as what will happen next; this in turn gives you a sense of relief as you know what course events will take. Therefore, a sense of calmness will come over you. It follows that a feeling of familiarity and friendship will prevail. The reader is guided to think in a certain fashion as how the story proceeds.

7: It lacks the dynamic structure of the “The hand”. By this we mean that the part is “lost” in the whole conscious mind out of which it gets its orders. The dominant pole here is the active mind casting a shadow over the part. The part can “think” of no independent action on its own. It finds itself recessed in the active, conscious mind. It is covert in the bigger picture of the mind. This would add another dimension to the ambience; the fact that we enjoy a sense of security and lawfulness. The ambience would exude a calm flow of law and order. Things are under control, and as they find their right place, so it follows that no violation of rights is allowed.

8: It is something real and genuine. By this statement we mean that as the part moves in harmony with the whole, so its movements make sense. These movements are understandable. We know the whys and wherefores.

In addition to the English language, we imagine, other languages can provide further evidences for the discussion above.

In the Persian language, as an instance of a sense of familiarity created by speakers, we can think of the following situation: imagine a man knocks at the door of his neighbor asking for the father; when the son answers the door, the man normally would say something like, “Is your dad/father home?” The reason for this genitive phrase, we believe, is the fact the speaker is trying to establish a close relationship here, making an emotional impact on the listener. He is trying to impart the feeling in the listener that: “He is your father; he is someone close to you; he is a part of you; I need to talk to someone who is an integral part of your own being; he is someone you know well and is loved .” Thus the genitive phrase in the Persian language moves along the same ones mentioned above for the English language.

Another language where, we imagine, the same feelings of closeness and a sense of friendship is created is the Arabic language. We are quoting sentences from the Koran as further proofs/evidences of our discussion above. In chapter “The Broad Day”, Mohammad was worried as there was some pause in God sending him more of the Koran. And then God sent the following sentences in the chapter among which we read, 3:” Your Lord has not abandoned you; He has not made you His enemy.” 5: “And so soon your Lord will give you (all you asked Him for); and you shall be pleased.” 11: “So talk to people about your Lord’s gifts and blessings.” Here, we imagine, God is creating a sense of familiarity and friendliness through the genitive pronouns. He is saying that He is yours; He is right with you; He is not far from you.

Now it is time to proceed with the opposite pole of “The hand”, and look for its possible implications. The definite article, we imagine, would associate the followings:

1: It is something separate from you. We should bear in mind that the article “the” is a derivative of “That” in old English. This would essentially and especially in the context of the story imply a kind of “distance” and being far away. It strikes you as all bonds are cut off. All bonds of love and connectedness are torn away. Thus the definite article +N. lead to symbolic implications. The lexis, we believe, is there not just to give us the linguistic meaning(s) but also the symbolic ones which in turn enrich the story.

2: Therefore something which is “far” from you is less controlled by you.

3: It is independent. By this statement we have the sentence “Everything was automatic now” in mind. When she manages with however difficulty to go to the cellar to get the frozen leg of lamb we read, “.....down the stairs to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze.....”. What strikes us here is the sense of automation created through the deliberate deletion of verbs; as verbs and many a time impart a feeling of conscious actions, so their emission suggest the opposite; we see automation projected by the narrator to give us a feeling of assembly line where no thought there is behind what the machinery does; what we feel here is an individual who has lost all sense of identity; an individual who

is void of any sense of humanity which causes the murder. So this loss of a sense leads the character to do what she did. And that is why the whole scene is filled with a sense of terror. We are dealing with someone who is a robot now. Here what we see is the unconscious mind taking the lead and encircling the whole scene. Thus two circles are created where the conscious one is surrounded by the unconscious one. The one dominating is the unconscious one which causes all the terrible killing.

Through these two circles and symbolically, we can detect a pattern here. And that is the dynamics governing the structure of the story. In one pole, you have the conscious mind knowing what it does; still in another one you have the unconscious one projected through the definite article +N. phrase. Thus a “clash” is set where the quintessence of the story is laid bare. The story is filled with a liveliness and vitality where opposing poles “challenge” each other.

This in turn leads us to the multilayer aspects the story offers. In fact through the above mentioned definite article +N. phrase, the story gives us various visions and viewpoints. We move in different directions through the choice of phrases.

We believe if we look at the story though the bigger picture of its whole structure, it offers two “feelings”. One is that of fear and terror as belongs to the genre. This is of course the apparent, dominant one. The ambience is one of fear and fright. You see an angel becoming a devil; a lover turning into a hater.

But yet, looking at the bigger picture, the story displays a vital structure of multilayer phases where the energetic layers “play” roles each in its own place and these functions power the story forward. Therefore the lexis mentioned above gives the story both a negative and positive aspect. If we look closely at the “mind” of the story, we can detect a subtle movement from the conscious mind to the unconscious one and yet again moving back to the conscious one at the end. In the beginning, all is conscious; Mary is fully aware of her actions as is Patrick; and then follows the state of shock where she commits the crime, and she comes out of the unconsciousness yet again when Patrick falls down on the ground. This last state continues to the end of the story. Therefore notice the “three” phases of the mental aspect of the story which could add further dimensions of the symbolic movements. The number “three” has as its quintessence the concept of vitality and energy. This lends additional aspects to the story and gives it a lively structure. What we are trying to say is that there is current and cross-current movement in here which lends the story a subtle texture of vitality throughout. This covert yet ongoing energy is what lies at the bottom of the story, and yet finds its projection through the definite article + hand lexis.

4: It is a separable and complete entity. By this we mean that the part can make movements on its own; you have no control over it whatever. Thus you cannot anticipate what is going to happen next. This would add further feelings of anxiety and fear. And that is where the reader finds the ambience filled with fear and fright.

5: The lexis mentioned above also makes “focalization” possible as well. By this statement we mean that if a movie is to be made based on the story, the cameraman will have to focus on “the hand” to give the audience the fullest visual impact possible.

V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we believe in the followings:

1: Through the definite article +N. phrase, equilibrium is set. On one hand, we see the phrase leading us to the unconscious mind where the crime belongs to. Here a circle is created where the protagonist is entangled in. She does what she does in a total absence of conscious thinking. Yet logically, it follows that the other circle is that of conscious mind where you are aware of what you are doing. You move in conscious states where your actions make sense to you.

2: And at the same time, we need to see the fact that this equilibrium is disturbed through the symbolic movements we make in the conscious and unconscious ones. Again this state of movement can lend further aspects of vitality mentioned earlier. We are trying to say that this is disequilibrium where the three phases of conscious and unconscious ones interplay. A pendulum state of affairs is set where the life of the story takes its beautiful shape and proportions. You make movements constantly between the mental states.

3: These two circles/poles, we believe, are in constant play and interplay where they give the story a lively structure. Each one stands opposite the other. And finally they find their totality in the lexical structure above. This could imply the inner structure of the story where in its quintessence what lies is a unified whole/thought, and this unification finds its projection in the definite article + N. phrase.

4: And finally, we believe, that the functions we mentioned above for the definite article “The” are ought to be considered as the discourse meanings for the word “The”. They also need to be viewed as crucial subtle meanings if the story is to be translated into another language. In the target language, the translator is supposed to provide the same lexical “equivalent” for his readers to get the inner feeling(s) created in the source one.

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4: "The Verger", a short story by William Somerset Maugham, a case of narrative onomastics.