

Lexicology Phenomena and Their Influence on English Study--Taking “a Rose for Emily” as an Example

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ABSTRACT. *Word is the foundation of language. There exist over one million words in English, which enables us to make up a sentence in numerous ways. A certain choice of words implies much information, such as the author’s attitude towards a character or his emotional overtones. Thus, recognizing lexicology phenomena correctly not only benefits us in understanding, but enhances our ability to appreciate literary works. Taking William Faulkner’s short story “the rose for Emily” as an example, this paper briefly expounds the lexicological phenomena from the aspects of word formation, word meaning type, semantic relationship, collocation, context function and its influence on English learning.*

KEYWORDS: *English study, Lexicology, William faulkner, A rose for emily*

1. Introduction

Speaking of “A Rose for Emily”, anyone who has been its reader will be immediately struck with sadness for unrequited love, lives unfulfilled, and opportunities lost. “A Rose for Emily”, written by William Faulkner, was first published in April 30, 1930. Like many of Faulkner’s other works, the story takes place in the fictional yorknapatava County, south of Jefferson, Mississippi[1]. Through this short story, Faulkner tends to show great pity and sympathy to character Emily Grierson, a member of a family of the antebellum Southern aristocracy. After her father’s death, she becomes the last clan who continues to live as if in the past, and finally passes away as a “fallen monument” of the whole town. Miss Emily remains a measure of dignity through her legend of life, which inspires wonder and admiration from generation to generation[2].

Being a master of wording and phrasing, Faulkner was fastidious in his choice of words. The symbolic meaning of the word “rose” in the title indicates, as the tone of the story insinuates, a feeling not altogether unfriendly, one probably of compassion. Faulkner described the title “A Rose for Emily” as an allegorical title, “this woman had undergone a great tragedy. As a salute, I handed her a rose.” Besides, some words and expressions are of distinct characteristics of typical times. The intentional use of outdated, elegant and formal expressions can very help readers to retrospect

the glorious history gone of wind and grief for the family's declining reality, which at the same time resonates with the unity of the subject and form[3]. For English learners, many lexicology phenomena presented in this work are also helpful for writing and reading in the future. Examples in different aspects of lexicology phenomena regarding word-formation, types of meaning, sense relations, collocation, role of context are going to be discussed to show the effects they have on English study.

2. Lexicology Phenomena and Their Influence on English Study

English, being one of about 5000 languages in the world, has been developing throughout a long history. Similar to each of the other languages, the history of English is the history of words and vocabulary. Lexicology, a branch of linguistics as the science of words, is aiming at investigating and studying the morphological structures of English words and word equivalents, their semantic structures, relations, historical development, formation, and usages etc. Distinguishing lexicology phenomena can help readers to grasp the meaning of a word exactly, meanwhile conducive to understanding the obscure theme of literary works. In "A Rose for Emily", many evidences prove this well from different perspectives.

2.1 Word-Formation

At first, word-formation is a distinctive phenomenon in lexicology. As English is an inflected language, it contains various kinds of morphemes to indicate the distinctions of tense, person, gender, etc. In regard to morpheme, affixes, especially derivational affixes play an active role in coining new words. Many derivational affixes have their particular usages. The word "squarish" (e.g.1) is a case in point. It is used to depict the shape of Miss Emily's house. In fact, as an English learner myself, I was confused about its meaning when I firstly met this word. All I could guess was that it was an adjective, being used with "big" in parallel. But when I watched this word carefully, I noticed it was formed by a free root "square", and a derivational affix "-ish". My confusion suddenly disappeared. The secret lies in word-formation. Generally speaking, a noun plus "-ish" means its resemblance or likeness. For example, "childish" refers to someone being like a child. It is by this way that I could understand Emily's house looked like a square[4]. In addition, suffixes like "-ist" and "-er" refer to a person concerning a thing or an action. For instance, "druggist" (e.g.2) and "rigger" (e.g.3) refer to someone who is trained to prepare medicines and someone who rigs roads or ships. In other words, as long as we know its root, we can easily get the idea of the word's meaning according to word-formation. Therefore, it is a helpful and applicable way for us when we face an unfamiliar word in reading materials.

2.2 Types of Meaning

Lexicology phenomena also include types of meaning, which has much to do with comprehension and appreciation of a literary work. A word with its associative meaning usually makes a story readable and profound. In *A Rose for Emily*, the abundant use of archaic words is a salient feature. Many words used in this story are old-fashioned, expressing the historical background as well as the identity of the main character[5]. For example, instead of choosing “a poor person”, Faulkner uses “pauper” (e.g.4), an archaic term for someone who is very poor. With this word, the whole sentence sounds more literary and formal, matching the style and the theme of this story as well. Besides, the word “bridal” (e.g.5) at nearly the end of the story is an archaic term for a wedding or wedding feast. Outdated expressions like these appear many times, like “save” (e.g.6), a quite formal use as a preposition meaning “except”; “negro” (e.g.7), an old-fashioned use referring to African-Americans from the end of 19th century till 1950s; “parlor” (e.g.8), an old-fashioned use to represent a room in a house, which is equivalent to living room nowadays; etc. To grasp these words in literary works will definitely help us to realize what the author tends to convey between lines[6].

2.3 Sense Relations

In the third place, sense relations are not negligible in telling lexicology phenomena. A few writers prefer using antonyms to achieve their stylistic purpose, such as Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. Antonymy is a useful technique to draw a contrast or to add emphasis. That's why the beginning of *Two Cities* is so impressive and powerful. Antonyms can be found in *A Rose for Emily* as well. One illustration is the combined use of “ranked” and “anonymous” (e.g.9), an embodiment to show different identities of soldiers. By using antonyms, the author succeeds in making a contrast as well as adding emphasis. Another illustration is the combined use of “thrill” and “despair” (e.g.10), which achieves a similar goal. As for its influence on English study, using antonyms appropriately is of great importance to writing. It enables us to make contrasts, express our thoughts economically and concisely, and give extra emphasis at the same time[7].

2.4 Collocation

In the fourth place, collocation should be highlighted in lexicology phenomena. From different perspectives, a typical collocation can be analyzed accordingly. Here we take the verb + noun collocation as an example. If we view the noun “condolence” as the dominating word, we can often find verbs like “send” or “offer” ahead of it. In this way we can have “offer condolence” (e.g.11), a formal phrase to express sympathy when someone has died. Moreover, if the word “father”, as a verb, is viewed as a collocation's center, it is always followed by nouns like “edict”, “concept”, “technology”, etc. In this way we can have “fathered the edict” (e.g.12) to describe the mayor's action of promulgating a law. What's more, verbs are

composed of two classifications, namely transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. In case of intransitive verb-centered collocations, the most noticeable pattern is the verb + preposition collocation. Almost every intransitive verb requires one or several specific prepositions, such as “dispose of” (e.g.13) and “resort to” (e.g.14). A good command of collocation and association has a huge influence on English study. It enlarges our acquisition of words, by which we can turn our passive words into active words as much as possible and use them accurately in speaking and writing. It is true that as second language learners, we need to make unremitting efforts on collocation and association, for most of English words are polysemic. But only by mastering them can we reach a higher level of word study.

2.5 Role of Context

Last but not least, the role of context, as one of lexicology phenomena, is also of great help to English learners when they are confronted with unknown words. Contextual clues may prove extremely valuable in guessing the meaning of new words. With the help of the role of context, learners are able to get the meaning of an unfamiliar word without the assistance of thick dictionaries. Contextual clues vary a great deal but can be summed up as eight types, namely, definition, explanation, example, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, relevant details and word structure. Among all of them, explanation is of great use for adding details, creating a certain atmosphere or conveying mixed feelings. In this story there is a sentence to describe Emily’s appearance when she enters the parlor. “She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue.” (e.g.15) After saying “she looked bloated”, Faulkner further explains the verb by using a somehow exaggerated simile, “like a body long submerged in motionless water”. Therefore, readers can easily imagine the protagonist’s figure even though they don’t know the word “bloated”. In this respect, the following clause acts as an explanation, which also makes the description more vivid.

3. Conclusion

Compared with lexicology phenomena shown in this short story, examples mentioned above are actually a tip of iceberg. In fact, as long as we explore carefully, we can surprisingly find many interesting lexicology phenomena that we haven’t noticed during our reading process in nearly each of books. All extraordinary works are more or less closely linked with the intentional choice of words. To some extent, it is perhaps the magic of words that makes this short story an outstanding work throughout American Southern literature.

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