

**Attitudinal Polarity in Children's Literature: A Study of Affect in
Selected Fairy-Tales**

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Abstract

It is a well-established fact that while representing the experience of reality at the experiential level, a text also communicates attitudes, emotions and feelings at the interpersonal level. To ascertain the nature of these attitudes, emotions and feelings in a text might be quite significant and useful. The present research paper is a minor attempt in this regard. By using the theoretical framework of the Appraisal system, it analyses the polarity of emotional content in the selected fairy tales in order to discover the nature of feelings and emotions being instilled in the minds of young readers through the texts of popular culture.

Introduction

It has already been established that the use of language is not merely for the representation of experiential meanings, but also for the facilitation of interaction and the construction of texts (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). An important aspect in interaction is the attitudinal orientation. The communication of attitudes in interaction is the primary subject of study in the Appraisal system developed by Martin and his associates (Martin 2004; Martin and Rose 2003; Martin and White 2005). This system analyses "the linguistic mechanisms for the sharing of emotions, tastes and normative assessments" (Martin and White 2005). In other words, appraisal "is concerned with evaluation; the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text; the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin and Rose 2003). On the whole, three types of attitudes are recognized – Affect, Judgment and Appreciation. Since the attitudes can be positive or negative, therefore each of the three types of attitudes has its positive as well as negative variants. The present paper analyses the

positive and negative affect in some of the most popular fairy tales in English in order to locate the polarity of feelings in this significant genre of children's literature.

Data

The data for the present research consists of five fairy-tales in English viz. "Rapunzel", "Hansel and Gretel", "Cinderella", "Little Snow White" and "The White Bride and the Black Bride". In order to minimise variables, all these stories have been taken from a single edition *The original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* translated and edited by Jack Zipes.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

As it has already been suggested, the theoretical framework for the present study is Appraisal System which has been developed within the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework and which in a way extended the "SFL account of the interpersonal by attending to three axes along which the speaker's/writer's intersubjective stance may vary" (Martin and White 2005). Out of the three types of attitudes, judgement deals with "people's character"; appreciation with "valuing the worth of things"; and affect with the expression of "feelings in discourse" (Martin and Rose 2003). Each of these attitudes can be further divided into two categories on the basis of the polarity of values or feelings - 'positive' or 'negative' because the values or feelings are either 'good' or 'bad'. In the present study, the semantic resources are analysed in the selected data in order to unearth the positive and negative emotions or feelings felt and expressed by different participants in the discourse and these negative and positive variants of affect are presented in the separate tables so that conclusions can be drawn.

Analysis

Here is the detail of positive and negative variants of affect in the fairy tale titled "Rapunzel":

+ve Affect
Nil

-ve Affect
Horrified
Terrified
Angrily
In his fear
fell into despair
terribly afraid
furious
astonished
angry
In his despair
Sadly
Weep

The positive and negative variants of affect in the fairy tale titled“Hansel and Gretel” are as follows:

+ve Affect
Rejoiced Delighted thought they were in heaven happy sleeping so sweetly Delighted Glad Rejoiced

-ve Affect
tossing and turning in bed because of his worries don't have the heart didn't give him any peace began to weep pitiful tears upset stopped still dawdling began to weep angry saddened so tremendously frightened yelled frightened Wept Puzzled with a sad heart wept bloody tears bear this sorrow began to scream and groan hadn't spent a single happy day

The following tables show the instances of positive and negative affects in the fairy tale “Cinderella”:

+ve Affect
Happily Amazed Splendour and joy glistened really like the sun at midday Astonished Astounded filled with so much joy glad glad

-ve Affect
Wept
her tears were good enough
to cause her grief
tired
ashamed
sadly
sighed
heart was heavy
angry
filled with jealousy
in distress
cried out
annoyed
in ashes and sadness
morose and kept quiet
looked angrily
cried out
anxiously
pale with envy
would have died of envy
terrified
out of fear
horrified and became pale

The positive and negative affects in the next fairy tale titled “Little Snow White” are tabled as below:

+ve Affect
Moved to pity
Glad
Pity
Rejoiced
Pity
Rejoiced
Ate with delight

-ve Affect
pale with envy
hated
jealousy
began to weep
afraid
astounded
Screamed
Horrified
remain upset
cried out
horrified
horrified
trembled and shook with rage
wept and wept
sad
angry
horrified
afraid
jealousy

And finally, here is the list of the positive and negative variants of affect in the fairy tale “The White Bride and the Black Bride”.

+ve Affect
fell desperately in love
rejoiced
rejoiced

-ve Affect
Infuriated
heart turned even more evil
distressed
envied
jealous
terribly annoyed
furious

Findings

The analysis reveals that the negative variant of affect remarkably outnumbers the positive variant of affect in the selected fairy tales, which are believed to be quite popular among children. For example, in the first story in the data titled “Rapunzel”, there is no positive affect and all the instances of affect are having negative polarity. Further, in the story titled “Hansel and Gretel”, there are total twenty-eight instances of affect. Out of these, 28.57 % are positive affect while the rest 71.43% are negative affect. Likewise, in the story titled “Cinderella”, out of the thirty-three instances of affect, merely 30.30 % are positive affect while the remaining 69.70% are negative ones. Next, in “Little Snow White”, positive affects amount to 26.92 % of the total instances of affect whereas negative affects stand at 73.08%. And finally the story “The White Bride and the Black Bride” is no exception in this regard. Here there are ten instances of affect. Out of these, positive and negative affects are 30% and 70% respectively. The inference that can be drawn from these findings is that in the genre of fairy tale, which is one among the most popular genres of children’s literature, the emotions and feelings that get communicated to young and impressionable listeners or readers are more negative and less positive. However, this inference needs to be tested on a much wider corpus of fairy tales. Further, such an analysis can also be applied to ascertain whether

the case is similar in other genres of children's literature. Such an analysis might give us a peep into the nature of emotions and feelings being served to children through literature.

References

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