SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF THE NOMINAL PARTS OF SPEECH IN THE LYRICS OF THE 2000s BRITISH INDEPENDENT SCENE

Marharyta Sterlikova

Postgraduate Student, Assistant Professor,
Yuriy Fedkovych National University of Chernivtsi, Ukraine
e-mail: m.sterlikova@chnu.edu.ua, orcid.org/0000-0002-2010-5518

Summary

This paper seeks to address the semantic classification of parts of speech with regard to the British independent scene of the 2000s. The vocabulary of any language is not simply a massive accumulation of words, but a system of interconnected elements. It is known as the lexico-semantic system of language. In the course of time, lexemes undergo semantic changes, i. e. reinterpretation and semantic modification. Given the multitude of linguistic factors and the rapid pace of development, the vernacular English language has experienced a lot of semantic changes over a period of a decade. To better reflect the semantic proprieties of the functional parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) that are peculiar to a definite time and a setting, we will examine the lyrics of the four most prominent British bands of the 2000s: Placebo, Franz Ferdinand, The Subways, and Stereophonics. Methods used in the study: the method of stylistic analysis for identifying and describing the proprieties of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in the subject-matter material, the method of quantitative calculations for generalizing the obtained results, induction, deduction and comparison.

Keywords: lexical semantics, semantic analysis, song lyrics, the British independent scene, discourse-centered study, nominal parts of speech, applied linguistics

1. Introduction

The history of rock is shaped by cultural and social diversity. For more than seventy years, musical forms have evolved, and the social movements associated with them have advanced rapidly. "Goths", "Mods", "Punks" etc. offer very inhomogeneous social, ideological and political configurations. Furthermore, the gaps between social movements and musical forms have become more pronounced. The marginality of rock has thus played as a unifying figure, but the success of Elvis Presley, The Beatles or U2 pushes marginality a little further. Rock becomes, like any art form, a grouping of words, a play of wit and imagination which the analyst must interpret, even if the representations of the musical artists obey multiple and a priori incoherent discursive logic.

2. A Sociolinguistic Linguistic Perspective to Studying Song Lyrics

It is fair to say that those who study rock music in its social, linguistic, or musical aspects face particular problems. Researchers experience a number of difficulties: a slight setback in terms of time, an overabundance of sources, and often a plethora of specialized bibliography. In addition to these arguments, researches also encounter the problem of defining the cultural history of the given period.

In this article, we would like to address some preliminary questions to the study of rock music in British civilization. These are questions concerning the perception of its sociolinguistic role: the perceived authenticity of certain music, the constituent parts that form the lyrics (the semantic classes of the subject-matter words), and finally, the use of music as a vector to expressing one's identity. The material for our research is the lyrics of the four British bands of the 2000s: Placebo, Franz Ferdinand, The Subways, and Stereophonics. We limit the study to chronological frames in order to most clearly characterize the key concepts that manifest themselves in the lyrics.

Lexical semantics is an increasingly important area in applied linguistics. More specifically, the stratification of semantic classes and subclasses in modern linguistics is one of the most difficult tasks there are. Semantic classes are obtained by averaging at least three methods: structural, psycholinguistic, and statistical. Semantic subclasses, in contrast, require the application of logical-deductive, linguistic-inductive, and psychological-inductive methods.

Our research presents semantic classifications of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs which are based on the logical-deductive approach. Classification in formal logic is understood as the distribution of objects of any kind into classes by similarity on the basis of essential features that are inherent in objects of this kind and distinguish them from objects of other genera. Each class occupies a certain permanent place in the formed system and, in turn, on the basis of the logical operation of dividing the concept (dichotomy) can be divided into appropriate subclasses *(Kondakov, 1975: 247)*. Therefore, the classification on this basis should be formulated with the utmost clarity about the properties of the given lexical items.

The semantic classifications of parts of speech have been explored extensively for verbs *(Dorr and Jones, 1996; McCarthy, 2000; Korhonen, Krymolowski, and Marx, 2003; Lapata and Brew, 2004; Schulte im Walde, 2006; Joanis, Stevenson, and James, 2008)* and, to a lesser degree, for nouns *(Hindle, 1990; Pereira, Tishby, and Lee, 1993)*, but, with very few exceptions *(Bohnet, Klatt, and Wanner, 2002; Carvalho and Ranchhod, 2003)*. In terms of adjectives and adverbs, there is little to no research.

3. Semantic Proprieties of Nouns in Lyrical Discourse

As has been said, there is sufficient research on the semantic classifications of nouns. It is usually customary to divide nouns by their semantic properties into two main classes: abstract and concrete. An abstract noun refers to a thing that does not exist as a material object, for instance:

1) "*You hit the ground with every **force**, it makes no sense*" – Oh Yeah, the Subways;
2) "*An open book is still **mystery***" – Move to Newlyn, the Subways;
3) "*I was filled with **incoherence***" – Haemoglobin, Placebo;
4) "*The whole world wants my **disappearance***" – Haemoglobin, Placebo;
5) "*You've never seen such **perseverance***" – Haemoglobin, Placebo.

Therefore, abstract nouns cannot be detected by the five senses: you cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch them.

Concrete nouns correspond to the concept of visibility in the strict sense of the word. In contrast to abstract nouns, they can be detected by the five senses. Within this category, there are names of animate and inanimate objects, for example:

1) "*Slide the **nail** under the top and bottom **buttons** of my **blazer***" – The Dark Of The Matinée, Franz Ferdinand;

2) "*I'm going to burn this **city***" – The Fire, Franz Ferdinand;

3) "*To try and save your swollen **face***" – Song to Say Goodbye, Placebo;

4) "*Someone call the **ambulance***" – Infra-Red, Placebo;

5) "*So I came down to crash and burn your bagger's **banquet***" – Infra-Red, Placebo.

The vast majority of nouns belong to the category common nouns, that is, the names of homogeneous objects, substances, qualities, properties, etc. They should also be distinguished from proper nouns – names of particular people, places, or objects that are spelled with a capital letter:

1) "***Jesus** looking down on me*" – Haemoglobin, Placebo;

2) "***Mary** is my best friend*" – Mary, the Subways;

3) "*Thank **God** for **Dracula**, he sucked the shit out of me*" – Mary, the Subways;

4) "***Michael** you're the boy with the leather hips sticky*" – Michael, Franz Ferdinand;

5) "*You're the first one to swim across the **Seine***" – Drag, Placebo.

Within that framework, it is essential to take into account nouns denote animate and inanimate things. Accordingly, animate nouns fall into human and non-human. Also, in terms of semantics, nouns can be countable and uncountable:

1) "*Did I see you in a **limousine***" (countable noun) – Michael, Franz Ferdinand;

2) "*The last **message** you sent*" (countable noun) –You Could Have It So Much Better, Franz Ferdinand;

3) "*When i walk on the city **pavement***" (countable noun) – City Pavement, the Subways;

4) "*Can you find me space inside your bleeding **heart***" (countable noun) – Passive Aggressive, Placebo;

5) "***Soul** starts spinning again*" (countable noun) – Can't Stop Feeling, Franz Ferdinand;

6) "*No escaping **gravity***" (uncountable noun) – Special K, Placebo;

7) "*In **sunshine** and in **rain***" (uncountable nouns) – Move To Newlyn, the Subways;

8) "*Must be through some lack of **kindness***" (uncountable noun) – Haemoglobin, Placebo;

9) "*I was brimming with **defiance***" (uncountable noun) – Haemoglobin, Placebo;

10) "*A latent strain of color **blindness***" (uncountable noun) – Haemoglobin, Placebo;

In this subpart, we have concluded that the category of abstract nouns is the most prolific in the lyrics of the four bands given the poetic narrative that is pursued by the songwriters. In total, 76 instances of abstract nouns have been found in the lyrics of Placebo, Franz Ferdinand, The Subways, and Stereophonics; concrete nouns – 62; common nouns – 63; proper nouns – 23; countable nouns – 91; uncountable nouns – 29.

4. Semantic Proprieties of Adjectives in Lyrical Discourse

Adjectives are one of the most elusive parts of speech with respect to meaning. For instance, it is very difficult to establish a broad classification of adjectives into semantic classes, analogous to a broad ontological classification of nouns *(Raskin & Nirenburg, 1998)*. The adjective is usually assigned an identification and restriction function. The predicative function also enriches the semantic properties of adjectives. One could also introduce a classification related to the thematic or referential importance of what adjectives denote. These relatively autonomous aspects of the class of adjectives contrast with the syntactic dependence that marked the formal status of adjectives. It can therefore be considered that adjectives constitute a subdomain of semantic primitives of language, whose basic referential role is to describe the properties of objects and events that nouns and nouns determine.

From the semantic point of view, adjectives commonly fall into two main categories: descriptive and relational. Descriptive adjectives are by far more prevalent and constitute the bulk of our subject-matter lyrics, for instance:

1) "*And I'll find no solace in your **poor** apology*" – Broken Promises, Placebo;

2) "*Our only nation lives in **lucid** dreams*" – Lucid Dreams, Franz Ferdinand;

3) "***Cold** hearts feel **good** deceiving*" – Always Tomorrow, the Subways;

4) "*Do you say your prayers late at night or do you save them for the **desperate** times*?" – 100mph, Stereophonics;

5) "*Your needle and your damage done remains a **sordid** twist of fate*" – Song to Say Goodbye, Placebo.

Relational adjectives are more semantically exclusive and cover limited spheres of activity, i. e. they are practically monosemantic. Thus, *chemical* has as its only semantic content "related to chemistry". Some examples of relational adjectives can also be found in the lyrics of Placebo:

1) "*With a **chemical** peel and a picture of Mary*" (derived from *chemistry*) – Space Monkey;

2) "*More **chaotic**, no relief*" (derived from chaos) – Special K;

3) "*Can you find me space inside your **bleeding** heart*" (derived from *blood*) – Passive Aggressive;

4) "*Beware this **troubled** world*" (derived from *trouble*) – This Picture;

5) "*And our one **heroic** pledge*" (derived from *hero*) – Meds.

Heyvaert affirms that the decision to put a particular adjective in one of both categories is sometimes slightly arbitrary. And some words that formally look like relational adjectives have a fairly rich meaning content. So, for instance, *Orwellian* is not just "related to Orwell", but "being like the totalitarian world in Orwell's 1984" *(Heyvaert, 2010)*. Therefore, the following line from Placebo's English Summer Rain – ***English** summer rain seems to last for ages* – not only conveys the territorial affiliation, but the annoyance with the constant rains in the UK.

In total, 86 instances of descriptive adjectives have been detected, relational – 37.

5. Semantic Proprieties of Verbs in Lyrical Discourse

The verb expresses an action or process. The question of verbal categories classification according to the most diverse features of both content and function has been repeatedly raised by linguists. At the semantic level, it acts as any part of speech, as a lexical unit or as a conceptual nomination. This verb pattern determines its lexical meaning. Secondly, the verb can convey not only its own meaning, but also show the meaning of the entire situation described by its lexeme. The verb is used to determine the set of participants in the situation, their roles and their hierarchy, that is, to act as a predicate is a unit of a special complex nomination that defines the situation as a whole. Thus, the verb is able to name not only the function by itself, but also determine the entire situation. The classification proposed in this paper contains the following semantic classifications of the verb:

1) Physical perception and action:

1.1. "***I've seen** the one to take my eye*" – Girl, Stereophonics;

1.2. "*Yeah you leave me here on the floor, you can't **feel** it*" – Can't Stop Feeling, Franz Ferdinand;

1.3. "***Hold your breath** and count to ten and **fall apart** and start again*" – English Summer Rain, Placebo;

1.4. "*Do you **hear** the children sing aloud? Can you **taste** the water in your mouth?*" – 100mph, Streophonics;

1.5. "*But you can't stop **moving**, you won't stop **moving** along*" – Can't Stop Feeling, Franz Ferdinand.

2) Emotional state:

2.1. "*I'd like an option but I **hate** to choose*" – All or Nothing, the Subways;

2.2. "*I'm gonna make somebody **love** me*" – Do You Want to, Franz Ferdinand;

2.3. "*Yourself and tourists, yeah that's what I **hate***" – Have a Nice Day, Stereophonics;

2.4. "*I will not **complain***" – I Want to Hear What You Have Got to Say, the Subways;

2.5. "*I think you**'d prefer** to be miserable instead*" – I'm Your Villain, Franz Ferdinand.

3) Mental activity:

3.1. "*I'm trying hard **to think** but I **can't understand***" – I Want to Hear What You Have Got to Say, the Subways;

3.2. "*I was alone, falling free, trying my best **not to forget***" – Meds, Placebo;

3.3. "*It **means** nothing if I haven't got you*" – It Means Nothing, Stereophonics;

3.4. "*And don't, and don't, and **don't let me down**...*" – Space Monkey, Placebo;

3.5. "*I've got **to learn** or **learn** how to die*" – Love and Destroy, Franz Ferdinand.

4) Verbs denoting speech:

4.1. "*Remembered all the things you**'d say**, how your promises rang hollow, as you threw me to the ground*" – Pierrot the Clown, Placebo;

4.2. "***Tell** me, **tell** me there's no goodbyes*" – No Goodbyes, the Subways;

4.3. "*I **scream** and **shout**, I'm lost for words*" – I Won't Let You Down, the Subways;

4.4. "*Gonna have **to tell** her tonight*" – Tell Her Tonight, Franz Ferdinand;

4.5. "*Can I **tell** you what's inside?*" – Devil, Stereophonics.

In total, 43 instances of verbs denoting physical perception and action have been found; emotional state – 35; mental activity – 33; verbs denoting speech – 18.

6. Semantic Proprieties of Adverbs in Lyrical Discourse

Many linguists have proposed classifications of adverbs. Particular problems arise with respect to a universally accepted definition of adverbs and the criteria for distinguishing their classes. Reichenbach, Davidson and Montague agreed to divide adverbs in adverbs of manner, adverbs of degree, adverbs of place, adverbs of frequency and adverbs of time. In that regard, let us consider the following examples:

1) "*I tore you down and I burnt you **badly***" (adverb of manner) – I Won't Let You Down, the Subways;

2) "***Completely** meretricious of a poke in the eye*" (adverb of degree) – Space Monkey, Placebo;

3) "*I can see the light **behind** your eyes*" (adverb of place) – No Goodbyes, the Subways;

4) "*You'll **never** understand it all when things go right or wrong*" (adverb of frequency) – Live 'N' Love, Stereophonics;

5) "*Leave me dreaming on the bed, see you right back here **tomorrow**, for the next round*" (adverb of time) – Pierrot the Clown, Placebo.

In the course of our research, we have concluded that the adverbs of manner are the most prevalent in the lyrics of the British independent scene of the 2000s, they constitute the bulk of this category – 55 items, adverbs of degree – 12, adverbs of place – 23, adverbs of frequency – 21, adverbs of time – 29.

7. Prevailing Socio-linguistic Patterns in the Lyrics
of the British Independent Scene of 2000s

In the field of lexical semantics, it has been found that a large number of nouns are organized hierarchically according to the terms of a semantic relationship of inclusion called hyperonymy/hyponymy, general/specific, superordinate/subordinate, etc. Several factors that influence this type of organization have been identified: frequency of occurrence, typicity and familiarity.

A good example of that is the widespread use of nouns denoting emotions is the lyrics of Placebo. Brian Molko makes good use of strong words expressing his thoughts and opinions: "*I was brimming with **defiance**￼*", "*You've never seen such **perseverance***", "*I was filled with **incoherence***", "*I was hanging from a tree unaccustomed to such **violence***" – Haemoglobin; "*Someone call the ambulance, there's gonna be an **accident***" – Infra-Red; "*And the sex and the drugs, and the **complications***" – Meds; "*And I'll find no **solace** in your poor apology*"; "*Be sure to come around, I'll be wallowing in **sorrow***", "*Be sure to come around, I'll be wallowing in **pity***" – Pierrot The Clown; "*Forget past **indiscretions***" – In The Cold Light Of Morning; "*I have a slow **disease** that sucked me dry*" – For What It's Worth. At this point, it is safe to say that the aforementioned lexemes are synonymous in a way that reflects the indignation of the whole generation of 2000s. We could observe the applicability of these semantic categories in a definite sociolinguistic context. Similar motives can be found in the lyrics of the Subways: "*Do you feel the **paranoia**? You will know it's been waiting for ya*" – Kalifornia; "*The way we hold our heads in hands – **regrets***", "*Worse happens in **cold wars***" – All or Nothing; "*It's always fine to hold onto your **sorrow***" – Always Tomorrow. Franz Ferdinand, too, features nouns that have rather dark connotations: "*You are the **villain** who sends her*" – Darts of Pleasure; "*I fell to the floor fainting at the sight of **blood***", "*On the seventh seal you said you never feel **pain***", "*I only have a **problem** when people insist on taking their **hate** and placing it on your name*" – The Fallen.

8. Conclusions

The current research was conducted in order to define the semantic proprieties of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in the song lyrics of the British independent scene of the 2000s, notably Placebo, Franz Ferdinand, The Subways, and Stereophonics. This paper demonstrates that lyrical discourse considers how language, both spoken and written, enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities. The whole process of analysis is based on understanding the relationship between words and reality. To examine discourse requires an investigator to ask – in highly specified contexts – just how particular ideas, concepts and perspectives come into being and are sustained. To do that, we have implemented the logical-deductive, linguistic-inductive, and psychological-inductive methods in order to define the semantic classes and subclasses which are present in our research.

Not only have we verified the socio-cultural value of the British independent scene of the 2000s, but also examined the constituent parts of the lyrics from a linguistic point of view. The category of nouns, which is the building blocks of spoken and written language at both semantic and syntactic level, has generated the following results: abstract nouns (76), concrete nouns (62), common nouns (63), proper nouns (23), countable nouns (91), and uncountable nouns (29). The category of adjectives contributed to the following outcomes: descriptive adjectives (86), relational adjectives (37). The category of nouns has led to the following results:

verbs denoting physical perception (43), verbs denoting emotional state (35), verbs denoting mental activity (33); verbs denoting speech (18). Finally, the analysis of adverbs has shown the following results: adverbs of manner (55), adverbs of degree (12), adverbs of place (23), adverbs of frequency (21), and adverbs of time (29).

Our investigations so far have only been on a small scale, and the unresolved issues rather serve as a continuous incentive for future research.

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