

William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming": A Stylistic Study in Terms of Collocation

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Abstract

The present research paper aims at analyzing William Butler Yeats' poem "The second coming" stylistically in terms of collocation. The paper consists of five sections, the first one presents some definitions of collocation to shed light on the scope of the study of collocation. The second section introduces W.B. Yeats' life briefly to explain the various poetic purposes that he had written about particularly the political purposes.

The third section in this paper deals with the interpretation of Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" according to some of the critics' opinions. The fourth section can be considered as the practical part of the study, this section includes the analysis of "The second Coming" stylistically in terms of collocation. The fifth section is devoted to reveal the conclusions that are drawn up from this study. The paper ends up with a list of references.

1. The Definitions of Collocation

Collocation is considered as "the most problematic part of lexical cohesion, cohesion that is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur (Halliday and Hassan, 1976:284). They (ibid:285) state that the basis of the lexical relationship that features as a cohesive force extended and there is cohesion between any part of lexical items that stand to each other in some recognizable lexicosemantic (word meaning) relation.

Witte and Faigley (1981:6) agree with such opinion so they believe that the "lexical cohesion through collocation is the most difficult type of cohesion to analyze because items said to collocate involve neither repetition, synonymy, superordination, nor mention of general items".

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Martin(1981) as cited in Armellini and Bax (1997) illustrates that "While there are problems in defining Collocation, its contribution to coherence in text is so significant that it cannot be ignored". The difficulty in providing an exhaustive definition of collocation is that "collocation is expressed through open rather than closed class items .Closed lexical items include all grammatical words e.g. pronouns and conjunctions, which form finite groups. There is ,however, no closed-ness about the items which can be used to express collocation, so predicating sets of co-occurring words is difficult, if not impossible.(Armellini and Bax,1997:2).

Jackson(1982:105)points that collocation "refers to the habitual company which words keep" Certain words tend to corp up in each other's company as the main idea behind collocation(Turner,1973:129).

McCarthy(1991) as cited in .(Armellini and Bax,1997:2) objects to the opinions that consider collocation as part of the notion of the lexical cohesion, so he dismisses collocation as relevant to this notion. Instead , he considers it as "only refering to the probability that lexical items will co-occur , and is not a semantic relation between words".On the other hand, Halliday and Hassan (1976:286) explain that collocation has a cohesive effect but this effect depends not so much on any systematic semantic relationship as one of the pairs of words tendency is to share the same lexical environment to occur in collocation with one another.

Collocation is regarded as a theoretical problem, it depends "on how much an uninstructed reader can notice this, even unconsciously, and whether an instructed reading is a true reading of the author's text(Turner,1973:129).He (ibid) adds: "my own feeling is that it would depend on the situation :in literature an alert reader may be aware of the echoes of words over a long span".

It is useful to distinguish between the collocated lexical items and the collocated lexical sets respectively. The cohesive force which is found through the employment of lexical items "is not limited to a pair of words. It is very common for long chains to be built up out of lexical relations of this kind, with word patterns like candle...flame ...flicker," (Halliday and Hassan, 1976:286). What referred to as lexical set is the cohesive force that can be determined" between any pair of lexical items that stand to each other in some recognizable lexicosemantic (word meaning) relation" (ibid: 285).

2. Yeats in Brief

William Butler Yeats, is one of the greatest Poets that Ireland has yet produced. He is a difficult character to pin down. His verse is beautiful, yet oftentimes indecipherable. He had lofty ideas while at the same time being rather unashamedly elitist in his political views. He supported Irish art and culture while he was not exactly himself. He is considered as the last romantic and also perhaps the first modernist. He was a complex man whose own uniqueness is definitely reflected in his works(Tran,2005:1).

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865, the firstborn of John Butler Yeats and Susan Mary Yeats. In 1877 W.B. entered Godolphin school, which he attended for four years, after which he continued his education at Erasm Smith High School, in Dublin (Wikinfo,2004:1). Yeats' family moved to London in 1874 but he spent a good deal of time with his grandparents in Sligo that's why he was affected with the Irish Countryside. For a time (1884-1886), he joined the Metropolitan School of Art. Yeats' first published poems that appeared in The Dublin University Review in 1885, at the same time he began to come under the influence of the Irish national leader O'Leary. "Yeats, George Russell and a few other friends, founded the Dublin Hermetic Society" (Coles,1980:2). It is a club made to study spiritualism, magic, theosophy, esoteric Buddhism and the Cabbala. Yeats participated in all the social organizations that were flourishing in this period (ibid).

In 1889, Yeats met Maud Gonne, a beautiful actress who was beginning to devote herself to the Irish nationalist movement. It is the great romantic love of his life. Yeats devoted himself to wooing Maud Gonne and devoted much of his poetry to praising her. He developed an obsessive infatuation with Gonne, and she was to have a significant effect on his poetry and his life ever after. Yeats proposed to Maud, but was rejected because she felt that Yeats was dreamy and idealistic. Yeats proposed to Maud again in 1899 and was again rejected and he proposed to her again in 1900 and in 1901. Maud Gonne married Irish nationalist John MacBride in 1903(Wikinfo,2004:1). See also Coles(1980:4).

Yeats became so famous and successful in 1922. He enhanced "both arts and aristocracy in keeping with most of the political and historical theories he expressed in his poems" (Coles,1980:4). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923 and in 1939 Yeats died after he suffered from heart and lung conditions and general weakness(ibid). W.H. Auden eulogises Yeats beautifully with few lines from his 1939 poem, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats":

You were silly like us: your gift survived it all :
Earth, receive an honoured guest:

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William Yeats is laid to rest.

(Tran,2005:2)

3.The Interpretation of "The Second Coming"

"The Second Coming" is one of five political poems Yeats composed. It is one of the most widely read and anthologized of all his poems, uniting the poet's political and mystical concerns in an intense and visionary artistic whole.

In the first stanza the poet describes the state of the world its political upheavals, the chaos and cynicism of modern civilization, the haphazard brutality of contemporary culture. The relationship between the falcon and the falconer is the first image which is devoted to state the relationship between the civilization on the one hand and Christianity on the other. When the falconer cannot control the falcon, it means that "Christianity has lost its power; it can no longer hold society in an orderly structure...., Instead, things are flying away, falling apart; our civilization is disintegrating" (Coles,1980:54).

The confusion and disintegration in the world must surely be a sign that a revelation: a "second Coming" of the Messiah is at hand. Instead, the poet sees a sphinx-like creature moving across the desert. The poet, here, makes a comparison between the first coming of Christ after two thousand years of sleep of pre-Christian time and the second Coming of a "vast image out of spiritus Mundi". To the mortal world as saviour, but asserts that the coming cycle will be merciless and without sympathy toward its predecessor, turning the focus of its "blank and pitiless" eyes toward a new spiritual direction (Destefano,1997:5).

Destefano (ibid:6) adds that "in The Second Coming" Yeats as narrator seems to find himself alone in his assessment of the Christian redemption as he questions the nature of its Messiah's return to earth to redeem mankind for the decadence of their spiritual deviation". The poet believes that "some revelation is at hand", but he also realizes that this revelation is not Christ's but of the "vast image out of a Spiritus Mundi".

Yeats in "The Second Coming" tries to criticize the moralities that are dominating the society. The Christian people believe in the Second Coming, but the poet here uses the Second Coming symbolically and metaphorically. Yeats employs the vast and pitiless image to come instead of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of humankind. So, the Second Coming, here, is a punishment to the sinful society.

4. The Analysis of "The Second Coming" in Terms of Collocation

The analysis of Yeats' poem "The Second Coming " may depend on stating relations among the lexical sets used. To achieve such analysis, the poem will be examined stanza by stanza or line by line.

"Circling and circling in the widening gyre"-flying further and further out in ever-widening circles (Frost,2001:1). The lexical item "turning", in the original text, which is repeated in the same line seems to be associated with the lexical items(widening, gyre).The poet uses such a lexical set to certify his belief in the cyclical theory of history. The falcon goes beyond the retrieving whistle of the falconer. In Yeats' poem, the falcon represents the people, the culture, the society of the age of the falconer.

The falconer represents the core of our moral sense which binds us in a sense of the good , of right and wrong. When the falcon begins to stray too far from the falconer, the falconer's whistle brings it back to his influence and control, back to the centre. If the falcon flies too far in its circling , it is no longer controlled by the commands of the falconer, it no longer even hears the falconer. If there is a moral imperative at the centre of our flight, we seem no longer to be under its influence(Frost,2001:1-2).The association between the falcon and the falconer may be also interpreted as the relation between the society on the one hand and the religion on the other , so Christianity has lost its power upon its followers(Coles,1980:54).

"The centre cannot hold". The centre is associated with the circle , it can be interpreted as the ground on which we stand, the principles and the rules that bind us, the falconer, Christ, *Mahdi or Messiah. "Centre" may also refer to the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, Koran , Books of the Elders and Ancestors(Frost,2001:2).

The poet uses "Mere anarchy is loosed" which is in collocation with "blood-dimmed tide is loosed" he refers to the civil war in Ireland and criticizes the role of the religious men. "No Pope Priest, no clergy or Guide of fame or humility can, in the age, pretend to the power to keep the dogs of war at bay. The faithful each invoke their gods- as they always have" (Frost,2001:2).

In the second part of the poem Yeats uses lexical items which are in collocation with each other like "sands, desert, sun , shadows, desert birds". These lexical items are used to describe the place in which the 'vast image' appears. Some lexical items have been also exploited to describe the shape of the "vast image" like "body, head" and "moving, slow" as a reference to this

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vast image's slouching towards Bethlehem .The poet uses a couple of lexical items significantly which are "cradle and Bethlehem"; they have a religious denotation and they are closely related to the subject matter of the whole poem "The Second Coming".

In "The Second Coming", the poet employs (3) lexical sets in the first stanza to explain the absence of the role of Christianity as a source of power in the life of the people. Moreover, he devotes(6) lexical sets to describe the circumstance in which the Second Coming will happen and to declare that the Second Coming will be of the vast image instead of Christ the Saviour (See Table 2).

* The Twelfth Imam of Muslim Shia

Table(1) The Collocated lexical items in "The Second Coming"

No.	The lexical items	The line No.	No.	The lexical item	The line No.
1.	turning	1	13	desert	13
2.	turning	1	14	sun	15
3.	gyre	1	15	shadows	17
4.	falcon	2	16	body	14
5.	falconer	2	17	head	14
6.	anarchy	3	18	moving	16
7.	loosed	3	19	slow	16
8.	blood-dimmed	4.	20	cradle	20
9.	tide	4	21	Bethlehem	22
10.	revelation	9			
11.	Second Coming	10			
12.	sands	13			

Table(2) The Collocated lexical Sets in "The Second Coming"

No.	The collocated lexical sets in stanza No.1	No.	The collocated lexical sets in stanza No.2
1.	Turning, turning, widening gyre	1.	revelation, Second Coming
2.	Falcon, falconer	2.	sands, desert
3.	anarchy, loosed, blood-dimmed ,tide	3.	sun, shadow
		4.	body, head
		5.	Moving, slow
		6.	cradle, Bethlehem

5.Conclusions

The present study arrived at the following conclusions:

1. W.B.Yeats exploited the lexical sets successfully to achieve his aim in criticizing the modern civilization and the absence of the role of Christianity in the society.
- 2.Stylistically speaking , it can be said that the role of collocation is very clear and helpful in interpreting Yeats' "The Second Coming" since he employed about (21) lexical items (see Table1) to tackle the subject matter of the poem. The intimate relationship among the mentioned lexical sets(see Table 2) leads to presenting a frightful picture to the society whenever the role of religion, values and moralities is absent or nonsignificant.

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قصيدة (العودة الثانية) للشاعر وليم بتلر بيتس:

دراسة اسلوبية في ضوء الإقتران اللغوي

الخلاصة

يهدف البحث الى تحليل قصيدة الشاعر وليم بتلر بيتس (العودة الثانية) اسلوبياً في ضوء الاقتران اللغوي. يتكون البحث من خمسة مباحث، المبحث الأول يقدم بعض التعريفات الخاصة بالاقتران اللغوي لتسليط الضوء على ميدان دراسته. اما المبحث الثاني فيعرض حياة الشاعر. بيتس باختصار لتوضيح الاغراض الشعرية المتنوعة التي كتب الشاعر فيها وخصوصاً الاغراض السياسية.

يتركز المبحث الثالث من البحث على تأويل قصيدة (العودة الثانية) على وفق أراء بعض النقاد والكتاب. هذا ويمكن عد المبحث الرابع على انه يمثل الجانب العملي من البحث لانه يتضمن تحليل القصيدة اسلوبياً في ضوء الاقتران اللغوي. أما المبحث الخامس فقد كُرس لاستعراض الاستنتاجات التي تم التوصل إليها من البحث وختام البحث قائمة من المصادر التي تم اعتمادها في كتابة البحث.