

An Analysis of Textual Cohesion in Shelley's Poems

-- Take "A Song: Men of England" as an Example

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the cohesive devices in Shelley's revolutionary poem: A Song: Men of England. It is of great significance to discover the cohesive devices in a poem for better understanding and appreciation of the content and value of a poem.

Keywords

Shelley, Poetry, Cohesive devices.

1. Introduction

A Song: Men of England, created in August 1819, is a representative work of fighting political lyrics by Percy Bysshe Shelley, a famous British romantic poet in 19th century. The poem criticizes the dark social system of England and appeals to the working people to resist exploitation and oppression. It has a strong political appeal and becomes a paean of the British workers' movement.

2. Textual Cohesion

Textual Cohesion was first mentioned by Roman Jakobson who, in 1960, analyzed the parallel phenomenon formed by syntactic structure and repetition[1]. In 1964, M.A.K Halliday divided "cohesion" into two categories: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion[2]. Halliday & Hason in 1976 pointed out that "cohesion" is a kind of discourse semantic relationship, which is a non-structural component that expresses the coherent meaning connection between sentences. They listed five categories of cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion[3]. In 1985, Halliday & Hason broadened the research of "cohesion" and divided "cohesion" into two types: structural and non-structural cohesion[4].

Hu Zhuanglin introduced "Textual Cohesion" theory into China in 1994 and he explored the "multi-level cohesion" model. At the same time, he also regards "transitivity structure" as a kind of "cohesion", and includes speech sounds into the scope of cohesion[5].

This paper will make an analysis of poetic cohesion from the perspective of textual cohesion.

3. Textual Cohesion in a Song: Men of England

Textual Cohesion includes six aspects: overall cohesion, structural cohesion, semantic cohesion, grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and phonetic cohesion.

3.1. Overall Cohesion

A Song: Men of England has 8 stanzas, each with 4 lines. In the first 4 stanzas, Shelley asked six questions in a row, awakening the public to see through the parasitic cannibalism of the exploiting class. In the fifth stanza, the poet described the relationship between the two antagonistic classes, pointed out the injustice in the real society, and aroused the indignation of the people. In the sixth stanza, Shelley calls on the people of England to take up arms and resist

exploitation and oppression. In the last two stanzas, the poet used irony to propose: If you don't stand up and resist, then there can only be one end for the toiling people - poverty and death.

In the poem, Shelley compares and describes the contradictions of the two antagonistic classes, pointing out the methods to be taken to resolve the contradictions and the consequences of insensitivity. This "contradictions, method and consequence" type of logical relationship makes the poet's irritating emotions progress through the text. The description of contradictions exposed the darkness of society at the time and the nature of the ruling class, affirmed that the working people were the creators of social wealth, expressed the poet's political views, and embodied Shelley's expectations for the proletarian revolution.

3.2. Structural Cohesion

Halliday believes that in order to express a complete thought, whether it is verbally or in writing, people will organize words and sentences into discourse. Discourse is different from disordered single sentences, with three characteristics of cohesion, relevance and organization[6]. Structural cohesion includes parallel structure, theme structure and information structure. Based on the features of the selected poem, the discussion here mainly focuses on the parallel structure.

There are a lot of parallel structures in *A Song: Men of England*. First of all, from the perspective of stanzas, the first to third stanzas are all interrogative sentences, and they all begin with *wherefore*, which makes the first three stanzas closely connected and indivisible, playing the role of contextual cohesion. In addition, as the example shows, the four-line verses in the fifth stanza are all "The + noun + *ye* + verb, another + verb" structure. The parallel sentences make the poem easier to read. At the same time, the sixth stanza uses a sentence pattern of "verb + noun,...", which not only realizes the internal parallelism of this stanza, but also perfectly takes into account the external parallelism of the previous stanza.

Structural cohesion enhances the structural beauty and the rhythm of the poem, highlights the connotations and strengthen the connections.

3.3. Semantic Cohesion

Semantic cohesion refers to the "cohesion" of the text with the help of meaning or content in a specific context. Semantic cohesion generally uses rhetoric, structure and logic. This article mainly discusses rhetoric.

In *A Song: Men of England*, the poet uses a variety of rhetorical devices: metaphors, symbols, synonymy and irony. The lords and tyrants in the first stanza, the drones in the second stanza, and the impostor and the idle in the sixth stanza are all metaphors for capitalists, exposing the dark injustice of the society at that time and the nature of capitalists' greedy exploitation while playing a role of contextual cohesion. The use of metaphors makes the language popular and visual, which can greatly enhance the expressive power of the work.

In addition, there are 6 symbols in the poem, namely cradle, grave, sweat, blood, tomb, and sepulchre. Among them, grave, tomb and sepulchre are located in the second and last stanza respectively, and they all mean "grave". The symbols not only form a semantic link, but also increase the profound connotation of the poem, and deepen the theme of the poem. Cradle and grave and sweat and blood form a connection through semantic complementarity, exposing the reality that working people are living in dire conditions.

3.4. Grammatical Cohesion

There are many grammatical means with cohesive function, including reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and so on.

Reference refers to the use of pronouns and other words that express grammatical relations to express semantic relations. Under normal circumstances, words representing people, things,

and concepts are replaced by referents. It, that, one, those, then, here and there are all commonly used referents. The natural cohesion between sentences can be realized with referents. In *A Song: Men of England*, the most obvious referential pronouns are *ye*, *your* and *another*. Among them, *another* refers to the capitalist, and can also refer to the image of the ruler mentioned in the previous stanza. For example, the lords and tyrants in the first stanza, the drones in the second stanza, and the impostor and the idle in the sixth stanza, play the role of contextual cohesion. Similar to *another*, *ye* also echoes *Men of England* and *Bees of England* in the poem. At the same time, *ye* indicated that the poet used the first-person perspective to advise the people of England, which can better express the poet's ideological intention, political position and the theme of the poem. In addition, the work also includes the referential words *it*, *those*, *these* and *that*, which play a role in contextual cohesion through reference, anaphora and allusion.

Illipsis refers to the default of some basic structural elements of sentences in the text. Illipsis can avoid repetition and textual cohesion. In the sixth stanza, "Sow seed, -but let no tyrant reap; Find wealth,-let no impostor heap; Weave robes,-let not the idle wear; Forge arms,-in your defence to bear. ", these four clauses are basically the same in sentence structure. But the transitional conjunction is omitted in the second to fourth sentences, which plays a role of semantic cohesion.

Conjunctions are mainly used in complex sentences as semantic ties between sentences to form cohesion. There are three common connecting elements: prepositions in clauses, conjunctions between clauses, and complex clauses. In this poem, the conjunctions mainly include *and*, *but*, *or*, *and*, *with* and *till*. The first line of the sixth stanza is "Sow seed, -but let no tyrant reap;" "*but*" is a turning point of the previous content, connecting the two sentences before and after it. In the fourth stanza, "*or*" plays a turning role in the content, emphasizing the darkness and injustice of the society and the distress of the working people. In the fourth line of the second stanza, "drain your sweat-*and*, drink your blood?" "*and*" means "not only, but also", which plays a supplementary and progressive role in tone. In the eighth stanza, "with plough and spade and hoe and loom..., till fair England be your parting.", "*till*" naturally connects the first and second sentences from the content. And in "Or what is it *ye* buy so dear With your pain and with your fear?", "*with*" plays an accompanying role, which naturally links the first and second sentences semantically.

3.5. Lexical Cohesion

Repetition, synonymy, antonym, hypernym and hyponym, complementarity, whole and part relationships constitute lexical cohesion.

The repeated use of a word, or the use of its synonyms or synonyms, can make the text have tangible cohesive elements. Many words appear repeatedly in the poem, such as: *ye* (12 times), *your* (12 times), *another* (5 times), *wherefore* (4 times), *weave* (4 times), *forge* (3 times), *toil* (2 times), *Grave* (2 times). The repeated use of *ye*, *your*, and *another* as pronouns clearly shows that the poet and the working masses stand in the same political position and are opposed to the capitalists. *Ye* and *your* appear more frequently than *another*, indicating the importance of "you" as the working masses, and calling on the English people, who are the absolute majority, to take up arms and fight against the minority capitalists.

The use of synonyms include: *leisure*, *comfort*, *calm*, *pain*, and *fear* in the fourth stanza. *Drain* and *drink*, *grave*, *tomb* and *sepulchre* in the second stanza. Among them, the *leisure*, *comfort*, and *calm* in the fourth stanza are ostensibly explained from the perspective of the working people, but they are actually a satire of the capitalists' living conditions and the injustices of the society at that time. This group of words is not only a summary of the living conditions of the working people in the first three stanzas, but also the beginning of the poet's use of contrast to describe social injustice. In the second stanza, *drain* and *drink* have similar meanings and echo

each other, revealing that the parasites squeeze the fat and drink the blood of the laboring people. The three synonyms of grave, tomb, and sepulchre are located in the second and last stanza respectively, highlighting the theme of the poem: the people of England need to resist, or they will perish.

In terms of antonyms, like weave and wears in the fifth stanza and deck and dwells in the second line of the seventh stanza have opposite meanings. Weave and deck mirror the process of toiling people spinning and weaving cloth and building houses. Wears and dwells reflect the shameless behavior of the exploiting class to get something for nothing and deprive others of the fruits of their labor.

As for the complementarity of words, drones and Bees, cradle and grave constitute complementary relationships. Among them, drones and Bees are located in the second and third stanza respectively, and the pair of words echo each other. Using the natural relationship between the two in nature, the poet describes the working people as hardworking "workers" and the exploiting classes as lazy "drones", vividly revealing the relationship between the ruling and the ruled. Cradle and grave reflect the plight of the working people in England. Cradle represents the beginning of life, grave the end of life. Used in combination, the pair of words reveal that the working people in England have been working hard throughout their lives, and are the creators of wealth. In addition, this contrast is also consistent with the overall tone of the work.

At the lexical level, collocation as a means of textual cohesion involves all semantically related terms. For example, drain your sweat and drink your blood vividly expose the greedy nature of capitalists to drain people's sweat and drink their blood, and express the poet's sympathy for the working people.

3.6. Phonetic Cohesion

To a great extent, phonetic cohesion is realized by using the same or similar phonemes repeatedly. Because poetic discourse pays attention to rhythm and rhyme, phonetic cohesion plays an irreplaceable role in poetry. "The broad phonetic model includes not only alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme, but also prosody and iambic, etc." [7].

A Song: Men of England has 8 stanzas, each with 4 lines. The basic metrical pattern is iambic tetrameter, and the sonorous and powerful rhythm makes readers feel refreshed. There are 15 pairs of perfect rhymes in the whole poem, which constitute the echo and cohesion of the works at the phonetic level. AABB-style rhymes make the poem short, vigorous and powerful, and enhance the sense of rhythm in reading, which is in line with the content of the poem.

It should be noted that although the overarching rhyming structure of the poem is AABB, the last two lines of the poem end with "fair" and "sepulchre" respectively, so it is unrhymed. "sepulchre" breaks the whole metrical structure of the whole poem and makes the readers pay attention to it involuntarily, thus enhancing the irony that if you don't resist, you will dig your own grave.

In addition, the poem uses a large amount of alliteration, consonance and assonance. Alliteration includes: lords, lay, low; drain, drink; weave, wears; deck, dwells; trace, tomb. Consonance includes: robes, tyrants; weapon, chain. Assonance includes: cradle, grave; shake, chain; plough, hoe; weave, wing-sheet. These not only enhance the sense of rhythm and musical effect of the poem, but also highlight the meaning of words and the theme of the poem. At the same time, there are many explosive sounds like b, p, t, d, k and g used in the whole poem. Explosive sounds make people feel urgent and powerful when reading the poem, echoing Shelley's theme of calling on English people to take the initiative and boldly fight against the exploiting class.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the cohesive devices on six levels in Shelley's poem: A Song: Men of England in order to arouse readers' attention to cohesive devices, interpret Shelley's revolutionary ideas at an enhanced level and appreciate the aesthetic value of his works.

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