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SEMANTIC PREFERENCE AND SEMANTIC PROSODY IN REPRESENTATION OF THE CHARACTERS IN "DIARY OF A WIMPY KID"

ID 1509

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1 INTRODUCTION

- Semantic prosody (SP) and Semantic preference (SPR) have been widely investigated in linguistic analysis; however, there is a limited number of studies applying these concepts to explore character representation in children's literature. This study addressed this knowledge gap by investigating the character representation of Frank Heffley in the first five books of the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series (DOWK) by Jeff Kinney through SPR and SP analysis.
- SP and SPR are two key concepts in the study of implicit attitudes and evaluations and recurring themes associated with words and phrases. SP, for instance, reveals the "connotative coloring" a word gains from its co-occurrence with other words. Scholars Sinclair, Louw, and Partington analyze SP and SPR, providing valuable tools for understanding people's representation in discourse, highlighting their importance in linguistics.
- With the use of a specialized corpus and the Sketch Engine corpus analysis tool of concordance search (KWIC), compiled from the first five books of DOWK, the study identifies a number of key themes associated with the father, Frank Heffley (node word "dad"). Moreover, it was discovered that from the SP analysis of collocates co-occuring with the node word "dad", the father is evaluated with more positive than negative prosody.

2 OBJECTIVE

The identified gaps in the current state of knowledge underscore the need for further investigation into SP and SPR in a corpus to uncover the attitudinal and evaluative representation, gaining a deeper understanding of how the identity of the character father in DOWK is constructed.

- The first objective is to investigate SPR to uncover the key themes related to Frank Heffley that emerge within the context of Greg's diary.
- Importantly, the father's SP, through its focus on evaluative meaning, can be explored by looking at obtained collocational patterns to reveal the underlying identity of the father's portrait, gaining a deeper understanding of how positive and negative identities are constructed in Greg's attitude toward his father.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Corpus linguistics uses large electronic collections of authentic language data, called corpora, to study language. It's an empirical method that analyzes natural language patterns, moving beyond linguistic intuition. Researchers use specialized software, such as concordances (e.g., Sketch Engine in this study), to identify word occurrences and co-occurrences. This approach uncovers subtle linguistic phenomena like SPR and SP. It provides structured data for linguistic research, language teaching, and discourse analysis. For this study, corpus linguistics is foundational for investigating character representation in DOWK.

Semantic prosody is the attitudinal meaning or connotative coloring a word acquires from its collocates (words it habitually appears with). This "coloring" can be positive, negative, or neutral and reveals implicit attitudes, evaluations, and pragmatic functions. For example, Sinclair (1987) showed "set in" often co-occurs with unpleasant subjects like "rot" or "despair", giving it a negative prosody. SP is particularly beneficial in children's literature for exploring how language conveys ideologies, power dynamics, and societal norms.

Semantic preference refers to a word's tendency to co-occur with a set of other words that belong to a particular semantic field or meaning category. Unlike SP which focuses on emotional "coloring," SPR is concerned with the recurring themes or topics that typically surround a word. The word "large" often shows a preference for words related to "quantities and size," such as amounts, numbers, and scale. SPR is a crucial concept derived from Sinclair's extended unit of meaning model (1996) for uncovering hidden patterns of usage and how language constructs meaning, moving beyond intuition.

SP and SPR are currently underutilized in the analysis of children's literature, despite their potential. Knowles & Malmkjaer (1996) found SP useful for examining Victorian children's narratives, while Zuraida and Simatupang (2023) found positive portrayal of "Dad" and "Mom" in Alec Greven's books, but their findings were potentially stereotypical.

6 CONCLUSION

Despite readers' mixed opinions on DOWK characters, this study found Greg's dad (Frank Heffley) is largely represented positively rather than negatively. He is depicted as a realistic, well-meaning but sometimes flawed father figure.
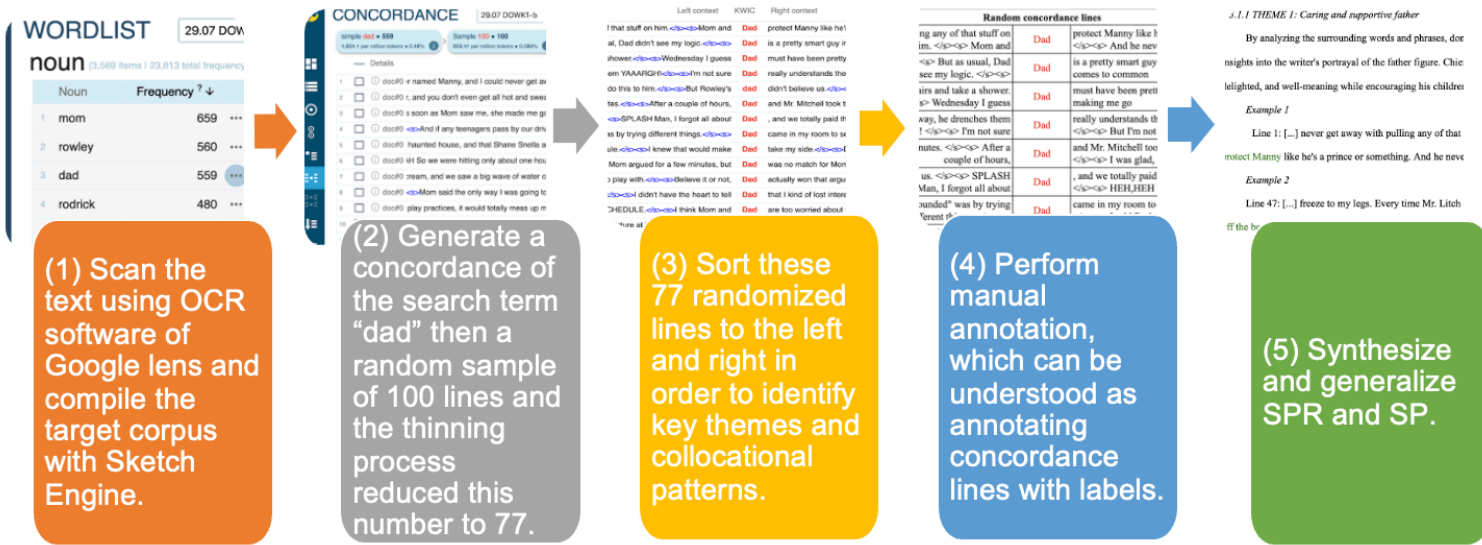
On the theoretical level, this approach supports the foundation of the constructionist view of language. This means that the meaning of words is not inherent in themselves but is created by the appearance of them together with words and phrases around them in a specific context. Subsequently, the analysis of concordance lines, SPR, and SP aid in the understanding of how authors control language use to shape our perceptions toward characters (Heritage & Taylor, 2024).

The findings drawn from the current research have profound implications for English-majored students, English language teaching, and literary analysis. On a wider level, the results gained from analyzing character representation can go beyond simply literature and linguistics to make significant contributions to social and cultural studies.

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4 METHODOLOGY

The DOWK series was selected due to its rich source for examining portrayal of characters in a modern American family.
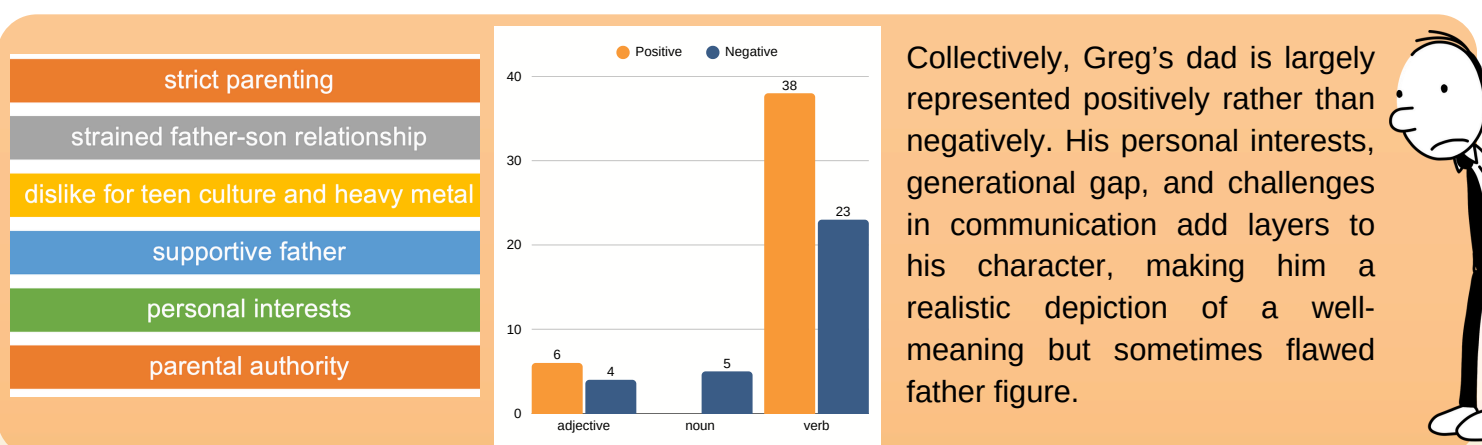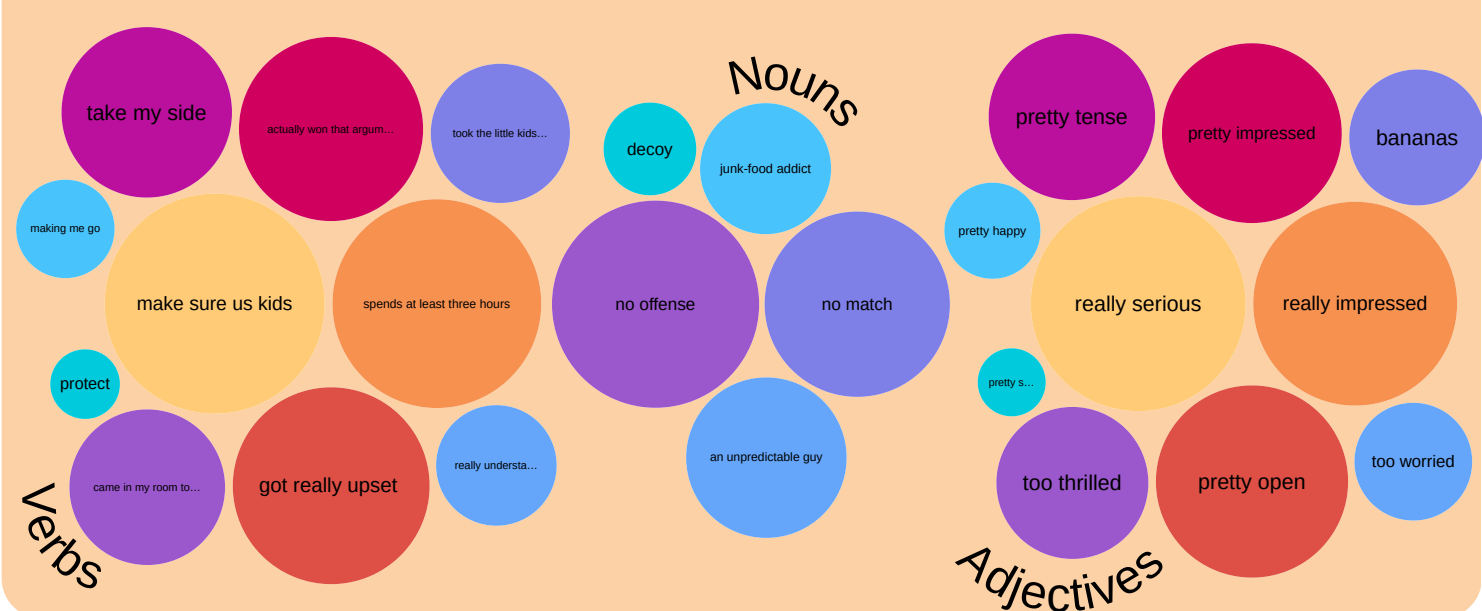
Hence, this is a valuable resource for investigating the struggle of adolescent and family influence on shaping characters' identity.

To achieve this, concordance analysis is employed since Cheng (2013) argued that the macro stages of identifying a SP involves both choosing a relevant search and scanning data in the corpus for identifying collocations and "then translating these into a prosody, to convert data into evidence".

(1) Scan the text using OCR software of Google lens and compile the target corpus with Sketch Engine.

(2) Generate a concordance of the search term "dad" then a random sample of 100 lines and the thinning process reduced this number to 77.

(3) Sort these 77 randomized lines to the left and right in order to identify key themes and collocational patterns.

(4) Perform manual annotation, which can be understood as annotating concordance lines with labels.

(5) Synthesize and generalize SPR and SP.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

SEMANTIC PREFERENCCE

Concordance line (left)	Node	Concordance line (right)	Collocate	Pattern	Theme
of stuff with us to keep him entertained. </s><s> Believe me, Mom and	Dad	never let me bring anything to church when I was his age. </s><s> Mom	never let me bring anything to church when I was his age	verb phrase	Strict parenting
it. </s><s> When I got home this morning, I went back to bed until	Dad	woke me up and told me it was time to go to the soccer game. </s><s> It	it was time to go to the soccer game	verb phrase	Caring and supportive father
freeze to my legs. </s><s> Every time Mr. Litch called a huddle,	Dad	made me get off the bench and go join the rest of the team. </s><s> Have	made me get off the bench and go join the rest of the team	verb phrase	Caring and supportive father
I really had was to try and find Dad. </s><s> Then I remembered:	Dad	is a junk-food addict. </s><s> I knew he'd eventually turn up at the	a junk-food addict	noun phrase	a junk-food addict
. </s><s> And once he recovered, he didn't look happy to see me. </s><s>	Dad	made me get out of his room, and then he slammed the door. </s><s> I'm	made me get out of his room and then he slammed the door	verb phrase	Strict parenting
or something. or play catch in the But the thing is, me and	Dad	just aren't cut out to be for that kind of father-son stuff. </s>	aren't cut out to be for that kind of father-son stuff	verb phrase	Strained father-son relationship

SEMANTIC PROSODY

Concordance lines	Collocates	Positive prosody	Negative prosody	Neutral prosody
[...] his side of the bed to make it look like he was asleep. Mom didn't find out about Dad's decoy until after the movie was over.	decoy		✓	
[...] I really had was to try and find Dad. Then I remembered: Dad is a junk-food addict. I knew he'd eventually turn up at the [...]	junk-food addict		✓	
[...] because it looked like an awful lot like his handwriting. But Dad's kind of an unpredictable guy, so I guess wait until Sunday to [...]	an unpredictable guy		✓	
[...] Dad take my side. Dad and Mom argued for a few minutes, but Dad was no match for Mom. So that means tomorrow I've got to [...]	no match		✓	
[...] Dad's in charge of helping me with my homework. No offense to Dad, but Mom is WAY better at homework help than he is. When Mom [...]	no offense		✓	

Nouns / Verbs / Adjectives

- strict parenting
- strained father-son relationship
- dislike for teen culture and heavy metal
- supportive father
- personal interests
- parental authority

Collectively, Greg's dad is largely represented positively rather than negatively. His personal interests, generational gap, and challenges in communication add layers to his character, making him a realistic depiction of a well-meaning but sometimes flawed father figure.