Semantic Analysis in The Short Story: The Gift of The Magi

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyze the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry by examining the field of semantic studies, which focused on analyzing the existence of sentences, utterances, and presuppositions. This study focused on interpreting the meaning of sentences, utterances, and presuppositions in the short story "The Gift of the Magi," as well as understanding the meaning of the purpose of each semantic analysis in the short story. The purpose of this study was to add insight into how to analyze a short story and interpret the meaning of a sentence, utterance, and presupposition that contributed to the narrative of the short story. The result of this research used a descriptive qualitative method in taking and analyzing data. This research used several theories from experts to interpret the data through sentence, utterance, and presupposition. This analysis showed that the story's narrative is shaped by both what is said and how it is said in context.

Keywords: semantic, analysis, short story, O. Henry, The Gift of Magi

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INTRODUCTION

According to Risdianto (2011) as cited in Ummah et al. (2020), literature is generally divided into three groups; respectively prose, drama and poetry. By that definition, literary works are created by writers to share thoughts, ideas, and feelings with readers through various media. They come in different forms like prose, poetry, and drama, and can be either fiction or non-fiction. Each literary works has deeper meanings and purposes that are connected to how they are structured. This research focuses on analyzing the three semantic elements, such as sentences, utterances, and presupposition, in a short story.

A sentence is defined as a unit of speech whose grammatical structure conforms to the laws of the language and serves as a chief means of conveying thought. Not only it is used as a mean of communicating, but also a way for the speaker to show their attitude toward it. This view is supported by linguists such as O.I. Musayev, V.L. Kaushanskaya, and R.L. Kovner as cited in Aliyeva (2016). Following this, there's another semantic element called utterance that is used for the data of this research. According to Aliyeva (2016), the sentence meaning is predictable directly from the grammatical and lexical features of the sentence, while the utterance meaning includes all the various types of meaning. From this explanation, utterance needs a different analysis approach compared to sentence where we can analyze its structure to be identified. Lastly, presupposition is also a necessary semantic element for this research. Semantic presupposition is held to be a relation between sentences. It is often defined by entailment along the following lines (Oualif, 2017) as cited in Fitriani (2021).

The three semantic elements, sentences, utterances, and presuppositions, can be found in various types of literary texts, including short stories, and contribute significantly to the interpretation of meaning beyond the surface level. The first related study titled An Analysis of Figurative Language in Short Story 'The Happy Prince' by Oscar Wilde written by Mentari (2023), analyzes different types of figurative language such as simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, symbol, and hyperbole. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research focused primarily on the use of language, aiming to explore how figures of speech enhance the expressiveness and emotional impact of a narrative. While the study did not directly address the semantic framework of sentence, utterance, and presupposition, Mentari's analysis shares a similar intent to understand how meaning is constructed through linguistic choices.

The second study related to this semantic study, written by Swarniti (2024), titled An Analysis of Short Story 'The Little Match Girl' by Hans Christian Andersen in Semantics Perspective sets more closely with the semantic focus of this study. Both Swarniti's and this study analyze the semantic structures of a short story, but with different directions. While Swarniti focuses on the word relationships in the narrative, while this study focuses on structural semantics including sentence composition, speech acts (utterances), and underlying assumptions (presuppositions). Both studies highlight the significance of language in shaping narrative impact, but their approaches vary in linguistic scope.

The last research related to this study is from a journal titled Semantic Analysis of Hyponym on "Hank and the Horse" Short Story on YouTube written by Kusumawardhani (2021), which is focusing on the use of hyponymy as the semantics features through the short story. Both are using descriptive qualitative methods to analyze the data within the semantics scope and focusing on meaning in the language, though each has different goal of the analysis. While Kusumawardhani's study focuses only on hyponymy, this study covers broader topic of the semantic elements, specifically sentences, utterances, and presuppositions.

By comparing these three studies with this study of semantic analysis in short stories, it allows us to have deeper insight and comprehension into how meaning operates at multiple linguistic levels within a single

narrative, offering readers a more refines understanding of character, intention, and balanced tone of the story.

This research focuses on a short story titled The Gift of Magi as the subject matter to be analyzed the three mentioned semantic elements. The short story is written by O. Henry and was originally published on Dec 10, 1905, in the newspaper called The New York Sunday World. The story revolves around a young married couple, Jim and Della, who live in poverty but still want to give each other meaningful Christmas presents. By studying its content, this research aims to analyze how using fewer words can communicate deeper meaning using literary techniques and metaphorical expression. The use of literary devices in short stories helps authors express ideas that go beyond the literal meaning of the words. While word choice is important in all forms of creative writing, it is especially crucial in short stories. This study benefits the readers who want to understand the deeper meaning of the short story The Gift of the Magi, not only through its literal meaning, but also the hidden or unimplied meaning behind the characters' words and actions. Other than that, this study encourages readers to improve their critical reading skills by observing how the languages are being used in a narrative structure.
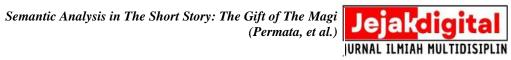
METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research uses a descriptive qualitative methodology as the application of the study since it is concerned in the form of words rather than numbers. According to Bodgan and Biklen (2007) as cited in Sugiyono (2010), it is stated that qualitative research is descriptive and the data is gathered in the form of words or images, not numbers. This approach produces descriptive data such as spoken or written words from the research subject, whether from people or textual sources.

The data collection method for this research was carried out by reading the content and proceeded by analyzing the several sentences, utterances, and presuppositions found in the short story The Gift of the Magi. The primary instruments in this research were the authors themselves, who collaboratively participated in analyzing and identifying the sentences, utterances, and presuppositions in the short story. Each author identified the semantic elements and grouped into each category through individual judgment, interpretation, and observation, based on their respective comprehension of the text. Finally, the data was organized systematically according to the focus of the research while including the theories from reliable sources to support the analysis of the data. The final interpretation of the data clarifies how a character's intention can be interpreted through the structure of the language or through unspoken assumptions embedded in the narrative, both of which contribute to how the story unfolds and how the characters drive the narrative forward.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data findings in The Gift of Magi reveal the semantic analysis based on theoretical structure supported by theories from experts. The result of the data is presented in a table followed.

No	Data	The Type	Analysis
1	Three times Della counted it.	Sentence	The clause of the data clearly shows a grammatical structured sentence. According to Kroeger (2005) as cited in Aziz et al. (2023), every clause has grammatical relations (such as subject, primary object, secondary object, oblique) and corresponding semantic roles (such as agent, patient, theme, etc.). Based on that definition, "*Della*" acts as the agent of the semantic role, while the verb "*counted*" determines how many and what kinds of arguments appear in the data.
2	"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.	Utterance	According to Rudin (2022), utterances containing tag questions particularly when delivered with rising intonation tend to function as biased questions, as they reflect an underlying presupposition or expectation from the speaker. In the result of analysis, it's utterance because show how a spoken expression that shows what she wants or needs. Since an utterance is any spoken or written statement made by someone, this sentence is clearly an example of that.
3	"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously.	Presupposition	According to Hornby (1995) as cited Yuniardi (2015), a presupposition is something assumed to be true, and to presuppose means to believe something before it's proven. Based on the analysis, this line contains presupposes because it assumes that the person has a longer hair before and suddenly cut off their hair, even though it's in an interrogative form.
4	Jim would have pulled out his watch....	Sentence	According to Kroeger (2005) as cited in Aziz et al. (2023), every clause involves arguments that carry both grammatical relations (such as subject, object, oblique) and semantic roles (such as agent, theme, patient, etc.). The data can be identified as a sentence based on the definition mentioned with "*Jim*" acts as the subject and agent of the role, and "*pulled out*" is the verb, and "*his watch*" is the direct object or theme.
5	It surely had been made for Jim and no one else.	Sentence	According to Kroeger (2005) as cited in Adisiswanto et al. (2023), the sentence *"It surely had been made for Jim and no one else"* is a passive clause that fulfills the criteria of a sentence because it contains a grammatical subject *it* and a verb *had been made*, and expresses a complete proposition. Semantically, the subject it functions as the patient because it undergoes the action of being made, while the phrase for Jim and no one else serves as the beneficiary, since Jim is the one for whom the action is done. This mapping between grammatical relations and semantic roles aligns with

			Kroeger's theory of argument structure.
6	She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result.	Sentence	According to Kroeger's theory (2005) as cited in Aziz et al. (2023), verbs assign grammatical relations such as subject, object, and oblique, and each of these is associated with specific semantic roles like agent, patient, theme, or location. In this case, the subject "*she*" carries the agent role as the initiator of the action, while the noun phrase "*every penny she could*" functions as the theme or patient, undergoing the action of being put aside.
7	"Give it to me quick," said Della.	Utterance	According to Allott (2023), this command by Della can be seen as an instance of spontaneous and unencapsulated utterance interpretation. Allott argues that understanding an utterance goes far beyond decoding the literal meaning of words; it requires drawing inferences based on contextual knowledge, speaker intention, and background beliefs. In Della's case, the utterance *"Give it to me quick"* is not just a literal imperative sentence, it is interpreted instantly by the hearer (Madame Sofronie) through unconscious inference. The hearer recognizes Della's urgency (expressed by the word quick), emotional state, and the transactional context (she has agreed to sell her hair). The meaning of the utterance is thus not just "give something" but "give something quickly, because the speaker is emotionally distressed and, in a rush, showing semantic enrichment based on inference.
8	"Don't you like me just as well, anyhow?"	Utterance	According to Rudin (2022), utterances containing negative polar questions, especially with rising intonation, function as biased questions because they carry an underlying expectation from the speaker. This is an utterance as it expresses a spoken thought or feeling, revealing the speaker's emotional need for reassurance.

			Since an utterance is any spoken expression conveying intent or meaning, this sentence clearly fits that definition.
9.	Suddenly she whirled from the window...	Sentence	According to Kroeger's theory (2005) as cited in Aziz et al. (2023), grammatical relations in active clauses include subject, primary object, secondary object, and oblique, with corresponding semantic roles such as agent, location, and source. In the sentence *"Suddenly she whirled from the window,"* the subject "*she*" functions grammatically as the subject and semantically as the agent, while the prepositional phrase "*from the window*" serves as an oblique argument with the semantic role of source. This aligns with the framework proposed in their study, where intransitive verbs like "*whirled*" take a single core argument (the subject) and may include obliques to mark spatial references.
10	Many a happy hour she had spent planning...	Sentence	Active clauses in English can be analyzed through grammatical relations such as subject and object, and their associated semantic roles like agent or theme. In the sentence, the noun phrase "*she*" functions as the subject and plays the semantic role of agent, while "*many a happy hour*" is the object (or theme), and the phrase "*had spent planning*" can be interpreted as an adjunct or oblique providing further semantic context to the theme. This aligns with Kroeger's (2005) framework as cited in Aziz et al. (2023).
11.	Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.	Presupposition	This sentence contains a presupposition from the phrase "*pulled down her hair*" and "*its full length.*" According to Yule (1996), existential presupposition occurs when the existence of an entity is taken for granted in the utterance. In this case, the phrase "her hair" presupposes that the character has hair. Additionally, the phrase "*its full length*" presupposes that the woman, Della, has a hair had a prior, known length before being altered. The phrases "*fall to its full length*" imply a prior state that portrays the hair was previously not in that state, or her hair was previously up.

12.	"It'll grow out again--you won't mind, will you?"	Utterance	According to Rudin (2022), utterances that contain tag questions, especially when spoken with rising intonation at the end, function similarly to what he describes as biased questions. These utterances do not strongly commit the speaker to the proposition but instead invite the addressee to confirm or deny it. In this case, Della is expressing her hope that Jim will not be upset, but she does not state this as a firm belief. The sentence "*You won't mind, will you?*" demonstrates a kind of partial commitment and simultaneously seeks Jim's agreement, which matches the interactional nature of rising intonation described in Rudin's theory.
13.	"I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs."	Utterance	According to Rudin (2022), declarative sentences spoken with standard falling intonation signal full speaker commitment to the truth of the proposition. Based on the

			analysis, it is an utterance because it is a spoken or written sentence said by someone in a specific moment. An utterance is any expression that someone says out loud or writes, especially during a conversation. In this case, the speaker is explaining their action and intention, which means they are communicating a message clearly to someone else. That's why it is considered an utterance.
14.	She stood at the looking-glass for a long time.	Sentence	According to Kroeger (2005) as cited in Adisiswanto et al. (2023), the sentence "*She stood at the looking-glass for a long time.*" is an active clause with one core argument. The subject "*she*" carries the semantic role of agent, and an oblique phrase "*at the looking-glass*" has the role of location. The verb "*stood*" is intransitive, requiring only the subject to form a well-structured sentence. CHECKIN JUSEYO
15,	The magi, as you know, were wise men— wonderfully wise men...	Presupposition	According to Hornby (1995) as cited in Yuniardi (2015), a presupposition refers to something taken as true from the outset, and to presuppose means to hold a belief about something before it is confirmed by evidence. Based on the analysis, the data presented is presupposition because it assumes that the reader already knows who the magi are, that they existed, and that they brought gifts to the Christ-child. The phrase "*as you know*" shows that the speaker treats this information as shared knowledge that

			doesn't need to be explained.
16.	While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home.	Sentence	According to Aziz et al (2023) based on Kroeger's theory (2005), grammatical relations such as subject and oblique, and semantic roles such as agent, patient, and location, are assigned based on the verb and the syntactic structure of the clause. In this line, the clause "*take a look at the home*" consists of a subject "*we*" (implied) as the agent and a prepositional phrase ("*at the home*" as an oblique with the semantic role of location. Meanwhile, in the subordinate clause, "*the mistress of the home*" serves as the subject and carries the theme or patient role, undergoing a change of state "gradually subsiding". Thus, the sentence aligns with Kroeger's framework as applied in the study.
17.	She cluttered out of the door and down the stairs to the street.	Presupposition	According to Yule (1996), existential presupposition occurs when the existence of an entity is taken for granted by the speaker and not questioned by the listener. Based on the analysis, it's a presupposition because these facts are not explained in the sentence, but the listener or reader understands them as already known or true. That's what makes it a presupposition, it's background information that the speaker expects the listener to accept as true.
18.	And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"	Utterance	According to Halliday (1989) as cited in Ni et al. (2022), understanding the implied meaning of an utterance relies heavily on context, as it clarifies the reasons behind saying something expresses an emotional reaction. The

			phrase "Oh, oh!" is a spontaneous exclamation, showing surprise, fear, or distress from the subject. Though not a full sentence, this utterance carries significant meaning within the narrative, and its interpretation depends heavily on the surrounding events.
19.	When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason.	Presupposition	As explained by Yule (1996), structural presuppositions are triggered by specific grammatical constructions such as subordinate clauses introduced by temporal conjunctions like *"when"*. The clause *"when Della reached home"* presupposes that Della had previously been away from home. In addition, the main clause *"her mind intoxication gave away"* presupposes that her mind was previously not quiet, indicating a change of emotional or mental state. These presuppositions are not explicitly stated, but they are inferred from the structure of the sentence. Hence, the use of the temporal structure supports Yule's theory that certain linguistic forms inherently carry presupposed meaning.
20	He needed a new overcoat...	Sentence	According to Kroeger (2005) as cited in Aziz et al. (2023), in analyzing active clauses, each verb must assign grammatical relations, such as subject, object, or oblique, and each of these relations is associated with semantic roles like agent, patient, theme, etc., depending on the meaning conveyed by the verb and clause structure. In the sentence, "he" shows its role as the subject and agent, "needed" acts as the verb that shows the purpose of the subject, as he is the one feeling the need. The noun phrase "a new overcoat" is the object and serves as the theme, representing the item involved in the mental state. With this analysis, the data clarifies itself as a sentence by applying the Kroeger's framework (2005).

CONCLUSION

The short story The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry presents a touching romantic narrative set during the Christmas season. Through O. Henry's distinctive storytelling style, the narrative subtly conveys meaning beyond the literal text. There are a few semantic elements that are contained within the short story, such as sentences, utterances, and presuppositions. Each data is found to be structured accordingly through the theoretical structure of semantic which uncover how language plays a role on developing the plot, revealing how Della's intentions and emotional journey are shaped and expressed through linguistic structure. This research demonstrates how semantics enhances the depth of meaning in literary narratives, especially in portraying the themes of this short story: love, sacrifice, and communication. By interpreting how meaning is constructed, this analysis shows that linguistic choices, from sentences, utterances, and presuppositions, are effective on revealing how the narrative unfold while contribute to evoking the reader's emotional response.

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