The Significance of Word Connotation in Interpreting Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib ": A Semantic-Stylistic Study

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Abstract:

The present study aimsat presenting a semantic-stylistic interpretation of Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" in terms of the significance of the connotation of the employedlexical items .Thetheory of Roland Barthes "the French literary critic" is adopted as the theoretical base to emphasize the significanceof the connotative meaning as it is presented through the employed lexical items in the poem. It is a semantic-stylistic study since it aims at interpreting the poem in terms of the connotative meaning of the employed lexical items in the poem and the way such a meaning is conveyed should be taken in a consideration. The connotative meaning has been conveyed through comparisons (i.e.simile and metaphor) .The paper contains a literature review that refers to the definitions of the word as an element of poetry and what is meant by the semantic-stylistic interpretation . The paper ends up with several conclusions , an appendix , and a list of references.

Key words : semantics , connotation , lexical item .

أهمية المعنى الايحائي للمفردة في تأويل قصيدة اللورد بايرن "هلاك سنحاريب"

دراسة دلالية – اسلوبية

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ملخص البحث:

تهدف الدراسةُ الحالية الى تقديم تأويلاً دلالياً –اسلوبياً لقصيدة الشاعر اللورد بايرن "هلاك سنحاريب " في ضوء أهمية المعنى الايحائي (الضمني) للمفردات التي تم توظيفها في القصيدة. لقد تمّ تبني نظرية رولاند بارثيز (الناقد الأدبي الفرنسي) كقاعدةٍ نظريةٍ للتأكيد على أهمية المعنى الايحائي (الضمني)، وتم تقديمه من خلال المفردات الموظفة في القصيدة.

تُعدُّ هذه الدراسة دراسةٌ دلالية – اسلوبية، إذ إنّها تهدفُ إلى تأويل القصيدة في ضوء المعنى الايحائي (الضمني) للمفردات الموظفة. إنّ الاسلوب الذي اعُتمدَ لإيصال ذلك المعنى قد أُخذ بنظر الاعتبار، فلقد تم إيصال المعنى الايحائي (الضمني) بواسطة عقد المقارنات بالتشبيه تارةً و بالاستعارة تارةً اخرى. ويحتوي البحث عرضاً نظرياً لتعريفاتٍ للمفردة كعنصرٍ من عناصر الشعر والمعنى الايحائي (الضمني)، وما يُقصدُ بالتأويل الدلالي – الاسلوبي. ُختم البحث ببعض الاستنتاجات وملحق وقائمةٍ بالمصادر .

الكلمات المفتاحية : علم الدلالة اللغوية ، المعنى الايحائي ، المفردة .

Introduction

The dependence on connotative meaning of the employed lexical items is advantageous in interpreting the literary text which is intended to be studied.The connotation of the employed lexical items tends to be highly significant in interpreting Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib". The study is limited to emphasize the significance of the connotation of the employed lexical items in Lord Byron's poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib". The theory of Roland Barthes about the "order of signification" is adopted for the sake of interpreting the poem.

Roland Barthes' theory depends on the relationship between a sign and signifier / signified to produce the explicit meaning then the associative meaning . This principle is called the " Order of Signification" (Nadira , 2018:12) . The order of signification contains denotation and connotation. The first order signifies denotation which is the literal meaning that can be found in the dictionary . The second order of signification is connotation or the associative meaning . The connotation of the word refers to the association between the word and a reference to certain situation which is far from the literal meaning of that word , so it is shift from the original literal meaning of the word. See (Figure-1-) which shows the two types of meaning (i.e. The Order of Signification).
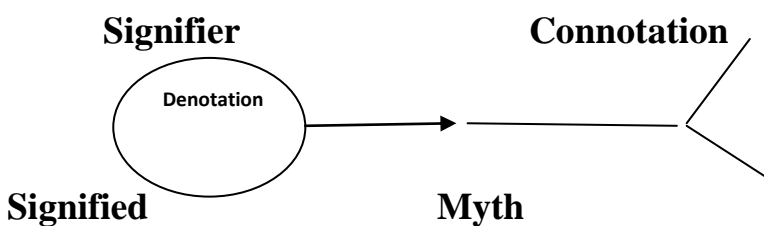

Figure (1) Shows the order of signification

(Adapted from Fiske ,2004:128 as cited in Nadira ,2018:13)

1. The Word as an Element of Poetry

Defining poetry would not be considered since there is a large number of definitions that can be introduced . Instead , it is important to shed lightupon the language of poetry and what are the characteristic features of language that is used in poetry . The language which is used in poetry and in prose is the same but "the language of poetry is richer , more suggestive , and powerful than the language of prose ." (Dickinson , 1959:47). In the poem , there is some sort of interaction among different elements . These elements are the elements of poetry and in certain way or another they characterize the language of poetry. These elements are : the employment of word , imagery , and the figures of speech .

Dickinson (1959:48) defines the word as "a sound or a combination of sounds which by general consent refers to , or "means" something ; what it refers to – its

"referent" is what it means" . The main function of the word is to convey a piece of information . In interpretative semantics word is termed as lexicon as it is stated by (Ramadan &Ababneh ,2013:313) that "the word has a grammatical portion and a semantic portion . The grammatical portion tells us whether the word is a noun , a verb , adjective , adverb …etc. . The semantic portion of the lexicon provides us with semantic components of each word".

Man : + human + male + adult

Woman : + human – male + adult

To define word as a meaningful unit , such a definition is considered as problematic because there are different criteria that have a role in defining the word . It is important to distinguish between words and expressions . Lyons " proposes that words as expressions can be defined as composite units that have both form and meaning and suggests more technical term 'lexeme' (Rambaud,2012 :22-23).

The word is considered as " one of the basic units of semantics" (Palmer ,1981:32). Accordingly , word may be studied in terms of the "dictionary entry" and that states the "grammatical compatibilities" of the word and it "may specify a defines or lexical citation for the meaning of the word" (Steinberg and Jakobovits,1971:26) .

The word plays a significant role as an element of poetry since it is considered as the means of carrying a weight and value in the context rather than representing the literal meaning . Thus , such a notion is known as *poeticity*. According to Jakobson (1960 :378) "poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion , when words and their composition , their meanings , their external and inner form , acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality".

The word or , semantically speaking , the lexical item takes part introducing the images in poetry , whether directly or indirectly . when an image is created , all the other lexical items in the poem will interact with it through the extension of their meaning rhetorically (Cummings and Simons (1983) as cited in (Goodarzi , 2009 :6).

However , the co-occurrence of stream of such related lexical items in the poem is helpful to the reader in understanding a poem through the understanding of the way by which the poet relates various types of images for the sake of expressing the theme of the poem (Goodarzi , 2009 : 6) .

To focus on the meaning of the word in poetry , there should be a distinction between two types of meaning , the denotation of the word and the connotation of the word and which type of meaning is more applicable and usable in the language of poetry.

2. The Semantic-Stylistic Interpretation

Semantics and stylistics are interrelated with each other . Stylistics is considered as a branch that has an intimate relationship with semantics because it concentrates on the language use with special focus on the use of language in literature (Turner , 1973 : 7) . Stylistics has its extensions in the other branches of language like : phonology , lexicography , and semantics (ibid : 30) .

The interrelationship between semantics and stylistics results an advantageous means to analyze a given text . The stylistic analysis cannot be systematic without being organized according to the particular roles that are played by the different levels and branches of language like : "phonology , graphology , lexicography , morphology , semantics etc." (Mellouki and Berriha , 2016 : 9). Accordingly , semantics and stylistics may complete each other in giving a satisfactory literary analysis of a text . The attempt of analyzing the literary text semantically considers the importance of the utterance as being the basic unit that carries meaning . Such an attempt may help to approach systematically the literary meaning within the literary text (Belfarhi , 2013 : 289).

The interrelationship between semantics and stylistics is necessary to be recognized when the literary text is intended to be analyzed . The analysis of the literary text may be presented depending on the lexical-semantic level in which the focus will be on the meaning of the lexical item . Thus , "lexical semanticists are interested in what words mean , why they mean , how they are represented in the speaker's mind , and how they are used in the text and discourse" (NazariBagha ,2011 : 10). Hence , The emphasis goes to the meaning of the words that are found in the literary text which is the field of semantics and to the way these words are used in the text which is the domain of stylistics.

The semantic analysis depends on the word context together with its "types , occurrences , and textual and non-textual signs" (Belfarhi , 2013 : 289-90). Thus , it is important to create a network among the words that are included within the text which is considered as a group of *textual signs.*

It is worthy to explain what is meant by semantic interpretation . The semantic interpretation of a given literary text means "the process of mapping from syntactically analyzed sentence of natural language to a representation of its meaning" (Hirst , 1983 : 64) . In other words , the semantic interpretation of a given literary text is how to justify systematically the literary meaning depending on interpreting the meanings of the words that are used in this particular text as the holders of the meaning . The semantic-stylistic interpretation , on the other hand , is the way of use of creating textual features that may be denoted in the text to serve conveying a particular meaning .

3. The Interpretation of Lord Byron's " The Destruction of Sennacherib" in Terms of The Word Connotation Approach

The Destruction of Sennacherib is one of the poems that belong to *Hebrew Melodies* . The theme of the poem is basically derived from one of the following sources of inspiration : religion (the biblical source) and history (the chronical source). According to the religious doctrine , the Assyrian king Sennacherib has invaded Jerusalem , but he has defeated together with his strong army through the direct aid and care of God , through the action which is done by the *angel of death* . Contradictorily , the historical (chronical) point of view refers to the military attack which has been led by the Assyrian king Sennacherib . The military attack has been successful to conquer Jerusalem and there was no serious loss of life among the Assyrian soldiers . Regardless the matter which point of view is the true what is important to be presented is an interpretation of Lord Byron's poem depending on the understanding of the word connotation through a special emphasis on the lexical-semantic field . In other words , the suggested interpretation depends on the shades of meaning of certain lexical items in each stanza of the poem. These lexical items may be considered as the clues that lead to the understanding of the theme of the poem.

The first quatrain may be interpreted depending on the significance of lexical-semantic field through examining the connotation of the lexical items that have been employed .(See table 1).

The poet employs significant lexical items that have a significant connotation to describe the destruction of the Assyrian king Sennacherib's army while he intends to invade Jerusalem.

Sennacherib in Byron's poem has been described as a *wolf* , since the lexical item *wolf* has negative connotations , it may refer to man who is perfidious and wild . It also connotes that the Assyrians were in a large number because the wolves are attacking as a pack. The *wolf* is evil while *fold* which is associated with sheep is employed to describe the Israeli people as innocent as the sheep. *Cohort* is another lexical item that refers to the large number of the Assyrian soldiers . Within the same semantic field to emphasize the sense that the Assyrian king Sennacherib came with a great army , the next lexical items that have been employed can be examined . The coloures of the uniform of the Assyrian army are given as *purple and gold* , these lexical items connote that the army is great and worthy to be respected . These coluresrefer to royal celebrity , the soldiers may be proud of themselves as their king . The Assyrian swords , spears , shields , and helmets are *gleaming* and the lexical item *sheen* is an evidence , i.e. sheen describes the spears of the Assyrian fighters . The poet employs *stars* to refer to the large number of the sparkling spears , then it is the connotation of the lexical item *stars* since the stars are referred to are on the *sea* instead of the sky , the lexical item *sea* itself has a connotation which is the great

army and the large number of the fighters . The *wave* refers to the army which succeeded to camp in the heart of *Galilee* , the wave was *blue* but it became black when it rolled *nightly* as it is related to the darkness of night while *Galilee* refers to the threatened kingdom of the Hebrew.

Table (1) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the first quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
wolf	wild , large number , Sennacherib
cohorts	large number of fighters
gleaming	the uniform of the Assyrian soldiers
purple	} the army is great and well
gold	prepared
sheen	the spears
stars	the large number of spears
sea	the army
wave	the army
Galilee	the kingdom of the Hebrew
fold	the Israeli people

The poet keeps describing the Assyrian army in the second quatrain to prepare for the destruction of the Assyrian troops . According to the lexical items that have been employed in the second quatrain , the quatrain can be divided into two parts . The first part of contains the description of the Assyrian troops that are still alive and ready to attack the Israelis .There are certain lexical items like : *leaves* to describe the large number of the Assyrian fighters , *Summer* that refers to those fighters while they are full of energy as it is the connotation of summer as a season among the other seasons , *green* is used to convey the sense of life , and *sunset* which predicates that the soldiers will face their fate soon . In the same time sunset may be a warning to the Israelis who will face an ambiguous future just like the darkness of the night that will come later . See table (2).

What is worthy to be noticed in the second quatrain is the change in the style of describing the Assyrian army with the reference to the theme of life and death . The lexical items that have been employed in the second part connote the meaning of death . The lexical item *leaves*is used for the second time in this particular quatrain but now with a different connotation . The second use of *leaves* is to refer to the large

number of the corpses of the dead Assyrian soldiers who felled down like the leaves under the force of the wind of *Autumn* . Autumn itself is a reference to death that left the dead bodies . In addition , the lexical item *withered* connotes the shriveled bodies of the Assyrian soldiers while they have lacked their energy and their souls have departed their bodies . However , the scene of the dead bodies on the field became perfect and well described through the use of the lexical item *strown* , that refers to the dead bodies which were strewn here and there . Hence , the lexical item *morrow* as it is mentioned in the last line of the second quatrain suggests different meanings . Firstly , it emphasizes the crucial turning point regarding the fate of the Assyrian army that they will meet in the morning . Secondly , morrow my indicate the hope that was growing up on the part of the Hebrew , for them it is the morning in which they have been saved .

Table (2) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the second quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
leaves	the large number of fighters
summer	full energy
green	life
sunset	death
leaves	the large number of corpses of the dead soldiers
autumn	death
morrow	hope
withered	the lack of energy and souls
strown	the dead bodies on the field

In the third quatrain , the poet employed lexical items that refer to the parts of the human body if they are considered according to their denotation . With the regard to their connotation , they occur   within the same semantic context to indicate that the power of God is more influential and crucial . God sent the *Angel of Death* to save the 'innocent' people of Jerusalem . The *Angel* has *wings* to be the weapon together with *breath* to indicate the great power of God . The *Angel* can fly with wings then , he is higher (i.e. victorious) while the Assyrian king and soldiers are on the earth that they are lower (i.e. losers) . Thus , the other lexical items prove that they will be beaten . The Assyrians have been described through certain lexical items that refer to the parts of human bodies , but the way of using these lexical items is different from that in the first part of the quatrain . The connotative meaning in the second part of

the quatrain is for the sake of insulting the Assyrian king and the Assyrian troops . The poet uses lexical items like : *face* that has been blasted by the breath of the *Angel of Death* , the *eyes*have been *waxed* , and the *heart* has been *heaved* . The connotation of these lexical items is *death* . Death is everywhere on the suggested battle field . As an evidence is the use of lexical items like : *chill* and *still* which connote death in a clear way to describe the scene that the poet intends to describe (see table 3).

Table (3) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the third quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
Angel of Death	the power of God
wings	the higher and the strong
face	defender
eyes	the insult
waxed	death
chill	death
heart	death
heaved	death
still	death
	death

The fourth quatrain of the poem contains several lexical items that describe the concept of death on the part of the horses of the Assyrian knights . The *Angel of Death* has blasted the soldiers' faces and the horses alike . The *nostril* of the Assyrian's horse became very wide to certify that it starts to suffer the stupor of death the poet says that "it was hard to get breath" . The lexical item that has been mentioned in this quatrain is *rolled* which denotes the loud noise that follows a lightening flash in the sky (i.e. thunder) , but in this context it describes the voice that is produced by the horse while it suffers severely in attempt to get breath . In addition , the concept of the death of the horse is well illustrated through the use of lexical items like *foam* which refers to the hard moment of getting breath and the suffocation that leads to death and *cold* which is considered as connotation of death ,(see table 4).

Table (4) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the fourth quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
nostril	breath and stupor of death
rolled	breath
foam	breath
cold	death

The last quatrain but one contains the lexical items that focuses on the concept of death among the Assyrian troops . The dead soldiers seem *distorted* and *pale* , in both lexical items there is a connotation which is *death* . In the next lines of the same quatrain , the poet employs lexical items like : *dew* which denotes *life* but it connotes *death* since it refers to the moment of agony that the soldiers have suffered from , then he employs *rust* , that refers to the time in which the soldiers have died . They died at night and in the morning their shields have been rusted because of the wet dew at night and dawn . In addition , silence expresses death , the poet describes the tents of the Assyrian army as being *silent* which means connotatively that the soldiers died all in their tents , (see table 5).

Table (5) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the fifth quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
distorted	the faces of the soldiers
pale	the faces of the soldiers
dew	the agony and death
rust	the time of death
silent	death

There are several lexical items that have been mentioned in the last quatrain focus on the *defeat* and the *disaster* that befalls the Assyrian king *Sennacherib* , the army , and the people . In the last quatrain there is a mentioning of the *widows* , through this lexical item , there is a connotative meaning which is *the death of the husbands* . Besides , there is the *wail*which is the loud voice of these grieved women . In the first line of the quatrain , it seems that the poet intends to conclude that *Sennacherib* has been defeated and here is the evidence . Directly , the next line contains the lexical item *broke* which denotes the destroyed *idols* but connotes *the destruction of the Assyrian king Sennacherib* with considering the significance of the temple to him . The poet mentions the lexical item *Baal* as a connotation to *Ashur* as a whole and it refers to the *break*and defeat of the Assyrian army . Another lexical item that has a connotation of *Ashur* that is *Gentile* , it means the people who worship idols . The poet intends to belittle the Assyrian beliefs in comparison with the Jewish beliefs . The poet employs a lexical item like : *snow* to refer to the *weakness* of the Assyrian army which is just like the weakness of their god *Baal* . The Assyrian soldiers have been milted like the *snow* without being aided by their god . On the other hand , *Lord* , The God of the Jewish people is greater than *Baal* . *Lord* represent the Divine force that saved Jerusalem and defeated the Assyrian king *Sennacherib* and his army , (see table 6).

Table (6) shows the employed lexical items with their connotation as they appeared in the sixth quatrain

The lexical item (sign)	The connotation (the associative meaning)
widows	death
wail	death
broke	defeat
Baal	Ashur
Gentile	Ashur
snow	the weakness of the Assyrian army
Lord	the Divine force

4. Conclusions

The connotation of the employed lexical items plays a significant role in interpreting Lord Byron's *The Destruction of Sennacherib* . It can be concluded that the connotation of certain lexical items that have been mentioned in the poem shows the creativity of the poet in making a comparisons (simile and metaphor) to convey the implicit meaning of the poem . The connotation of the employed lexical items provides an opportunity to interpret the poem .

The present research paper ends up with the following :

1. The poem contains certain lexical items that carry a positive connotation to describe the great Assyrian army .

2. There are certain lexical items that carry a negative connotation . They have been employed to describe the Assyrian army, to belittle their force , and to prepare for the description of their defeat .

3. It can be noticed that there are certain lexical items that lie in the same lexical field . They describe certain parts of the human body . They carry positive connotation to describe the super power of the *Angel of Death* as the defender of Jerusalem and the representative of God to carry the divine will . In the same time , there are certain lexical items that carry negative connotations to describe the weakness and the suffering of the Assyrian soldiers .

4. The poem contains certain lexical items that carry connotation to describe the dead horses as an indication of the defeat of *Sennacherib* .

5. The poem contains lexical items that have connotation which can be interpreted as a description of the dead bodies of the Assyrian soldiers after being attacked by the *Angel of Death* .

6. The poem ends with a set of lexical items that carry a connotation that can be considered as an affective description of the disastrous defeat and its overwhelming impact on the Assyrian society itself.

7. Through the given interpretation , it seems that the consideration of the connotation of the employed lexical items is an advantageous procedure to interpret the poem .

Appendix 1

The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold ,
And his cohort were gleaming in purple gold ;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea ,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee .

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green ,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen :
Like the leaves of forest when Autumn hath blown ,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown .

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast ,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved , and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide ,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride ;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf ,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow , and the rust on his mail:

And the tents were all silent , the banners alone,

The lances unlifted , the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,

And the idols are broken in the temple of Baal;

And the might of the Gentile , unsmote by sword ,

Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

GeorgeGordon ,LordByron

first published 1815

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