
ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2024.49.15>

LANGUAGE PATTERNS OF OVERSTATEMENT IN ENGLISH HYPERTEXT

Research article

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Abstract

The article deals with the issues of English hypertext organization. The goal of the study is to reveal the language patterns of overstatement recurrently used by English-speakers when producing hypertexts in literary communication of the XXI century. The study material includes hypertexts in the form of general readers' reviews of fiction books posted on British and US book-selling websites and professional reviews by literary critics and professional authors published in online mass media. The analysis of the reviews reveals a number of recurrent language patterns used to implement overstatement. The comparative analysis of professional and non-professional reviews shows some differences in the use of language patterns of overstatement.

Keywords: overstatement, hypertext, book review, language pattern.

ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ КОНСТРУКЦИИ ПРЕУВЕЛИЧЕНИЯ В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ ГИПЕРТЕКСТЕ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются вопросы организации англоязычного гипертекста. Цель исследования – выявить рекуррентные языковые конструкции преувеличения, используемые при построении гипертекста на английском языке в рамках литературной коммуникации XXI века. Материалом исследования послужили гипертексты, реализованные в виде непрофессиональных отзывов читателей и профессиональных отзывов критиков на художественный текст, и размещенные в сети Интернет на британских и американских сайтах по продажам книг или в СМИ. В ходе анализа отзывов были выявлены языковые конструкции, которые регулярно используются для вербализации преувеличения. Сравнительный анализ профессиональных и непрофессиональных отзывов позволил выявить некоторые различия в использовании языковых конструкций преувеличения.

Ключевые слова: преувеличение, гипертекст, рецензия на книгу, языковая конструкция.

Introduction

Traditionally, the phenomenon of overstatement in the English language has been the object of stylistic studies. In this framework, overstatement is explained via hyperbole, exaggeration, metaphor, simile and other figures of speech that generate hyperbolic effect [1], [7]. According to the definition in the Dictionary of Literary Devices and Terms, “Overstatement is an act of stating something more profoundly than it actually is, in order to make the point more serious or important or beautiful. In literature, writers use overstatement as a literary technique for the sake of humor, and for laying emphasis on a certain point” [9]. A point should be made that overstatement as a stylistic device is currently studied not only in literary texts but media texts either [12], [18].

Another major approach to studying overstatement is treating it as a communicative strategy [22]. In this framework, overstatement is mainly considered in connection with the category of politeness, particularly, with such speech acts as praise, regret, empathy, gratitude, evaluation, acclaim, etc. [8]. However, while overstatement has been amply treated by linguists, its features at the level of text organization remain a less-studied area as the majority of research works has primarily focused on grammar, lexical, and syntactic means of overstatement realization. For this reason, it seems logical and to address this issue in the perspective of hypertext as a manifestation of written communication in the digital world.

The general objective of this study is to reveal the language patterns of overstatement applied by English-speakers when producing hypertexts in the form of a fiction book review. The specific objectives include studying overstatement as communicative strategy, describing hypertext as part of contemporary literary communication, analyzing the text organization of professional and non-professional fiction book reviews, revealing the recurrent language patterns of overstatement. The study has been carried out synchronically.

Theoretical background

The study is based on the theoretical works of Russian, English and French scholars in various fields of philology. Despite the fact that the mainstream linguistic research of hypertext is focused on the mechanisms of transition between electronic texts in digital environment [20], [21], we make an attempt to elaborate the alternative approach to this phenomenon. Thus, our idea

of hypertext is rooted in the conception of hypertextuality suggested by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette. In his fundamental work *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (1982) he describes a number of intertextual relationships a literary text may develop with prior or successive literary texts. In this framework, Genette uses the term ‘hypertext’ to refer to any new literary text derived from the initial one [5, P. 14]. Examples of literary hypertexts include parodies, pastiches, sequels, prequels, spin-offs. Considering Genette’s theory, we can sum up the idea of hypertextuality as a type of semantic interaction between literary texts, resulting in the emergence of new literary text on the base of the initial one [11, P. 5].

Genette’s theory has been developed in the works of the Russian linguist, N. A. Shekhtman, who introduced the term ‘linguistic hypertext’ to describe non-literary texts deriving from the initial literary text. Originally, he meant notes to a literary text as the linguistic hypertext [13, P. 107]. A point should be made that a modern fiction book includes not only notes but other non-literary texts, such as foreword, afterword, summary, about the author, praise, acknowledgements etc. Therefore, it seems logical to extend the range of linguistic hypertexts by bringing in the whole variety of non-fiction texts published in a hard-copy or electronic book along with other online and offline non-fiction texts derived from the initial literary text but functioning beyond the book edition. The latter include such hypertexts as reviews written by professional critics or general readers.

According to marketing research, online book reviews have become an important source of information to consumers, substituting traditional offline word-of-mouth communication. The study proves that there is a connection between the improvement in a book’s reviews and the increase in its sales on the website [2, P. 345]. Considering this, we can formulate the recognized goal of an online fiction book review as follows: an online book review helps customers to decide positively about reading a particular fiction book, propelling them to buy it eventually.

In this study, the idea of overstatement is based on the theory of conversational cooperation elaborated by the English linguist, H. P. Grice, in the field of communication theory. According to Grice, the interpretation of the utterance rather depends on how the speaker puts it than what they are trying to convey, because the speaker and the listener share a common knowledge of the recognized goal or purpose of ‘the talk exchange’. In order for the conversation to be effective, each participant contributes to the exchange in a way which is consistent with this recognized aim or purpose [6, P. 24-25]. Grice’s theory has been developed in relation to understatement and overstatement as communicative strategies used in various types of discourse. Particularly, it was found that overstatement in legal discourse relies upon both an explicit statement of its conclusion and implicature to communicate its message [10, P. 658]. In this study, we attempt to apply Grice’s theory to overstatement in hypertext as part of the literary discourse. In this framework, our hypothesis is that there may exist certain language patterns of overstatement which align with the recognized goal of the fiction book review as a type of hypertext. These patterns would make the basis of hypertext organization and facilitate readers’ understanding.

Discussion

The study material comprises hypertext as 50 units of English non-professional reviews of novels by contemporary British and US authors represented by customer reviews written by general readers and posted on book-selling websites amazon.com and goodreads.com. Professional reviews include 50 units of editorial reviews written by critics, columnists, editors, or other professional authors and posted on the official website of Kirkus Reviews (kirkusreviews.com) and the online platform Reedsy Discovery (reedsy.com/discovery). All reviews under analysis are dated April – September 2023 and deal with contemporary adult fiction of various genres. The reviews share the same structural elements covering the plot of the book, presenting evaluation of the author’s work, giving a recommendation to the readers [4].

The analysis has showed that both customer and editorial reviews employ overstatement as a communicative strategy, mainly in the parts devoted to evaluation of the book and giving a recommendation to the audience. In this framework, the tactic of explicit statement and the tactic of implication can be determined as the techniques of building the communicative strategy of overstatement in English hypertext.

The tactic of explicit statement can be implemented in the part devoted to evaluation of the book when the reviewer gives praise to it. In this case, strong adjective makes the main language means of overstatement in fiction book reviews. Semantically, these adjectives express extreme emotions. Therefore, grammatically they do not possess different degrees of quality, e.g. amazing, breathtaking, enthralling, etc. Considering this fact, we can expand the scope and single out a general lexico-syntactic pattern of overstatement in book reviews: noun / it / this + be + strong adjective(s) ... + noun. The following examples can be given to demonstrate the pattern in English professional (1) and non-professional (2) reviews.

(1) *It’s a propulsive, pulse-pounding exploration of how people reveal their true natures during tragedies; Based on the true story of Richmond’s theater fire, The House Is on Fire is a stunning, all-consuming exploration* [14].

(2) *I’m happy to report that this, too, is an excellent story; This historical fiction is thrilling; The story is fascinating; This is a brilliant novel of interwoven stories, painting a vivid picture of Richmond in 1811; This is an awesome book by Rachel Beanland; This historical novel was fantastic!!; The action is enthralling, keeping my attention throughout* [3].

It should be noted that within the general lexico-syntactic pattern of overstatement a major trend can be observed, i.e. the use of multiple strong adjectives in succession. The analysis shows that non-professional reviews (3) tend to include three strong adjectives, while professional reviews (4) show a tendency to use two strong adjectives.

(3) *This book is on FIRE!! A breathtaking, heart-pounding, unputdownable, powerhouse of a historical fiction; The story is fascinating, illuminating, and heartfelt and I just love it; Addictive, moving, totally unputdownable; My favorite kind of thriller – gripping, heartbreaking, and impossible to put down* [18].

(4) *Though historical fiction, this was a compelling and exciting read; Nevertheless, it is a fascinating and engaging story; Rachel Beanland gives us a front-row seat to a terrifying nineteenth-century calamity and the fascinating cast of villains* [16]; *Fully realized characters and gripping prose makes for an excellent, riveting novel* [18].

Another variation of the general lexico-syntactic pattern of overstatement involves a change of word order, i.e. the use of fronting when strong adjectives are placed at the beginning of the sentence to add emphasis. This variation is typical of professional reviews (5) while non-professional reviews do not employ it on a regular basis.

(5) *Heart-pounding and suspenseful, this is unputdownable historical fiction at its finest; Haunting and heartbreaking, yet sometimes uplifting, telling these stories hopefully helps us not forget what happened and, more importantly, not repeat history* [17]; *Incendiary and haunting, the story of the fire is advanced by four vastly different perspectives; Thrilling, heartbreaking, radically empathic, The House Is on Fire is a gorgeous braid of heroism, cowardice, tragedy, and the aftermath of everything* [18].

The tactic of implication can be applied in the part devoted to recommendation of the book to the audience when the reviewer describes the influence the book can have on the reader. Unlike the above-mentioned tactic of explicit statement, this tactic provides an indirect praise of the book by describing its emotional effects on the reader. In this case, overstatement is based on verbs denoting feelings and emotions: love, shock, relish, cry, beguile, etc. In this perspective, the tactic of implication can employ several lexico-syntactic patterns of overstatement. The first pattern is mainly used in professional book reviews (6) and includes the following elements that can go in various combinations and order: noun/I + verb(s) of emotion + reader / you. The pattern variation with the focus on the feelings and emotions of the reviewer is typical of non-professional book reviews (7).

(6) *This is a page-turner that will leave the reader fired up; This novel will wring out your heart and make grateful for it* [18]; *Readers will relish this; The novel beguiles, informs, shocks and captivates you* [17].

(7) *It made me cry, smile and hug my own loved ones a little tighter; Contradictory, flawed and entirely human, I loved and rooted for them like real people; I was torn between pausing to weep, and ploughing on to solve the mysteries* [15].

The study reveals another language pattern that can be singled out in connection with the tactics of implication. In this case, a noun phrase expressing exaggeration makes the main language means of overstatement, e.g. a whirlwind of emotions, a block of time, etc. In light of this, we can formulate a conditional lexico-syntactic pattern of overstatement in book reviews: verb in the imperative + if/until/because/while... + noun phrase. Though this pattern can be tracked down both in professional and non-professional book reviews, the study shows that general readers (8) employ it more frequently than book critics.

(8) *Don't start this until you have a block of time to read; Make sure you have plenty of time to read when you pick it up, because you won't be able to put it down; Read this book if you love a whirlwind of emotions* [3].

It should be pointed out that the language patterns formulated as a result of the study represent not all possible variants of implementing the tactics of overstatement in English hypertext. We can suggest that variations are diverse and include multiple grammar and vocabulary units expressing overstatement as elements of the lexico-syntactic patterns revealed.

Conclusion

To sum up the above-mentioned considerations and the potential of the examples under analysis, we can conclude that overstatement makes a constituent part of hypertext organization. In this connection, there exist certain language patterns of overstatement strategy in English hypertext functioning in British and US literary communication of the XXI century. These patterns are recurrently used to implement the tactic of explicit statement and the tactic of implication in fiction book reviews.

However, we should point out some differences in the use of language patterns depending on the type of review and the variant of the language. Thus, both British and US professional reviews tend to avoid lexico-syntactic patterns, as well as their variations, with personal focus, i.e. those directly stating the feelings and emotions of the reviewer. On the contrary, non-professional reviews of both language variants demonstrate multiple references to the reviewer's impressions of the book by sharing them with the reader. A point should be made that US non-professional reviews tend to be more emphatic than British ones, which can be proved by the larger number of strong adjectives employed by the reviewer. These levels of formality reflect the tendency of longer and shorter distancing of the reviewer from the reader. Consequently, in the first case the reader starts seeing the reviewer as an authority, while in the second case the reviewer is considered as an equal.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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