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The Role of Hyponymy and Meronymy in Creating Lexical Cohesion in Literary Discourse

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of hyponymy and meronymy as lexical cohesion devices in literary discourse, focusing on how these semantic relations contribute to the unity and coherence of texts. Hyponymy, which involves the relationship between general and specific terms, and meronymy, which denotes part-whole relationships, are essential for building meaning connections within a narrative. By analyzing selected English short stories, this research explores how authors employ hyponyms and meronyms to establish thematic links, enrich descriptions, and maintain cohesion throughout the text. This study highlights the importance of hyponymy and meronymy in creating cohesive and engaging literary texts and offers insights relevant to both literary analysis and language teaching.

Keywords: lexical cohesion, hyponymy, meronymy, cohesive device, literary discourse, semantic relations.



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Lexical cohesion is a crucial aspect of textual cohesion that connects words and ideas across sentences to create a unified and meaningful discourse. Among the various types of lexical cohesion, **hyponymy** and **meronymy** play significant roles in establishing semantic relationships within a text. Hyponymy refers to the relationship between general and specific terms (e.g., *animal* and *dog*), while meronymy denotes part-whole relationships (e.g., *car* and *engine*). In literary discourse, particularly in short stories, these cohesive devices help authors create rich and coherent narratives by linking related words and concepts, thus guiding readers through the story. Despite their importance, the use of hyponymy and meronymy as tools for achieving cohesion in literary texts has not been extensively studied. Therefore, this research aims to explore how these lexical relations contribute to the cohesion and coherence of English short stories, shedding light on their function in literary writing. This study focuses on O. Henry's short stories as the primary literary texts for analyzing the role of hyponymy and meronymy in creating lexical cohesion.

The use of hyponyms serves to provide detailed descriptions and deepen the reader's understanding of certain themes, such as food, tradition, and the social dynamics between the two main characters. By employing hyponyms, O. Henry adds layers of meaning and specificity to general concepts, helping to create a vivid and immersive narrative. These are words that denote a specific instance or subclass of a more general category. For example, "apple" is a hyponym of

"fruit," and "sparrow" is a hyponym of "bird." In storytelling, hyponyms allow authors to describe general concepts with more precision, adding depth to the narrative.

In the story *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen"* O. Henry uses hyponyms to provide specific examples of broader concepts. These examples help illustrate the theme of tradition and the complex social interactions between the old gentleman and the poor man, as well as the contrast between abundance and need. In the story we could see several ways where the author referred to type-subtype relationship.

The Thanksgiving meal is central to the story, representing generosity, tradition and, ultimately, the tension between abundance and discomfort. O. Henry doesn't just refer to "food" in general terms but uses specific hyponyms to evoke a traditional Thanksgiving feast and its significance in American culture. One of the key lexical units of the story is *Turkey* is used as a hyponym of *meat*. Turkey is the quintessential Thanksgiving dish, symbolizing tradition. Instead of simply referring to "meat," O. Henry specifies turkey to emphasize the cultural importance of the meal.

Example: *The old gentleman insisted on feeding the poor man a grand Thanksgiving dinner, complete with roast **turkey** and all the trimmings.*

By using the hyponym "turkey" instead of just "meat," O. Henry evokes a specific image associated with Thanksgiving, highlighting the tradition behind the meal. Pumpkin pie is another specific food tied to Thanksgiving traditions. Instead of simply mentioning "dessert" O. Henry includes "pumpkin pie" to reinforce the traditional elements of the meal.

Example: *After the main course came the **pumpkin pie**, a slice of which the poor man could barely manage after his second Thanksgiving feast of the day.*

The mention of *pumpkin pie* further grounds the narrative in the specific cultural context of an American Thanksgiving celebration, enriching the sense of setting and tradition. *Stuffing* is another traditional Thanksgiving side dish. By specifying this instead of referring to "side dishes" generally, O. Henry immerses readers in the sensory details of the meal.

Example: *The poor man stared at the heaping plate of **stuffing** and gravy, already feeling too full to take another bite.*

This precise word choice reinforces the theme of abundance and excess, showing how the old gentleman's generosity may overwhelm rather than satisfy. O. Henry also uses specific hyponyms to describe the characters, particularly the poor man, and their physical states, which serve as symbols of their social standing and emotional conditions. The poor man's *overcoat* is not just any piece of clothing; it signifies his status as a person trying to stay warm during the cold Thanksgiving Day.

Example: *The poor man wrapped his threadbare **overcoat** tighter around himself as he approached the park, where he hoped to meet the old gentleman once again.*

This specific term for outerwear emphasizes the harsh conditions the poor man endures, contrasting with the warmth and excess of the Thanksgiving feast he is about to receive. The mention of a *bowler hat* instead of simply "hat" adds specificity to the old gentleman's appearance, reflecting his formal, traditional demeanor.

Example: *The old gentleman tipped his **bowler hat** to the people he passed, his mind already on the Thanksgiving tradition he was about to uphold.*

The use of this specific hyponym evokes a particular era and social class, underscoring the character's adherence to tradition and decorum. Social dynamics between the old gentleman and the poor man play a crucial role in the story. O. Henry uses specific hyponyms to describe different forms of social interaction, adding nuance to their relationship. Thanksgiving meal is

described as a *feast*, emphasizing its abundance and celebratory nature, which contrasts with the poor man's usual scarcity of food.

Example: *It wasn't just a meal – it was a **feast** of the most lavish proportions, and the poor man felt obliged to partake, even though he had already eaten.*

The word *feast* evokes the idea of overindulgence and plenty, heightening the contrast between the poor man's daily struggles and the excess he is offered. The relationship between the two men is described not just as a duty but as an *obligation*, a more personal, almost burdensome commitment.

Example: *The poor man felt an unspoken **obligation** to meet the old gentleman each Thanksgiving, even though their encounters had grown increasingly uncomfortable.*

By using *obligation* instead of just "duty," O. Henry emphasizes the emotional weight of the relationship, where generosity and charity come with expectations. The story is rich with emotional undercurrents, and the author uses specific hyponyms to convey the complexities of the characters' feelings, particularly as the poor man grapples with conflicting emotions of gratitude and discomfort. *Gratitude* as a hyponym of *thankfulness* used when the poor man feels *gratitude* toward the old gentleman, a more specific form of thankfulness that implies personal indebtedness.

Example: *Though his stomach churned with overindulgence, the poor man couldn't shake the feeling of **gratitude** toward the old gentleman.*

The use of *gratitude* over the more general *thankfulness* suggests a deeper emotional connection, indicating that the poor man feels not just thankful but personally obliged to the old man for his generosity. As the poor man struggles with the yearly ritual, he experiences *resentment* – a specific form of *anger* that arises from being forced into a situation against one's will.

Example: *He had never felt so full in his life, and with every bite, his **resentment** toward the old man's well-meaning charity grew.*

By choosing *resentment*, O. Henry emphasizes the complexity of the poor man's emotions. He is not simply angry; his feelings are rooted in the pressure to accept charity year after year, even when it no longer serves him. The story is built around the idea of Thanksgiving as a *tradition*, but within that, O. Henry uses hyponyms to highlight specific elements of this cultural practice. The yearly meeting between the old gentleman and the poor man has become more than just a *tradition*; it is described as a *ritual* – a repeated act with symbolic meaning.

Example: *For nine years, their Thanksgiving meeting had been a **ritual**, one that neither man could break despite the discomfort it caused.*

The term *ritual* suggests a more formal, almost sacred practice, indicating how deeply ingrained this yearly event has become in both their lives. Thanksgiving feast is part of a broader *custom* in American society, linking the personal tradition of the characters to a national cultural practice.

Example: *Thanksgiving was more than just a personal celebration for the old man – it was an American **custom** that he felt obliged to uphold.*

The use of *custom* ties the characters' personal actions to the larger social context of Thanksgiving, reinforcing the theme of societal expectations. By using hyponyms O. Henry is able to paint a more vivid picture of the characters, their environment, and the Thanksgiving meal itself. Instead of simply referring to general categories like food or tradition, he provides specific examples that make the story more immersive. The use of words like *turkey*, *pumpkin pie*, *overcoat* adds richness to the sensory details of the narrative. Hyponyms help to ground the story in its cultural context. By specifying Thanksgiving dishes and traditions, O. Henry connects the

personal experiences of the characters to a broader American tradition, giving the story both a personal and societal dimension.

The next lexical cohesive device we want to mention is meronyms which refer to a part of something larger – are used to enrich the narrative by emphasizing specific elements of the characters' experiences and environments. By focusing on parts of objects, events, or concepts meronyms help to create a more detailed and layered depiction of the story's setting and themes. They denote a part of something larger. In literature, meronyms can be used to focus on specific details, adding depth to descriptions and emphasizing particular aspects of a scene or character. In "*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*" O. Henry uses meronyms to highlight key elements of the story, such as the Thanksgiving meal, the characters' appearances and the setting. These detailed parts help to bring the narrative to life and underscore the themes of tradition, generosity and social contrast. Here we will see some examples where the author referred to whole-part relationship.

Turkey was used as meronym as well and it was of *Thanksgiving meal*. *Turkey* is considered a specific part of the larger Thanksgiving meal. By mentioning *turkey*, O. Henry emphasizes the traditional and symbolic nature of the feast.

Example: *The old gentleman made sure that the poor man had his fill of **turkey** and all the trimmings, each year as part of their Thanksgiving ritual.*

The word "*turkey*" focuses on a key part of the feast, highlighting its importance in the tradition of Thanksgiving. *Stuffing* is another specific element of the Thanksgiving meal. Its inclusion in the story helps to paint a detailed picture of the feast and the excess associated with it.

Example: *The poor man's plate was piled high with **stuffing**, making him wince as he realized how much he had to eat.*

By using *stuffing*, O. Henry underscores the abundance and overindulgence of the meal. *Gravy* is a specific part of the meal as well that adds richness to the description of the feast.

Example: *He could barely manage another bite of the **gravy**-drenched turkey, already feeling uncomfortably full.*

The mention of *gravy* adds to the sensory detail of the meal, emphasizing the richness and excess that characterize the Thanksgiving feast.

Overcoat as the meronym of *clothing* worn by the poor man is a specific part of his attire, representing his social status and the harsh conditions he endures.

Example: *The poor man's **overcoat** was threadbare, a stark contrast to the warmth and comfort he found in the old gentleman's generosity.*

By focusing on the *overcoat*, O. Henry highlights the disparity between the poor man's situation and the old gentleman's wealth. The *bowler hat* worn by the old gentleman is a specific item of his formal attire, indicating his social class and adherence to tradition.

Example: *The old gentleman's **bowler hat** was as much a part of his identity as his annual Thanksgiving ritual.*

The use of *bowler hat* provides insight into the character's background and the formality of his actions. A *button* on the poor man's overcoat can symbolize the wear and tear of his life.

Example: *One of the **buttons** on his overcoat was missing, a small detail that spoke volumes about his financial struggles.*

The focus on a *button* emphasizes the poor man's impoverished state and adds a layer of detail to his appearance. A *handshake* is a part of the broader act of greeting and symbolizes the social

interaction between the old gentleman and the poor man. The mention of *handshake* highlights the formal and polite nature of their interaction, as well as the ritualistic aspect of their meetings.

Example: *The old gentleman extended his hand for a **handshake**, a gesture that had become a part of their Thanksgiving ritual.*

The *meal* represents a part of the larger Thanksgiving *feast* and reflects the daily reality of the poor man compared to the ceremonial nature of the old gentleman's offering. Focusing on *meal* emphasizes the disparity between the poor man's everyday life and the special occasion of Thanksgiving.

Example: *Before the grand **feast**, the poor man had managed a modest **meal** of bread and water, highlighting the contrast between his usual sustenance and the lavish Thanksgiving spread.*

The *bench* in the park is a specific part of the setting where the characters meet, contributing to the overall atmosphere of the story. It helps to ground the story in a specific location, adding realism and context to their meeting.

Example: *The old gentleman and the poor man sat on a worn **bench** in the park, their conversation a familiar ritual amidst the backdrop of the city's holiday bustle.*

The next meronym is *street* where the poor man walks is a part of the larger city environment, reflecting his daily struggles and interactions. By specifying the *street*, O. Henry provides a sense of the urban setting and the poor man's place within it.

Example: *He wandered down the crowded **street**, his thoughts focused on the upcoming encounter with the old gentleman.*

Ritual of meeting each Thanksgiving is a specific part of the broader *tradition* that shapes the story. The term *ritual* emphasizes the repetitive and symbolic nature of their annual meeting.

Example: *The Thanksgiving **ritual** had become a deeply ingrained part of both men's lives, each year bringing the same patterns and expectations.*

Feast is a specific aspect of the broader Thanksgiving *celebration*, symbolizing the excess and tradition associated with the holiday. By focusing on the *feast*, O. Henry highlights the central event of the story and its significance in the characters' lives.

Example: *The **feast** was not just a meal but a grand celebration that marked the culmination of the old gentleman's annual charity.*

From analyzed meronyms we could see that they provide specific details that enrich the narrative. By focusing on parts of objects or experiences, O. Henry creates a more vivid and nuanced portrayal of the Thanksgiving tradition and the characters' interactions. Specific elements like *turkey*, *stuffing*, *overcoat* help to paint a detailed picture of the story's setting and themes. The use of meronyms underscores key themes, such as social disparity and tradition. Details like the *button* on the poor man's overcoat and the *gravy* on his plate emphasize the contrast between his poverty and the old gentleman's wealth. This focus on parts of larger concepts highlights the broader social commentary embedded in the story. Specific meronyms often carry symbolic meaning. For example, the *feast* represents abundance and tradition, while the *overcoat* symbolizes the poor man's social status. These symbols help to convey deeper meanings and themes, enriching the reader's understanding of the story. By using meronyms to describe the setting and characters, O. Henry creates a distinct atmosphere that reflects the story's emotional and social dynamics. Details like the *bench* in the park and the *bowler hat* worn by the old gentleman contribute to the overall ambiance and mood of the narrative. In "Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen" O. Henry effectively uses meronyms to enhance the narrative through detailed descriptions and symbolic elements. By focusing on specific parts of objects, experiences, and concepts, he adds depth to the story's portrayal of tradition, generosity, and social contrast. The

use of meronyms not only enriches the reader's experience but also underscores the central themes and emotional undercurrents of the story.

The analysis of O. Henry's short stories reveals that hyponymy and meronymy play an essential role in creating lexical cohesion and enhancing the coherence of literary discourse. Through the strategic use of general-specific and part-whole relationships, O. Henry connects ideas, characters, and objects, making his narratives more engaging and unified. These lexical devices not only enrich the semantic depth of the stories but also guide readers in understanding the relationships within the text. Thus, hyponymy and meronymy are significant tools in maintaining cohesion in literary writing, contributing to both the aesthetic and communicative value of the text.

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