COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH 'CRYING' TERMS

NABILA TIJJANI ZAHRADEEN
Department of Arts and Humanities,
Kano State Polytechnic, Nigeria.
beelanzahra36@gmail.com
+2348036277444

Abstract

This is a study of English crying terms through componential analysis theory. The concern of the work is to identify and describe the crying terms of the English language by following the approach of Pottier (1964). Naturally, crying as an emotion is present in every language and that it has its semantic meaning or field. Various forms of crying such as sobbing, weeping, wailing, whimpering, even bawling and blubbering are accompanied by some characteristics. English language identifies different name for each kind of crying depending on its distinctive feature(s). According to componential theory, words can be classified according to shared and differentiating features. The presence or absence of distinct feature within a word, determine its meaning thereby distinguishing it from other words. The + sign indicates a feature that is prominent in the emotional term, while the - sign is indicating the lack of that particular characteristic. The determination of such features has been referred to as componential analysis (Kriedler, 2002:87).

Keywords: Componential Analysis, Crying, Crying terms.

1.0   Introduction

Componential analysis has been adopted in analysing variety of studies. Many scholars have focused on its nature, formation, how it determines 'distinctiveness' of particular data and other aspects concerning the approach. In this paper, some of the investigations about it are presented by some scholars. The concern of the study is to evaluate the characteristics of 4 forms of crying. 'Cry' is the most general word for producing tears when one is unhappy or hurt, or extremely happy. However, in the English language, there are different ways of shedding tears; depending on the situation or how deeply affected one is. Another distinct feature is whether there is vocalisation accompanying the tears. Different names were given to such actions and this is what the present study look into: to explore the features of each form of shedding tears in the English language using componential analysis theory. Crying – that is, shedding of tears in response to an emotional stimulus is a typical and uniquely human emotional expression which is considered as generally associated with distress and discomfort.

Linguists have various approaches applied to understanding meaning, since meaning is related to many different functions of language. The meanings of words in a language are interrelated and they are defined in part by their relations with other words in the language. Analysed in the same semantic domain, words can be classified according to shared and distinctive features. Componential analysis theory can be a useful approach in breaking down the sense of a word into its minimal distinctive features, particularly in determining the meaning of a word. Although componential analysis theory has some limitations in its applications, it is still used in modern linguistics.

In semantics, the structure of a word is treated as a system of meanings. To some extent we can define a word by telling what set it belongs to and how it differs from other members of the same set. Palmer (1983:85) asserts that the total meaning of a word can be seen in terms of a number of distinct elements or components of meaning. Components have a distinguishing function and serve to distinguish the meaning of a word from that of semantically related words, more accurately they serve to distinguish among the meanings of words in the same semantic domain. Componential analysis is based on the presumption that the meaning of a word is composed of semantic components. So the essential features that form the meaning are elementary units on semantic level. By componential analysis, it is possible to state the smallest indivisible units of lexis or minimal components (Aitchison, 2003:92).

2.0   Componential Analysis

McArthur (1992:915) defines componential analysis as "an approach which makes use of semantic components that was first used by anthropologist in the analysis of kinship terms. Componential analysis seeks to deal with sense relations by means of a single set of constructs". Lexical items are analysed in terms of semantic features or sense components. Generally, components are treated as binary opposites distinguished by pluses or minuses: for example, [+male]/[-male] or [+female]/ [-female] rather than simply [male] / [female].

Componential analysis is based on the presumption that the meaning of a word is composed of semantic components. So the essential features that form the meaning are elementary units on semantic level. Componential analysis as an approach lexicalized each item that will be entered in the dictionary with a complex of semantic components. There will be in addition a set of redundancy rules for these components which apply automatically to reduce the number of components stated for each item. Lexical relations can be stated in terms of the components (Saeed, 2009:250). Componential analysis as such, is a method typical of structural semantics which analyzes the structure of a word meaning. Thus, it reveals the culturally important features by which speakers of the language distinguish different words in the domain.

Leech (1976:98) states componential analysis as "a distinctive technique that first evolved in anthropological linguistics as a means of studying relations between kinship terms, but it has since developed in many spheres of meaning". Componential analysis has a useful part to play in contributing to the description of meanings of words (Jackson,1996:91-92). Contributions such as: first, comprehension of synonymy. A pair of synonyms will share the same set of semantic components such as [+human], [+adult]. Second, understanding antonymy. Antonyms that share all their features except one, for example, man and woman share the components [+concrete], [+animate][+human], but they are contrasted by the component male.

3.0 Crying and crying terms

In English language, crying as an emotional outburst has many facets depending on the circumstance. Description of crying terms is not yet familiar to many people. That is why the current contribution provides a semantic analysis of 'crying' terms. Among the kinds or rather synonymous terms of 'cry' includes: weep, sob and wail. Others such as whine, whimper, bawl, blubber, snivel are described as some kind of either weeping, sobbing or wailing. Often, these crying terms are accompanied by alterations in the muscles of facial expression, vocalisations and in some cases sobbing, which is the convulsive inhaling and exhaling of air with spasms of the respiratory and truncal muscle groups (Patel, 1993). In consideration with the aforementioned information, characteristics such as +/- audible and body movement (alterations in the muscles of facial expression) were included.

As crying is triggered by human emotion, features such as pain, joy, and fear are considered as the measuring features. This universal and uniquely human emotional expression can be elicited by a plethora of events, from those seemingly mundane and unimportant to the most crucial events in a person's life, and ranging from extremely negative to extremely positive experiences (Vingerhoets, 2013). Crying may vary in duration, intensity and in several qualitative aspects. For example, it may vary in both the involvement and intensity of specific features such as sobbing, distress, vocalisations and tearing. As already stated, perhaps different characteristics and components of crying may represent different mechanisms that mediate the relationship between crying and its kinds.

4.0   Theoretical Framework

The following study has adopted the work of Pottier (1964,1965) of componential analysis as its basis for analysis. In his description of structural semantic analysis, Pottier provides an example of words of the field of furniture terms (sitting equipment) in French. He contrasted the words based on their distinctive features. Pottier's terminology considers a series of hyponyms of sitting furniture where the superordinate class *chair*, along with the specific characteristics that differentiate it from the other members of the class such as *armchai*r, *stool,sofa.* The entire description of the semantic field of words for furniture items is based on the presence or absence of a number of features. In this theory, word meanings were broken down into semantic primitives or semantic features and their specification. Pottier's approach is embodied in binary features + and – signs that indicate the presence + or absence – of a feature. Such use of binary features was mapped on the phonological methods of Prague school developed for phonological analysis which used binary phonological features like [+-voiced], [+_labial], [+_nasal] (Riemer, 2012:155). Since componential analysis provides a descriptive model for semantic content, based on the assumption that meanings can be described on the basis of a restricted set of the semantic components or features, the sign + means a certain feature is present while the sign – means the feature is absent.

Componential analysis is particularly applicable to distinguishing the meanings of words that are semantically related or in the same semantic domain. It is often seen as a process of breaking down the sense of a word into its minimal distinctive features; that is, into components which contrast with other components. It refers to the description of the meaning of words through structured sets of semantic features. The lexical decomposition (or componential) approach to lexical semantics became one of the most influential in the 1960-1970s.

Componential analysis links up with the semantic fields approach. Its major impact came from its incorporation into generative grammar; the appearance of the famous article by Jerrod J. Katz and Jerry A. Fodor. The structure of a semantic theory (1963), marked a theoretical migration of componential analysis from a structuralist to a generativist framework (Geeraerts, 2010:70).

5.0   Methodology

The crying terms used in this study were collected from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Once decision was made on the topic of the research; the researcher identified other 'cry' terms from the dictionary. The source of the study then, was the dictionary. The researcher serves as the instrument of collecting the data.

5.1 Componential Analysis of English 'crying' terms

This paper is concerned with identifying and describing the distinctive features of the various forms of crying that are referred to in different words in English. Crying can be seen as an internal state of being and involuntary physiological response to an object or situation.

Emotions that can lead to crying include anger, sadness and even happiness. Crying is believed to be an outlet or a result of a burst of intense emotional sensations such as agony, surprise or joy.

6.0 Presentation of Data and Analysis

The following table shows the main differences when they are observable.

	With tears	From pain or rage	From joy	From fear	From grief	From exhaustion	Audible	Body movement
Cry	+	+	+	+	+	-	-/+	-/+
Weep	+	-	+	-	+	-	- /+	-
Sob	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Wail	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+

 Field of English 'crying' terms

In English, these words are synonymous. Still, most people will experience a shade of difference in meaning and context between cry and weep, even if they are not aware of it. Cry is the ordinary word for shedding of tears in response to certain emotion; an exhibition of a shallow and fleeting emotional reaction. For instance, a person can cry angry tears. However, we would not use weep to describe a child throwing tantrums unless trying to be funny. Another example is if a person has had a bad day that ended in tears, cry with frustration describe the state better than weeping. We can describe cry = +tears, +pain/rage, +from fear, +exhaustion.

Weep generally implies a quieter utterance than the other words, that is, to cry quietly for a long time, often used to emphasize an intense note of grief. Weeping is associated with grief, mourning and profound sadness of some kind. Weep is = +with tears, -from pain/rage, -from joy, +from fear, +from grief, -from exhaustion, -audible, -body movement. As such, weep is an internal state expressed through tears as opposed to the noisy tears of someone who has temporarily lost control of their day to day emotional state. Where weeping is a gentler version of sobbing that involves soft, steady stream of tears with lightly audible signs of distress, sob means to cry noisily taking sudden, sharp breaths or convulsive gasp. For crying to be described as sobbing, it usually has to be accompanied by a set of other signs, such as slow but erratic inhalation, occasional instances of breath holding and muscular tremor. In componential analysis, we can describe sob as = +tears, -pain/rage, -from joy, -from fear, +from grief, -from exhaustion, -audible, -body movement. Wail is a loud shrill utterance, that is, to cry in a loud voice especially as in grief or anguish, for instance: 'she let out a loud, doleful wail'. Wailing is very common in babies. Wail is = -tears, +from pain/rage, -from joy,-from fear, +from grief, -from exhaustion, +audible, +body movement.

7.0 Conclusion

Componential analysis is an approach to the description of word meaning, which most structural semanticists adopted. The approach is said to face some problems since it treats components or semantic features in terms of the binary features. This works only when there is a clear distinction. The labels for the components are not always readily available because such components do not have any physical manifestations. The study adopted a componential analysis such as that of Pottier (1964) to identify the distinctiveness among the terms by using plus and minus sign. We can conclude that componential analysis has been a useful approach to determine the meaning of the crying terms. Although Pottier's analysis can be considered basically a description of referents, physical entities in the world rather than a description of semantic structures, even so, componential analysis is practical and effective. To summarize, crying terms in English varies in terms of some apparent features. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that first, there are some existing discrepancies in the observed features as some are not so easily detectible. Second, some features overlapped in certain components. Third, we cannot be precise in what emotion initiates the cry as all these are dependent on the person, gender, emotion and situation.

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