

Exploring Actions and Personality of the Characters in the Short Story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

Thin Thin Mon¹

Abstract

This research focuses on actions and personality of the characters in the short story 'The Lottery' by Shirley Jackson. As Shirley Jackson's literary output is very great in degree, it is impossible to study all her literary works. Among the literary works, the story 'The Lottery' is selected as the material for the research and the research area is restricted to characterisation, with an emphasis on the verbs that show actions and personality of the characters in the story 'The Lottery'. The objectives of the research are to identify the semantic categories of lexical verbs and to explore the verbs that indicate actions and personality of the main characters in the short story 'The Lottery'. The verbs which portray the characters are identified in terms of Douglas Biber's semantic categories (2002): activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, causative verbs, verbs of occurrence, verbs of existence or relationship and verbs of aspect. Based on the semantic categories of verbs, the research points out how the characters behave, what they do and what types of personalities they have. And it also gives the moral lesson to the readers through the portrayal of the characters. It is recommended that further researches should be done within linguistic aspects (using Functional Grammar or Case Grammar) and within the scope of literary criticism (exploring themes, point of view, plot and setting).

Keywords: Actions, Personality, Characterisation, Lottery

Introduction

"The Lottery" is the highly controversial and famous short story about a village that partakes in an annual death ritual by Shirley Jackson. This study focuses on actions and personality of the characters in the short story "The Lottery". According to van Peer (1988), "Character, it can be hardly denied, is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist". By exploring the use of semantic categories of lexical verbs that show actions and personality of the characters in the story "The Lottery", one can observe how Shirley Jackson writes this story to achieve a maximum effectiveness.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to analyze how the characters are portrayed by means of semantic categories of lexical verbs in Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery". The objectives of this research are to identify the semantic domains of lexical verbs and to explore the verbs that show actions and personality of the main characters in the short story "The Lottery".

Literature Review

In order to assess what knowledge exists and what is generally accepted with regard to this research, a theory concerning characterisation is presented.

¹ Lecturer, Department of English, Dagon University

Summary of the Short Story

The location of this story was set in New England. In this story, on a warm day in late June, villagers gathered in the square to participate in a lottery run by Mr. Summers who officiated at all the big civic events. The children arrived first and began collecting stones until their parents call them to order. Mrs. Hutchinson arrived late and chatted briefly with her friend, Mrs. Delacroix. Mr. Summers called each head of the household (always a grown man) forward a black wooden box, where each selected a slip of paper. Once the men had chosen, Mr. Summers allowed everyone to open the paper and see who had been selected. The lucky person selected is Bill Hutchinson. His wife immediately started protesting. There are altogether five people in the Hutchinson family. Mr. Summers placed five slips of paper into the box and each member of the family drew. Mrs. Tess Hutchinson drew a slip of paper with a big black dot in the centre. The villagers advanced on her, and it became clear what the prize for the lottery really was: stoning to death. Tess protested in vain as the villagers attacked her.

Research Methodology

Material

The material used in the research is the short story ‘The Lottery’ written by Shirley Jackson, an acclaimed American writer of the short story ‘The Lottery’ as well as longer works like ‘We Have Always Lived in the Castle’. The story was published in the June 26, 1948 issue of *The New Yorker*. The story reflects Jackson’s own life: she continually struggled with the expectations that her mother and later her husband forced upon her. She not only supported their family, including four children, with her literary career but also managed the daily household responsibilities. The story explores ideas such as communal violence, individual vulnerability, and the dangers of blindly following tradition.

Method

This research is mainly based on the analysis of semantic categories. Lexical verbs are examined in terms of Douglas Biber's method (2002). According to Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad and Geoffrey Leech's method (2002), semantic domains are generally distinguished seven categories: activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, causative verbs, verbs of occurrence, verbs of existence or relationship, and verbs of aspect. Activity verbs usually refer to a volitional activity—that is, an action performed intentionally by an agent or "doer". The second type of semantic category is communication verbs which are a special subcategory of activity verbs that involve communication activities, particularly verbs describing speech and writing. Mental verbs refer to mental states and activities. Causative verbs, such as, allow, cause, force, and help indicate that some person or thing helps to bring about a new state of affairs. These verbs often occur with a derived noun as the direct object, which reports the action that was facilitated. Verbs of occurrence report events that occur without an actor. Often the subjects of these verbs are affected by the event that is described by the verb. Verbs of existence or relationship report a state of existence or a logical relationship that exists between entities. Verbs of aspect characterize the stage of progress of an activity. These verbs usually occur with a complement clause following the verb.

Procedures

The procedures for analyzing the characters are as follows:

- (1) Collecting the verbs that show actions and personality of the characters to explore the characters through action and classifying them.
- (2) Exploring the actions of the characters in order to infer personalities of the characters from their behaviour towards others.

Data Analysis and Data Interpretation

Verbs of semantic categories are analysed in the short story “The Lottery” in terms of Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad and Geoffrey Leech's method (2002).

The verbs used for the characterisation in the short story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson are: Activity verbs (68 items), Communication verbs (62 items), Mental verbs (5 items), Causative verbs (4 items), Verbs of occurrence (3 items), Verb of existence or relationship 1 and Verbs of aspect 2 items. The striking semantic categories are activity verbs and communication verbs.

As shown in Table 5, the striking semantic categories that show the actions of the characters are activity verbs and communication verbs. With regard to activity verbs, the word "made" is mostly found because it occurs 3 times. Concerning communication verbs, the word "said" is mostly found because it occurs 30 times. The repetition of verbs supports the significance of the action in this short story.

Table 1. Classification of verbs that show the action of the character Mr. Summers into semantic domains

Activity	Communication	Mental	Causative	Occurrence	Existence	Aspectual
arrived	called (4)	knew	devoted		seemed	began
waved	said (30)		left			
set	spoke		hushed			
stirred (2)	argued					
made (3)	declared					
put	talked					
performed	consulted					
turned (2)	asked (3)					
left	directed					
go						
holding						
nodded						
cleared						
looked (2)						
raised						
grinned						
stepped						
selected						
holding						
waiting						
waited						

Mr. Summers, the main character of the story and a married childless business owner, emerges with the black box. According to the table, the Activity verbs such as "arrived", "waved", "set", "stirred" indicate the procedures of the lottery ritual. As Mr. Summer is a sensitive person, he easily notices the murmur of conversation among the villagers. So he lets them know his arrival. Then he settles the black box down on a three-legged stool produced by Mr. Graves. Instead of ordering the villagers, he requests some of them to assist him to place the box. As one of the actions in this event, he stirs up the papers inside the black box.

Moreover, the Communication verbs "called", "said", "spoke" show Mr. Summers' thoughtful suggestion to make a new box every year after the lottery because it has grown shabby with time. However, the new box was never made by the villagers not to upset the tradition. This speech portrays an image of Mr. Summers as a careful person. Besides, the verbs "stirred", "made", "put", reveal that Mr. Summers has to stir the papers thoroughly with his hand as the responsible lottery official. Instead of the chips of wood used in the previous rituals, he introduces slips of paper in order to be more attractive and convenient as the population has increased. In addition, the verbs "declared", "said", "sang", support the scenario of the lottery ritual. A state of Mr. Summers' solemn existence is reported by the verb of existence "seemed". The verbs "left", "turned" describe Mr. Summer as an observant person who left behind his colleagues in order to show his attention to the crowd. Mr. Summers' friendly jokes about Mrs. Hutchinson's late arrival are used to describe by the verb "said". Moreover, the verb "said" shows that as the motivated officiator of the lottery who does not want to waste time, he suggests the villagers to start quickly and finish the ritual.

Mr. Summers makes sure that everyone who needs to be at the lottery is present and accounts for those who are unable to attend. Then the lottery begins. Mr. Summers begins to call out the names of each family alphabetically, and each head of the household, usually the husband and father, comes forward to take a slip of paper from the black box. Here, the verbs "consulted", "said", indicate that he is very systematic and keeps the drawing going efficiently so that it can be finished on time. In addition, the verb "waited" uncovers Mr. Summers' understanding and patience for the slow response of Mrs. Dunbar. As Clyde Dunbar isn't there due to his broken leg, his wife has to draw the lottery for him since their son is not old enough.

When Mr. Summers asks the Watson boy if he will draw the lottery for the family, he nervously affirms. The verbs "made" "holding" represent his responsible spirit in performing his duty systematically. Mr. Summers asks to make sure if Old Man Warner is there too. The verb "nodded" explains that Mr. Summers paid attention to all the villagers. During the lottery ritual, Mr. Summers reminds everyone about the lottery's rules, he'll read names, and the family heads come up and draw a slip of paper and no one should look at the paper until everyone has drawn. These actions indicating Mr. Summers' clear instructions are demonstrated by the verbs "cleared", "looked". Besides, the verbs "raised", "grinned" illustrate Mr. Summers' close friendship with Mr. Adams, the first person to draw in the lottery. Like the other villagers, Mr. Summers called his own name, paced forward strictly and chose a paper slip from the box. The verbs "stepped", "selected" give an idea about the fact that he followed the discipline.

After the heads of each household have drawn their slips until Mr. Summers approves, they open their slips at once. In this case, the verbs "said" "asked" reveal Mr. Summers' important role in the lottery. The verb "directed" describes the speech of Mr. Summers who conducted the lottery. Here, Mr. Summers prepared for a second ritual lottery drawing. He mentioned that the first lottery drawing took longer than expected so they need to hurry. He asks Mr. Hutchinson if there are any other households in the Hutchinson family. Mr. Hutchinson says that her daughter Eva and her husband Don should take their chance. The verb "said" explains that Mr. Summers reminds her that daughters draw with their husbands' family. This fact is simply more evident that the villagers are organized as a patriarchy. Families are defined by male heads of household.

Once all of the heads of households receive slips, they simultaneously check them. Bill Hutchinson has selected the special slip, and his family is singled out. Mrs. Hutchinson expresses her discontent and accuses Mr. Summers of not giving her husband enough time to select his slip. Nonetheless, Mr. Summers rearranges the box so that it holds only five slips for

the Hutchinson family. The family comes forth, and each of them, Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson and their three children, select one of the five slips in the box. One by one, the children, then Mr. Hutchinson, reveal that their slips of paper are blank. The town realizes that Mrs. Hutchinson holds the remaining piece of paper with the black dot. These activities are described in detail by the verbs such as "looked", "hushed", "and made".

Table 2. Classification of verbs that show the action of the character Mrs. Hutchinson into semantic domains

Activity	Communication	Mental	Causative	Occurrence	Existence	Aspectual
came (2)	said (6)	forgot				began
slid	grinning	thought				
laughed	shouted	remembered				
went (2)	saying	found				
looked	yelled					
dried						
craned						
tapped						
made						
reached						
leave						
hesitate						
looking						
set						
snatched						
held (2)						

Another important character of the story is Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson. In analyzing the actions of Tessie Hutchinson, the verbs "came", "slid", "laughed", "went", "dried" show the reader that Tessie is a busy mother as well as a dutiful villager who obeys the traditional customs. She knows she must go to the ritual lottery drawing. On that day, she immediately stands out totally different from the other villagers. Tessie arrives flustered and breathless just before the lottery ritual began whereas the other women arrive at the square calmly, chatting with one another and then standing placidly by their husbands. In order to reach quickly to join her family, the friendly villagers clear up the way for Mrs. Hutchinson. Besides, the verb "craned" indicates the caring concern of a wife and mother who is eagerly craning her neck searching for her family in the crowded square where the ritual lottery is held. The verb "found" shows that when Tessie finally found them out, she joined them. The verb "began" in this case emphasizes that the ritual lottery drawing begins as soon as Tessie arrives. She has been washing dishes and lost track of time.

Moreover, the verbs "shouted", "said" show the fact that Tessie is bold and brave when Bill Hutchinson draws the marked strip of paper: she protests that Bill didn't have enough time to take any paper he wanted and repeated many times that it was not fair. This shows that Tessie dares to break the rules speaking out the unfairness by the responsible lottery managers towards her husband. When Tessie's family's name is called, she urges her husband to get up quickly there, making the people near her amused to hear the way she says. Here, Mrs. Hutchinson's eager encouragement to her husband to participate in the lottery is demonstrated by the verb "said". In addition, the verb "yelled" uncovers the fact that Tessie's enthusiasm to

see the lottery through is only paralleled by her desperate impatience to get out of it once it turns out to be her turn. In this critical situation, Tessie tries to substitute her daughter and son-in-law to draw the ritual lottery instead of her. In this case, naturally, being a human, Tessie decides to save herself by allowing to sacrifice either her daughter or son-in-law. Moreover, the Activity verbs "hesitated", "looking", "set", "went", "snatched" reveal Tessie's foreboding thoughts concerning the cruel ritual. While Tessie is protesting quietly, Mr. Graves takes back Hutchinson's paper slip and adds it to the box, which now contains the five slips of paper. In the final lottery drawing, Davy is chosen first to draw the lottery. After they have taken care of young Dave, Mr. Graves helps him take a single slip of paper from the box. Nancy draws next, than Bill Jr. After hesitating, Tessie draws her own slip. She holds it in her fist until Bill takes it from her forcibly and shows the black spot on the slip of paper.

In this case, when Mr. Summers tells everyone that Tess is the person who wins the lottery: that is, she has been selected for being stoned. Someone gives Dave Hutchinson a few pebbles so that he can attack his mother with the rest of the village. The villagers start to collect stones, Mrs. Delacroix selected an enormous stone. As Tess Hutchinson protests, everyone, even her own children and husband, descend upon her and stone her to death. Actually, Mrs. Hutchinson is protesting only because the violence has become personal. She would have been perfectly fine with the idea of being one of the attackers. Tessie's frightened stage for being stoned mercilessly is represented by the Communication verbs 'said', 'screamed'.

Table 3. Classification of verbs that show the action of the character Mr. Graves into semantic domains

Activity	Communication	Mental	Causative	Occurrence	Existence	Aspectual
followed	said (2)					
carrying	greeted					
made						
put (2)						
watched						
came						
selected (2)						
nodded						
held (2)						
dropped						
took (2)						
removed						

The third character Mr. Graves, the village postmaster and Mr. Summers' assistant in the proceedings of the lottery, is never described and he never has a line of dialogue although "The Lottery" is a dialogue- rich story. However, Mr. Graves is the ultimate authority in a murderous lottery. His name is where the "winner" of this ritual is going. Here, the Activity verbs "followed" "made" "put" indicate Mr. Graves' position that gives him enormous power since he controls the town's communication with the outside world. It's the importance of his work that makes him, the strong support of the village's tradition. It is Mr. Graves who brings the three-legged stool to support the lottery's black box and he is the one who vests Mr. Summers with the right to conduct the lottery in the first place. Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves prepare the papers, put them in the black box the night before and then lock it up at Mr.

Summers' coal company. Moreover, the verb "swearing-in" shows that Mr. Graves swears in Mr. Summers as the lottery official before the lottery begins. In addition, the verbs "nodded" and "held" reveal Mr. Graves' obedience towards Mr. Summers who wields a frightening amount of power as the lottery conductor. During the lottery drawing, before Mr. Graves puts the five slips of paper selected for the Hutchinsons, he drops the other paper slips onto the ground. These actions of Mr. Graves are obviously described by the verbs "selected", "put", "dropped". Besides, the verbs "took", "removed" "held" also represent the fact that as Mr. Graves was told to help little Dave, draw a paper from the box and then looks at it to determine if Dave's going to be the village's chosen victim. However, he is not chosen. Moreover, the verbs "opened" and "held" reveal Mr. Graves' action in taking little Dave Hutchinson's paper from his clenched fist and opening it. It can be assumed that this lottery drawing will be Dave's first introduction to mortality, as he participates in the violent death of his mother. It seems to be appropriate that Graves is the powerful person who initiates the lottery resulting the brutal lessons of life, human nature, injustice, misuse of power and ultimate death.

Table 4. Classification of verbs that show the action of the character Mrs. Delacroix into semantic domains

Activity	Communication	Mental	Causative	Occurrence	Existence	Aspectual
stood	said (3)		held	got		
selected	talking					
pick	called					
turn						
laughed						

The personality of the fourth character "Mrs. Delacroix" is only lightly sketched in and not described in detail. She is a friend of Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson. The Activity verbs "stood" "laughed" indicate the actions of Mrs. Delacroix whose name means of-the-cross in French. She is explained by Mrs. Hutchinson why she is late. Mrs. Hutchinson has forgotten about the date of the lottery drawing until she realizes the absence of her children. Mrs. Delacroix reassures Mrs. Hutchinson that she didn't miss anything. At first, Mrs. Delacroix is chatting happily with Mrs. Graves and Mrs. Tess Hutchinson. It is found strikingly that Mrs. Delacroix is the only person who speaks to the silent Mrs. Graves, wife of the even more silent postmaster. Here, the verb "said" indicates the gossip between Mrs. Delacroix and Mrs. Graves in the back row about how time flies. The last lottery seems to be very recent. Mrs. Delacroix's friendly relationship with the Graves family foreshadows her eagerness to let Tess Hutchinson die. Besides, the Activity verb and the Communication verb "held", "said" reveal Mrs. Delacroix's visible nervousness as her husband moves forward. When Delacroix is called, Mrs. Delacroix holds her breath. Here, the verb "called" shows Mrs. Delacroix's anger towards Tessie for her childish behaviour when she protests again that the lottery wasn't fair. Moreover, the verbs "selected", "picked", "turned", uncover that Mrs. Delacroix chooses an especially giant stone to throw at her friend as Mrs. Dunbar tells her to start stoning. In this case, the lottery appears completely natural to Mrs. Delacroix, so much so that it doesn't seem to her as a contradicting behaviour to chat happily with Tess one minute before attacking Mrs. Hutchinson.

Findings and Discussion

This research tends to analyze how the actions and personality of the characters have been portrayed by Semantic categories of lexical verbs: activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, causative verbs, verbs of occurrence, verbs of existence or relationship, and verbs of aspect. The four characters involved in the story are to be analyzed in terms of Semantic domains. In analyzing the characters through actions, the number of verbs in semantic domains for each character is displayed as follows:

Table 5. Finding the frequency and percentage of verbs that show the action of the characters

Semantic domains of verbs	Mr. Summers	Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson	Mr. Harry Graves	Mrs. Delacroix	Frequency of verbs	Percentage
Activity	27	20	16	5	68	46.90%
Communication	45	9	3	5	62	42.76%
Mental	1	4	-	-	5	3.45%
Causative	3	-	-	1	4	2.76%
Occurrence	2	-	-	1	3	2.07%
Existence	1	-	-	-	1	0.69%
Aspectual	1	1	-	-	2	1.38%
Total	80	34	19	12	145	100%

In the table, Activity Verbs 46.90 % which show the actions and movements of the characters are mostly found. The author has made use of the Activity Verbs to indicate the action of the characters and Activity Verbs that show the series of action of Mr. Summers are found out more than the Activity Verbs for the other three characters. Communication Verbs 42.76% are applied to reveal the interaction and communication of the characters and Mental Verbs 3.45% are used to show the emotion and feeling of the characters. Causative Verbs are found out in 2.76%. The Occurrence Verbs are resulted in 2.07% and the Existence Verbs 0.69% are used to report a state of existence or a logical relationship that exists between entities. Finally, Aspectual Verbs are resulted in 1.38%.

Regarding Mr. Summers' personalities, verbs of motion such as 'arrived', 'go', 'left', 'stepped' express that Mr. Summers moves from one place to another during the lottery process as he is the most responsible person in the lottery drawing. Besides, verbs of action such as 'waved', 'nodded', 'cleared' are physiological verbs which show Mr. Summers' mental activity and physical movement. These action verbs are used in order to show agreement and understanding towards the villagers and in order to get the people's attention. These actions indicate his light-heartedness towards the villagers and seriousness of his duty. Mr. Summers' carefulness and eagerness to perform his duty is revealed by the verbs of doing such as 'set', 'stir', 'made', 'put', 'performed', 'holding', 'grinned', 'stepped', 'selected'. The communication verbs 'called', 'said', 'spoke', 'talked' only highlight how he gives the message to his friends and responsibility for the lottery ritual as he is in charge of the brutal ritual. However, the verb 'asked' describes the fact that he wanted to know more about the individual villagers. Presumably, he wants to be dutiful or he is a very inquisitive person. In

addition, the verb 'argued' shows that Mr. Summers is against with the villagers to use paper slips instead of wood chips in the lottery drawing due to increasing population. The communication verb 'declared' points out Mr. Summers' statement of the opening of the lottery ritual firmly and confidently indicating that Mr. Summers' is an assertive person. The fact that Mr. Summers want to get the suggestion and confirmation from others with regard to the list of the lottery drawers is uncovered by the communication verb "consulted" shows that he is a very systematic person. Moreover, no mental motion gives hints of his brain about the absence of Clyde Dunbar who broke his leg by the use of the static verb 'knew'. The use of the relationship verb 'seemed' points out that he is not really proper and important and he does not have a genuine authority in the lottery process.

In referring the characters' personalities from what they say, what they do and how they behave towards others, their action, responses and reactions to other people are found out. The author has inserted these responses and actions of the characters to make the personalities of the characters more vivid and alive.

Conclusion

This research indicates the actions and personality of the characters in the short story by Shirley Jackson by means of the methods proposed by Douglas Biber (2002). In analyzing the personalities of the characters, critical linguistic approach, a combination of linguistics and literary approach, are applied.

This research concerns with analyzing the characters through actions: what they say, what they do and how they behave. Personalities of the characters are detected by classifying the verbs into seven major semantic domains: Activity, Communication, Mental, Causative, Occurrence, Existence and Aspectual verbs. Among them, Activity verbs indicate physical activities, actions and movements of the characters and other verbs show emotion, expression and mannerisms. In all the characters, activity verbs are found more than other as they describe what they act and how they act.

By analyzing and exploring the actions and personality of the characters in the story 'The Lottery', the researcher comes to realize that this technique of characterisation is very useful for further researchers.

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