Narrative Comprehension and Story Grammar

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ABSTRACT

Every text has an underlying structure which has a vital contribution in making it a meaningful whole. Awareness of a text's structure therefore is significant in deriving the sense of the text. Story grammar offers a simple and effective framework to analyze a coherent structure in narrative texts, hence is assumed to facilitate the comprehension of narratives. The research has been designed to be a descriptive study, with the objective to explain and illustrate how story grammar can function in constructing and decoding meanings in a narrative text, and, to highlight the scope of story grammar in pedagogy. A short story text has been randomly selected from the short story collection in the English text book by Punjab text book board for Intermediate level. A three stepped comprehensive analysis of the sample text has been done by implementing the selected story grammar model. It has been found that story grammar helped in deriving a coherent structure from the short story text; hence it has pedagogical implications in developing narrative comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not an absolute, neutral entity to label some objective reality around us. It is a dynamic tool not just to address reality but to communicate our feelings, thoughts and emotions, and, to socialize with our fellow beings. We humans, hence, can customize language to suit our personal needs. Yet, being members of the same species, having common natural tendencies, sharing common interests and experiences, we exhibit certain observable regularities in the use of language. With time, these regularities become agreed upon patterns of language use to communicate meaningfully.

These regularities have long been observed at sentential level in terms of sentence grammars. With the advent of functional linguistics in 1960's, there was an upsurge of interest in analyzing language as larger semantic units. The notions of text and discourse were initiated by functional linguistics to label these larger functional units of language. M. A. K. Halliday (1976), the pioneer of functional linguistics, believed that 'a text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning'. For Wallace (1992), text is any chunk of written language which contains a whole meaning. In other words, text is a semantic unit realized by the textual component (Halliday, 2002).

The two defining features of a text therefore are textual unity and semantic unity. Textual unity is the unity among the surface linguistic features of a text, while semantic unity implies the unified meanings generated by the text. Meanings – explicit or implicit – are, however, drawn from the linguistic features in the surface text. Textual unity, hence, is not absolutely distinct from semantic unity. It is the unity among the linguistic features in the surface text which significantly contributes in imparting semantic unity onto a text.

Saussure's notion that meanings are not absolute, but relative and contextual, implies most obviously on texts for involving a situated use of language. Since texts are larger semantic units, readers ability to draw meanings of individual sentences alone, does not suffice in comprehending the message in texts. Texts have certain linguistic conventions, beyond the scope of sentence grammars, which contribute in constructing a unified meaning in them. Texts being unified semantic units represent a flow of thought and a flow of meanings, generally pertaining to a single topic or subject matter, so that the readers can sail smoothly through them, interlocking coherent meanings in their minds. This flow of thought and meanings in a text is an outcome of cohesion and coherence.

According to Halliday (2002), cohesion is a property which refers to the connectedness of various grammatical and lexical features in a text, while coherence refers to the overall structural unity underlying the text. Text structure is the term used to refer to the interconnectedness of the text resulting from logical connections among ideas and subordination of some ideas to others, in order to convey a coherent message to the reader (Meyer & Rice, 1984). However, as pointed out by Givon (1993), "Coherence (text structure) is fundamentally not an objective property of the produced text"; that text is rather a by-product of the mental processes involved in text production and comprehension.

Text structure therefore has a vital role in constructing meanings at textual level. Being implicit it requires an active cognitive involvement on part of the readers to probe text structure. Once explored, text structure can make it quite convenient to follow the text and to comprehend it. The fact is validated by rigorous research in the field of text linguistics, which talked about text grammars as a substantial tool for understanding texts. Different text grammars and text parsing systems have been devised and implemented, over the years, to study text semantics. The most recent of them is story grammar, particularly meant to study narrative texts.

Story grammar, also referred to as narrative structure, is a story's internal structure representing its essential formal constituents and the relationships among them (Lalas, 1983). It involves a set of rules defining the type of story constituents contained in the story and the kind of semantic relationships connecting them. Over the years several researchers have postulated several simple story grammar models. Among the most prominent story grammar models are those given by Thorndike (1977), Stein & Glenn (1975) and Mandler & Johnson (1977).

All these models have commonly outlined almost similar story constituents and the types of semantic relationships held between the constituents; it is only the way of representation that differs. The invariant story constituents postulated by these models generally include the equivalents of setting, event structure, episodes, initiating event for the episode, a reaction to the initiating event, goal, attempts and consequences, and a final resolution. The story grammar models commonly represent these constituents in a hierarchical

organization. The common types of relationships connecting the constituents are temporal and logical.

Several studies have explored the prototypical schematic character of story grammar. Cited in a report by Mosenthal & Tierney (1980), story grammar is an approximation of the reader's internalized grammar (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975; Stein & Glenn, 1978; Thorndyke, 1977). It is because of this notion of internalized grammar that story grammar is also referred to as story schema. Spivey (1989) defines story schema as a hypothesized mental structure for story processing. The theoretical basis for an internalized story grammar has been supported by cognitive psychology- Schema theory.

Schema theory is one of the most rigorously consulted areas of cognitive psychology in relation to text processing and reading comprehension. Recently story grammarians have also drawn upon schema theory to explain the interpretative act of reading narratives and to provide basis for the effectiveness of story grammar in comprehending narrative texts. As proposed by Mosenthal & Tierney (1980), it is impossible for individuals to mentally process whole texts without a "deep," internalized plan. They believed that story grammars are relatively simple frameworks which can serve as efficient research tools to gauge the effects of narrative structure on comprehension as well as a convenient method for the practitioners to have a qualitative analysis of both story and story comprehension. According to Dymock (2007), story grammar identifies the fundamental elements in a story and depicts how these elements knit together to generate a well formed story. He believed that story grammar offers a complete framework for unfolding narrative text structure and concluded that students having thorough understanding of the narrative structure showed better narrative comprehension. This is because the awareness of narrative structure helps students predict the flow of stories which consequently facilitates the comprehension of narratives (Duchan, 2004).

Studying narratives is significant as narrative form is an inherent tendency of human mind to construct meanings. Whatever we experience, our mind prefers to process it in a narrative form rather than as discrete facts in logical relationships (Pearson, 2008). As a genre of literature also, narrative is dominant over other literary forms; that is why texts are broadly classified as narrative and expository (Amer, 1992). Most of the literary genres like: drama, novel, short story and poetry, involve narrative form. Knowledge of narrative structure thus can be beneficial in furnishing literary reading skills in general. Moreover, since literature involves the play of language; linguistics and literary skills are also not absolutely independent of each other. Hence, knowledge of story grammar can be valuable for both literature and language learners.

English bears the status of a compulsory subject in Pakistani educational institutions. The subject caters both language and literature. In majority of institutions in the country, the trend is to teach literature and language in an integrated manner i.e. language exercises based on literary texts. It is though an established and recommended teaching strategy among the faculty of language and literature, students have been observed to be deficient in comprehending literary texts. The difficulty rises with complex and compact texts like short stories. For the same reason the genre of short story is the main focus of the study.

Common teaching practice for developing short story comprehension in Pakistani educational institutions is to make students read aloud chunks of the text in class turn by turn, providing them with the meanings of the difficult words and explanation of the complex

expressions, and finally making them attempt to answer the comprehension questions given at the end of each story's text in the text book. Analyzing these comprehension exercises at the end of each short story text, it has been found that majority of questions catered only surface level comprehension and not the underlying message in the text. The theme of each story is already given at the end of the story which students are made to cram instead to explore after a critical reading of the text. As far as the linguistic skills are concerned, learners are restricted to sentence level grammatical knowledge only, which is absolutely insufficient to deal with textual meanings.

1.1. Problem Statement

Every text has an underlying structure which has a vital contribution in making it a meaningful whole. Awareness of the text's structure therefore is significant in interpreting the sense of the text. Story grammar offers a simple and effective framework to analyze a coherent structure in narrative texts, hence can help comprehend them. The study particularly intends to signify how story grammar guides the process of understanding short story texts.

1.2. Research Question

How does story grammar operate in developing the comprehension of a narrative text (short story)?

1.3. Research Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

1. To highlight the significance of text structure in comprehending textual meanings.
2. To explain and illustrate how story grammar works in constructing and decoding meanings in a narrative text.
3. To signify the scope of story grammar in pedagogy.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The potential of story grammar in improving reading comprehension of narratives has been established by a number of research studies conducted in this area since the advent of story grammar. The research in this regard mostly focused on the outcome of using story grammar as a direct method of instruction for teaching narratives. The phenomenon is relatively new with regards to Pakistani educational scenario; hence the need was to explain how story grammar operates in the process of comprehending narratives, that is, how it guides the readers in decoding meanings from narrative texts. The present research is therefore, specifically designed as a descriptive study to explain the theoretical stance of story grammar as an effective strategy of comprehending narratives.

The study will highlight the significance of analyzing textual unity in deriving meanings out of a narrative text by applying story grammar on sample texts. The study will be significant in suggesting teachers of English language and literature in Pakistan that story grammar can be used as a pedagogic technique to develop learners' reading comprehension skills. Interpreting

narratives through story grammar will be promising in fostering cloze reading and critical thinking skills which are considered important in comprehending literary writings. A thorough analysis of the selected short stories, specifically taken from the course books, is likely to offer an explicit illustration and a guideline for teachers to facilitate them implement the strategy on regular basis in their classrooms. Readers in general can also benefit from the strategy to develop effective literary reading skills. The study will also be an initiative for future researchers to explore further dimensions of the research area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

The study intended to explicate the scope of story grammar in facilitating reading comprehension of narrative texts, specifically short stories. It attempted to explain how knowledge of story grammar guides the process of comprehending a short story text. This was done by identifying the canonical story constituents in the sample short story text and then analyzing and explaining their meaningful organization, by implementing a story grammar framework. The study therefore conducted a qualitative analysis of the selected short story. Qualitative analysis, as explained by McEnery & Wilsonis (2001) is more suitable when the intention is to identify and describe aspects of language use. Such an analysis, they believe, can offer a rich and comprehensive perspective on the data.

A major concern of the study was to explore the potential significance of story grammar for students of English language and literature in Pakistan; thus the sample story 'The Gift of The Magi' written by O' Henry, has been taken from the English text book for Intermediate students published by Punjab text book board. There is a reasonable number of short stories included in the literature section of the English text book for intermediate students. The sample story was selected randomly from the short story selection in the text book. Selecting sample story from a text book was believed to validate the scope of story grammar in pedagogy.

2.2. Study Framework

The sample story has been analyzed by adapting the story grammar model proposed by Mandler & Johnson in 1977, in their renowned work titled; "Remembrance of Things Parsed: Story Structure and Recall".

Mandler & Johnson (1977) have talked of an internalized story grammar comprising of canonical elements termed as the story constituents. According to them, these constituents are hierarchical and mainly include a setting and an event structure. The event structure further branches off into one or more episodes. Each episode involves an initiating event, a reaction to the initiating event, goal, attempt and outcome, and a final resolution. The individual nodes in the hierarchy of story constituents are connected through relational terms - *And*, *Then*, and *Cause*. The term *And* stands for simultaneity; *Then* refers a temporal or sequential order of events; while *Cause* connects two nodes in a cause and effect relationship. These relational terms are inserted in the form of abbreviations i.e. A, T, and C respectively, between the nodes in the tree diagram.

2.3. Scheme of Analysis

A thorough analysis of the sample story's text has been done by applying the selected framework. The analysis was done in three steps.

As the first step of analysis, the story's text was parsed into fundamental story constituents, as explained in the model. The second step involved sketching a graphical representation of the story's text in the form of a tree diagram, as per the requirement of the study framework, so as to show a vivid picture of the structural organization of the story constituents. As the third and final step of analysis, a qualitative description of the semantic relations between the fundamental story constituents has been given. This final qualitative analysis was intended to answer the research question by providing a comprehensive analysis of how meanings have been carried forward in the text along a coherent text structure, and, how the story grammar framework has assisted the comprehension of the text being analyzed.

DATA

A thorough three stepped analysis of the sample text has been presented in the following section. Complete text of the sample story has been given in the appendix.

3.1. The Sample Story's Text Split into Propositions

As the first step of the analysis, the story's text has been parsed into propositions pertaining to the essential functional story constituents outlined by the study model. The text marked in italics represents the aesthetic or the emotional elements in the story and cannot be identified with any functional constituent enlisted by the study framework.

1. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. She had put it aside, one cent and then another and then another, in her careful buying of meat and other food. Della counted it three times. One dollar and eighty-seven cents.

2. And the next day would be Christmas.

3. There was nothing to do but fall on the bed and cry. So Della did it.

4. Only $1.87 to buy a gift for Jim. Her Jim. She had had many happy hours planning something nice for him. Something nearly good enough. Something almost with the honor of belonging to Jim.

5. The James Dillingham Youngs were very proud of two things which they owned. One thing was Jim's gold watch. It had once belonged to his father. And, long ago, it had belonged to his father's father. The other thing was Della's hair.

   If a queen had lived in the rooms next to theirs, Della would have washed and dried her hair where the queen could see it. Della knew her hair was more beautiful than any queen's jewels and gifts.

   If a King had lived in the same house, with all his riches, Jim would have looked at his watch every time they met. Jim knew no king had anything so valuable.

6. So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, *shining like a falling stream of brown water.* It reached below her knee. It almost made itself into a dress for her. And then she put it up on her head again, nervously and quickly. Once she stopped for a moment and stood still while a tear or two ran down her face.

7. She put on her old brown coat. She put on her old brown hat. With the bright light still in her eyes, she moved quickly out of the door and down to the street. Where she stopped the sign read: "Mrs. Sofronie. Hair articles of All Kinds."

   Up to the second floor Della ran, and stopped to get her breath. Mrs. Sofronie, large, too white, cold-eyed looked at her.

   "Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

   "I buy hair," said Mrs. Sofronie. "Take your hat off and let me look at it."

Down fell the brown waterfall.

"Twenty dollars," said Mrs. Sofronie, lifting the hair to feel its weight.

"Give it to me quickly," said Della.

8. Oh, and the next two hours seemed to fly. She was going from one shop to another, to find a gift for Jim.

9. She found it at last.

    It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the shops, and she had looked in every shop in the city.

    It was a gold watch chain, very simply made. Its value was in its rich and pure material.

    Because it was so plain and simple, you knew that it was very valuable. All good things are like this.

    It was good enough for the watch. As soon as she saw it, she knew that Jim must have it.

    It was like him. Quietness and value—Jim and the chain both had quietness and value.

10. She paid twenty-one dollars for it. And she hurried home with the chain and 87 cents.

11. With that chain on his watch, Jim could look at his watch and learn the time anywhere he might be. Though the watch was so fine, it never had a fine chain. He sometimes took it out and looked at it only when no one could see him do it.

12. When Della arrived home, her mind quietened a little.

13. She began to think more reasonably.

14. She started to cover the sad marks of what she had done.

    Love and large-hearted giving, when added together, can leave deep marks. It is never easy to cover these marks, dear friends-never easy.

15. Within forty minutes her head looked a little better. With her short hair, she looked wonderfully like a schoolboy.

16. She looked at the looking glass for a long time. "If Jim doesn't like me," she said to herself, "before he looks at me a second time, he'll say I look like a girl who works for money. But what could I do—oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty seven cents?"

17. At seven Jim's dinner was ready for him.

18. Jim was never late. Della held the watch chain in her hand and sat near the door where he always entered.

19. Then she heard his steps in the hall

20. and her face lost color for a moment.

21. She often said little prayers quietly, about simple everyday things. And now she said: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

22. The door opened and Jim stepped in.

    He looked very thin and he was not smiling. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two-and with a family to take care of! He needed a new coat and he had nothing -to cover his cold hands.

    Jim stopped inside the door. *He was as quiet as a hunting dog when it is near a bird.* His eyes looked strangely at Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not understand.

23. It filled her with fear.

    It was not anger, nor surprise, nor anything else she had been ready for. He simply looked at her with the strange expression on his face.

24. Della went to him. "Jim, dear," she cried, "don't look at me like that. I had my hair cut off and sold it. I couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a gift. My hair will grow again. You won't care, will you? My hair grows very fast. It's Christmas Jim. Let's be happy. You don't know what a nice - what a beautiful, nice gift I got for you."

25. "You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim slowly. He seemed to labor to understand what had happened. He seemed not to feel sure he knew.

26. "Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me now? I'm me, Jim. I'm the same without my hair"

27. Jim looked around the room. "You say your hair is gone?" he said.

28. "You don't have to look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's the night before Christmas, boy. Be good to me, because I sold it for you. May be the hairs of my head could be counted," she said, "but no one could ever count my regard for you. Shall we eat dinner, Jim?"

29. Jim folded his arms before him. For ten seconds let us look in another direction. Eight dollars a week or a million dollars a year – how different are they? Someone may give you an answer but it will be wrong. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. My meaning will be explained soon.

30. From inside his coat, Jim took something tied in paper. He threw it upon the table.
   "I want you o understand me, Dell," he said. "Nothing like a haircut could make me careless for you. But if you'll open that, you may know what I felt when I came in."

31. White fingers pulled off the paper. And then a cry of joy; and then a change to tears.
   For there lay the Combs—the combs that Della had seen in a shop window and loved for a long time. Beautiful combs, with jewels, perfect for her beautiful hair. She had known they cost too much for her to buy them. She had looked at them without the least hope of owning them. And now they were hers, but her hair was gone.
   But she held them to her heart, and at last was able to look up and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

32. And then she jumped up and cried, "Oh, oh!" Jim had not yet seen his beautiful gift. She held it out to him in her open hand. The gold seemed to shine softly as if with her own warm and loving spirit. "Isn't it perfect, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at your watch a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how they look together."

33. Jim sat down and smiled.
   "Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep them a while. They're too nice to use now. I sold the watch to get the money to buy the combs. And now I think we should have our dinner."

34. The magi, as you know, were wise men - wonderfully wise men - who brought gifts to the new born Christ-child. They were the first to give Christmas gifts. Being wise, their gifts were doubtlessly wise ones. And here I have told you the story of two children who were not wise. Each sold the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other. But let me speak the last word to the wise of these days: Of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are the most wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

The second and third step of the story's analysis - the tree diagram of the underlying structure of the story's text and the descriptive analysis are given in an integrated manner under the next heading.

3.2. Descriptive Analysis of the Story

The story's text has been split into 34 propositions pertaining to different story constituents enlisted by the study model. An overview of the hierarchical tree structure of the story reveals that it involves a brief description of the setting and an event structure splitting into 4 episodes. First two episodes of the story are structurally independent, while the third and fourth episodes are embedded episodes and are structurally subordinate to episode 2. Generally all the episodes are well composed including a complete set of basic and terminal nodes. Comparing the two major episodes (i.e. episode 1 and 2) in terms of structural compactness, the tree structure exposes that episode 1 is short and simple than episode 2 which involves a compact web of events encompassing two more subordinate episodes (episodes 3 and 4) under the ending node. Episode 4 is the most compact of all; involving maximum number of propositions in the text.

The story's complete tree structure could not be effectively sketched on a single page hence has been split along its episodes. The tree diagram next (Fig. 1), sketches episode 1 of the story followed by its descriptive analysis. The tree diagram sketch of episode 2 (Fig. 2), having two embedded episodes 3 and 4 along with their descriptive analyses is given subsequently.

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI
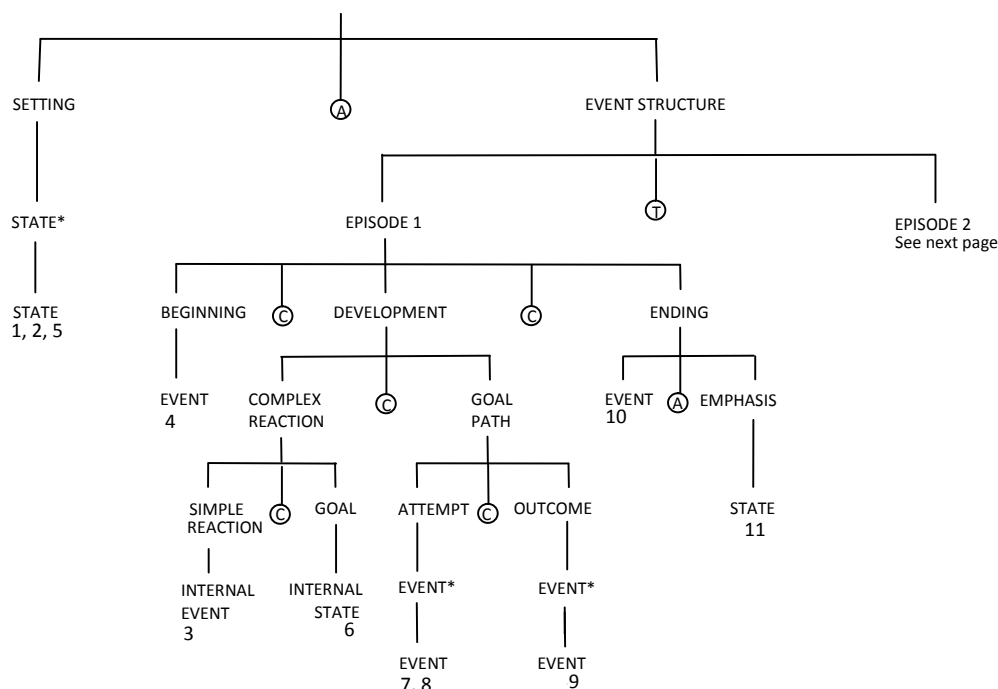
The story starts with the setting. Della, and describes the situation she is in; in the episode. Proposition 2 also

Proposition 1 introduces the protagonist - setting the precedent for later happenings provides the necessary

Fig.2. Tree diagram of the underlying structure of episode 1 of the story 'The Gift of the Magi'

information about the setting. Both these propositions are connected through the semantic relation A, also reflected in the surface text by the connective 'And'. Third proposition states the reaction of the protagonist, while the initiating event causing the protagonist's reaction has been stated afterwards; in the next proposition (i.e. proposition 4). Proposition 5 refers back to setting since it states the background information which will contribute in comprehending the story plot ahead.

The propositions 3, 4 and 5 in the text are transformations, as they are not in the straightforward linear order suggested by an ideal story schema. Nevertheless, the story grammar model used in the study allows such transformations and assumes that they do not distort comprehension but require a little effort on part of the reader to sort out their structural and meaningful organization in the text. Once sorted out, as done in the tree structure, they can be readily processed by the reader's mind; hence proving that knowledge of story grammar does facilitate comprehension.

The text marked in italics under proposition 5 is though superfluous as it does not contribute directly in the story's plot and does not fit in any story constituent enlisted by the study model; it is researcher's assumption that the segment is not absolutely extraneous. The text segment involves analogy which is a figurative speech feature in literary terms, meant for beautification and aesthetic pleasure in literary texts. As the text segment in question enhances the meaning of proposition 5, it does contribute in the meaningfulness of the text.

Proposition 6, though, does not state the protagonist's plan explicitly but hints at the fact that she has been making up her mind for something, hence has been marked as goal.

Propositions 7 and 8 together subsume the node attempt since they reflect the effort made by the protagonist to reach her goal. Both these events are connected through the temporal relation T (i.e. Then), as it is after selling the hair that Della was able to get the money and search for the gift. Proposition 9 reflects the immediate consequence of Della's effort, hence occupies the node outcome. Since it is the consequence of attempt, it connects to the node attempt through a causal relation C. Proposition 9 has also got some chunks in italics representing the emotional content. The next two propositions in the text (i.e. propositions 10 and 11) state the long range consequence of development as a whole and the overall resolution of the problem Della sorted out throughout the episode; thus subsume the ending node of the episode. The rewrite rule underlying the structure of the ending node is 'Event* (Emphasis)'. Proposition 10 is an event while proposition 11 is an emphatic statement. Both these propositions are linked through a temporal relation A.

Following is the tree structure of episode 2 including two embedded episodes i.e. episode 3 and 4. It will be followed by the descriptive analysis of the stated episodes.

Fig.3. Tree diagram of the underlying structure of episode 2, 3 & 4 of the story 'The Gift of the Magi'. The Emphasis under the Ending node in Episode 4 represents the author's comment on the characters of the story; thus bears no direct semantic relation with the preceding events. The constituents missing in the surface text (Goal in episode 2 & 4 here) are enclosed in square brackets.

Proposition 12 marks the beginning of episode 2. It is an event and connects through a causal relation C to the next proposition in the text (i.e. proposition 13), which represents the protagonist's reaction to the beginning. Upon getting home Della is out of the intoxication represented by the emphatic ending of the last episode and consequently she starts thinking reasonably. Her thoughts lead her to act as reflected in the next proposition (i.e. proposition 14); hence the proposition is marked as attempt, initiating the development node in the episode. The beginning relates to the development node through a causal relation C. No goal has been stated explicitly in the text but it can be inferred from the context. The happenings in the last episode as well as the mention of the words 'to cover the sad marks of what she had done' in proposition 14 can help the reader infer that Della wants to make up for the loss of her beautiful hair which her husband adored.

As proposed by the story grammarians, story grammar activates the ideal story schema in readers' mind so when a certain story constituent is missing in the surface text, the reader is prompted and he then attempts to infer it from the context, thus filling in the gap in meanings caused by the omission of that story constituent . It proves therefore that orientation with story grammar can make the reader vigilant to any gaps in meaning construction, sorting which can facilitate their reading comprehension.

Proposition 14 also includes a text segment (marked in italics) which is again apparently superfluous to the basic meaning construction of the text but it does contribute in enhancing the meaning of the proposition thus making a part of the proposition. Proposition 15 reflects the immediate consequence of the attempt made by Della, therefore it is marked as outcome. Both these propositions have an obvious cause and effect relationship between them, hence marked by the semantic relation C in the tree structure. The ending of this episode is rather an elaborated one, subsuming a whole new episode (i.e. episode 3).

Della dressed her hair beautifully to make up for the hair loss but the thought that her husband might not find her pretty even now (reflected in proposition16) is bothersome and functions as an initiating event thus marking the beginning of a new episode (i.e. episode 3). The next three propositions (proposition 17, 18 and 19) also reflect the beginning of the episode. All four propositions under beginning occurred in a linear order of time hence are connected through the temporal relation T. Proposition 20 quite explicitly states the emotional reaction by the protagonist, therefore is marked as simple reaction, leading to a single action on part of the protagonist represented by proposition 21. Both these propositions bear a causal relation C between them. The ending of this episode subsumes yet another episode (i.e. episode 4).

Proposition 22 introduces a new character and functions as the initiating event for later happenings thus marks the beginning of a new episode (i.e. episode 4). It also includes a text segment (marked in italics) which is impertinent to any story constituent. The segment is an extension of the new character's introduction in this proposition, stating his character description, therefore not absolutely out of place in the meaningful construction of the text in researcher's opinion. The event stated in proposition 22 causes the protagonist's reaction reflected in proposition 23, therefore marked as simple reaction. Goal is missing in this episode too but can be inferred from later events in the episode that the protagonist Della wants to convince her husband Jim that she is still pretty enough to be loved. The development node in this episode is relatively elaborate, having a recursive goal path. From proposition 24 till 29 in

the text reflect an argument between Della and Jim, making up three goal paths, each subsuming an attempt (a verbal act) and an outcome (a verbal response) connected through a causal relation C. From proposition 30 till 34, the events function to wrap up the episode, therefore subsume the ending node. All these events are connected through a temporal relation T in the tree structure, except the last proposition which is an emphatic note by the author of the story which ends up the story with a dramatic flavor. This emphatic ending being author's comment and not an event pertaining to the story's plot bears no direct semantic relation to the preceding event in the text structure.

Conclusion

The basic premise of the study was to explicate the function of story grammar in decoding coherent meanings out of a narrative text; hence the research question 'How can story grammar help in comprehension of a narrative text?'. It has been observed that story grammar did so by unfolding the whole text into manageable functional units sketched along a coherent meaningful structure. Processing these units becomes convenient rather than going about the whole text randomly. Furthermore, the hierarchical tree diagram provides an outline of the text showing how smaller functional units are knitted up into a larger whole. As proposed by gestalt psychologists, it is human mind's natural tendency to process any physical experience in the form of a whole. Story grammar presenting similar whole form processing experience results in better processing and understanding of the text.

An active and vigilant search of the text for the essential story constituents and their meaningful interlocking in the text structure is likely to yield close reading and critical understanding of the text.

It has been found in the analysis of the sample story that keeping track of the context provides the clues to infer the missing information in the text. Therefore, the stance of story grammar that it can help readers keep track of the events thus facilitating them in inferring the missing elements in the text has also been authenticated. Filling in the information gaps facilitates comprehension; hence it provides the evidence for the assumption that story grammar can facilitate narrative comprehension.

Story grammar, as maintained by story grammarians, represents a mental schema which gets activated through enough exposure with narrative texts. Readers having extensive reading experience are therefore generally more spontaneous in reading literary texts. They can also grasp the meanings in literary texts more readily. Story grammar can thus be specifically beneficial for the readers whose experience of literary texts is nominal. Pakistani students of English literature have limited exposure to English literary texts outside their formal classrooms. They have been observed not to be fond of reading English literature other than as part of their academic curriculum. Their reading habits are hence not well-developed. Giving them an orientation with story grammar is likely to prove effective in improving their reading comprehension of narrative texts in particular and literary texts in general because majority of literary genres underlie a narrative form.

The efficacy of story grammar in pedagogy has been validated through its successful application on the sample text taken from a course book. A thorough analysis of the sample text along with the tree diagram provides an explicit illustration of the application of story

grammar on a narrative text. The tree structure yields an outline or a mental map which can make it simple and convenient for the readers to follow and absorb longer texts.

To the best of researcher's knowledge of the available research on story grammar, it has yet been testified on very simple and short fable stories. Differentially, the present study has implemented story grammar on a longer and complex short story text and found that story grammar is applicable on such complex and longer texts also.

Earlier research on story grammar has stated that it helps the reader distinguish the most significant elements in the text - the ones which directly contribute in the construction of meanings in the text. Focusing on these significant functional elements in the narrative structure will suffice in deriving out an overall sense of the text. On this basis, it has been established that story grammar does not take into account the aesthetic aspect of the texts which is though an essential feature commonly found in literary texts. On the contrary, the researcher in the current study has found that the figurative elements in the texts are not altogether superfluous in the meaningful construction of the text. They do contribute in enhancing or elaborating the meaning of the significant functional constituents in a narrative text outlined by the story grammar models.

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