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## **APPLYING CORPUS LINGUISTICS IN PROVIDING TELEVISUAL CHARACTERIZATION**

In the last two decades, a situation comedy (sitcom), a form of TV series, with each episode having fixed characters and similar daily scenes, have been gaining increasing popularity among viewers all over the world. Numerous sitcoms have permeated into our lives making viewers emotionally involved with the main characters, imitate their behavior modes and language. It stands to reason that being a part of the global popular culture sitcoms «have a crucial part to play in consumers' making sense of everyday reality, constructing identity and constructing desires» [1, 24]. No wonder this relatively new televisual genre attracts the attention of linguists doing their research into the various aspects of TV shows such as humour, telecinematic discourse, gender roles, etc. It is possible to mention such scholars as Hermes, Durham, Bordwell, Bubel, Wodak, Bednarek, who contributed to the television series analyses with their works. However, it should be noted that the research into the televisual characterisation is scarce, therefore it is worthwhile endeavours.

Characters play the central role in situation comedies since, as a rule, they constitute the particular archetypes and the plot revolves around them, unlike story-driven forms like, for instance, novels, where the boundaries are primarily defined by the plot and the characters are mainly called to support it. In sitcoms, plots and theme development can be crucially connected to character identity, and an episode can be more about aspects of a character personality than about unfolding events [2, 56-57]. Bednarek reviewing previous studies on the relation between audiences and televisual characters comes to the conclusion that «only through involvement with characters do viewers come to care about stories which otherwise lack relevance to them» [1, 67]. The importance of character in long-running television shows gives a further reason for focusing the research on the characterization of the protagonists from linguistic perspectives.

The repetitive nature of television series results in specific characteristics of sitcom protagonists in contrast to novelistic ones. Selby and Cowdery in their research emphasises on the necessity for sitcom characters being «relatively static to sustain a whole series, with room only for some biographical and personal development» [2, 75]. Indeed, sitcom characters change little over the time and this peculiarity makes it possible to provide characterisation using corpus linguistic key word/concordance/cluster analysis.

Corpus linguistics is considered useful methodology for analyzing televisual charters as this allows a summative analysis of a character across various episodes. The term corpus linguistics is relatively new as it dates back to the 1980s. Yet this methodology was known much earlier in a paper form. Stubbs, for instance is known to describe the ‘Stone Age’ and list a few examples of ‘language corpora BC’ (before computers). The most notable one is a corpus of 5 million citation slips compiled by volunteers in the second half of the 19th c. and at the beginning of the 20th c. for the Oxford English Dictionary published in 1928 [3, 110]. What is a corpus? It is a large and structured set of texts (nowadays usually electronically stored and processed). They are used to do statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, checking occurrences or validating linguistic rules within a specific language territory [4, 48]. Corpus linguistics is not a homogeneous methodology: it is used with a varying level of granularity and varying reliance on quantitative and qualitative methods, with its shared features being as follows: machine-readable naturally-occurring language, balanced and representative corpus design, systematic and exhaustive analysis:

- The analysis is based on a corpus or corpora, which is a plural of corpus, of naturally-occurring language which are machine-readable so that the retrieval of the search patterns is computerized;

- The analysis is, or at least attempts to be, systematic and exhaustive, meaning that the corpus does not simply serve as a database of examples from which some can be chosen ad libitum and others neglected but that the whole corpus is taken into consideration.

Overall, the main advantages of corpus-based studies of language are as follows: reduced speculation and subjectivity; authenticity of data; and the potential to verify research hypotheses systematically and based on more extensive linguistic material.

For the analysis of Sheldon Cooper, the protagonist of a popular American sitcom called *The Big Bang Theory*, a special software (AntConc) and two corpora, one of which was created by extracting Sheldon’s dialogues from the *The Big Bang Theory* scripts of season 1 were used.

This corpus allowed to analyze Sheldon’s character. For this purpose, both the keyword analyses tool and the concordance tool were used. Keyword analyses is an

automatic identification by corpus software of word forms (e.g. his, her, him) or word clusters (e.g. you know) that are statistically speaking more or less significant in a node corpus (i.e. the corpus that is of interest) when compared to a reference corpus (i.e. the corpus that works as a standard of comparison, baseline or norm). Whereas concordance is an alphabetical list of the principal words used in a book or body of work, listing every instance of each word with its immediate context [5, 35].

Instances below illustrate concordances for the phrase «*This is a*» in the Sheldon corpus that seem to point to a tendency for Sheldon to define things and thus may hint at the fact that he considers himself intellectually superior to others. In this instance, the search term is presented with its immediate context.

- *This is a* classic piece of sci-fi movie memorabilia.
- *This is a* classic rookie time travel mistake.
- *This is a* notion, and a rather sucky one at that.
- *This is a* complex battle simulation with a steep learning curve, there are myriad weapons, vehicles...

What is more, with the help of the concordance tool it was possible to find some patterns indicating Sheldon's tendency to refer to his own opinion and show superior knowledge.

- going to have to: You're **going to have to** call her; I can see we're going to have to spell out everything for this girl; And if water is involved we're **going to have to** ground the crap out of the thing.

- you might want to: And that's probably just a sinus infection, but it could be sleep apnoea, **you might want to** see an otolaryngologist. It's a throat doctor; **You might want to** speak in a lower register; Leonard, I'm not expert here but I believe in the context of a luncheon invitation, **you might want to** skip the reference to bowel movements.

- to point: I was wrong **to point** it out; I do feel obligated to **point out** to you; I've hesitated **to point** this out.

- remind you: let me **remind you**; need I **remind you**; I must now **remind you**;
- suggest: I **suggest** you go through with it; may I **suggest** white mice instead;

As far as the keyword analysis goes, using *SHELDON* as a node corpus and *ALL* as a reference corpus, it is possible to determine what word clusters Sheldon uses more frequently than other characters, which can provide some insights into his character. Sheldon utters expressions that seem to show him speaking in words that we may associate with formal academic writing rather than casual or informal spoken language. Such expressions include *number of*, *a series of*, *the fact that*, *lack of*, *the result*, *the possibility/possibility that*, *your premise*, *in addition*.

Table 1 below shows frequencies for these clusters in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (more than 425 million words of American English, evenly divided between spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic journals).

Table 1

**Frequencies in the Corpus of Contemporary American English**

Word/Cluster	Spoken	Fiction	Magazine	Newspaper	Academic
number of	17663	4147	19794	19150	<b>41402</b>
a series of	2744	2401	4984	4280	<b>6177</b>
the fact that	<b>16124</b>	4861	7658	6438	<b>12276</b>
lack of	3543	2659	5997	6408	<b>14762</b>
the result	2029	1045	5012	3320	<b>6025</b>
the possibility	3078	1357	2413	2455	<b>5780</b>
possibility that	1300	475	863	772	<b>1738</b>
your premise	<b>31</b>	5	2	1	<b>3</b>
premise	741	118	673	656	<b>1519</b>
in addition	2939	1057	7937	6699	<b>21517</b>

As Table 1 demonstrates, with the exception of *the fact that* and *your premise*, all these expressions are primarily used in academic works and hence are associated with academic discourse. Even *the fact that* is highly frequent in academic journals, more so than in any other written variety, and the word *premise* itself is clearly associated with academic discourse.

Thus, it is possible to come to the conclusion that corpus linguistics tools have proved to be extremely useful in identifying the regular occurrence of speech patterns as well as determining an intense usage of words, which allows to attribute sitcom protagonists with certain characteristics shaping their identity.

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