

Comparative Thematic Analysis of select works of Stephen Leacock and R K Narayan

¹Dr.Usha Sadasivan, ²Dr.S.Vijayalakshmi

¹ Professor & Head, Department of English, Meenakshi College for Women, Chennai, India.

² Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT, Chennai.

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Abstract

Literature is undoubtedly a reflection of universal ideas and emotions. Across generations and across continents, various authors have churned out countless literary pieces which are an outpouring of their personal desires and personal experiences shaped by the society they are born out of. This research article is. The authors of this paper want to analyse the works of two authors from totally diverse backgrounds, and see if they can be systematically and meaningfully categorized using qualitative research methods. The two authors chosen for conducting thematic analysis were **Stephen Leacock**, (born Dec. 30, 1869, Hampshire, England—died March 28, 1944, Toronto, Canada), and R.K.Narayan (born October 10, 1906, Chennai, India—died May 13, 2001, Chennai). The first writer was a native speaker of English and wrote in his native tongue. The second writer, that is, R.K.Narayan, English was the L2 whereas his native language was Tamil. For this analysis, the researchers decided to base their study on the Glaserian grounded theory. This involves the collection of qualitative data, with ideas and concepts emerging naturally from the data collected. The collected data is then coded and then classified into categories. The codes are not pre-determined but emerge on reading and reading the texts. It was a very interesting study and the data collected was analyzed using ANOVA software. The codes, themes and categories and the detailed analysis are given in the rest of the paper.

Keywords: Grounded theory – thematic analysis - codes - Qualitative data analysis

Introduction

Literature is a reflection of universal ideas and emotions. Writers from across the world having diverse cultures and first languages, but writing in the English language, can still be read and discussed on a common platform. The works of the writers provide a window to their emotional and cognitive worlds. Qualitative thematic analysis is an exciting way to compare two writers from differing geographical backgrounds. Qualitative thematic analysis involves coding, then listing the codes under potential subthemes or themes, and comparing

the emerged coding clusters together and in relation to the entire data set .The creativity of the researcher is an integral part of the analysis and in the presentation of the findings. Intuition of the researcher is also significant , as the codes are chosen subjectively, and then the themes are enumerated and categorized entirely according to the researchers' personal understanding of the selected texts.

Aim of study

The aim was to thematically compare two writers, Stephen Leacock, Canadian writer and R K Narayan writer in the Asian sub-continent. It was proposed to analyze select works of the two writers on fixed thematic parameters to see how they resembled or differed from each other.

Research questions

After the selection of texts of the two authors being compared, the following research questions were formulated:-

1. Are the two authors i.e. Stephen Leacock and R K Narayan, similar in usage of stylistic features?
2. Are the two authors similar in usage of figurative language?
3. Are the two authors similar in observing human behavior?
4. Are the two authors similar in relating with the reader?

Review of literature

Grounded theory involves the use of codes and categories into similar themes . Glaser (1992) does not favour the use of automated systems, as the researcher will not be in close contact with their data (Glaser 1978). The researchers of the present study , decided against using the word by word Straussian approach . The Glaserian approach dealing with meaningful units at the phrasal or sentence level was more suited to the present research dealing with themes. Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as a pattern in the phenomenon of interest that describes and organizes observation of data. In this type of grounded theory approach, researchers need to both immerse themselves in the data and conversely distance themselves from the data . Maintaining closeness to data is required for a valid representation of data. Having a personal rapport with text under analysis becomes inevitable.

Methodology

For the present study, the methodology to be adopted was the thematic analysis method otherwise known as the Grounded theory method put forth by Glaser . Works of two authors to be subject to comparison were first selected. The works were read line by line in a detailed manner. Repeated reading was required to collect and code the data into the parameters that were not pre-determined, but emerged after repeated reading of the texts. The researchers decided to use the grounded theory of analysis which provides a logically consistent set of data collection and analysis procedures that is best suited for the thematic textual analysis that is being undertaken. The methodology is given below in detail.

The steps involved in the methodological process are

1. Selecting texts of both writers
2. Coding into themes
3. Categorising themes into meaningful units
4. Classifying the themes into categories

5. Quantifying the data
6. Analysis of data using ANOVA
7. Discussion of findings
8. Recommendations

1. Selecting texts of the writers

The texts that were selected for comparison were Stephen Leacock's - *The Hostelry of Mr. Smith*, chapter one of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. This is a collection of sequential short stories, published in 1912., about the people that live in a small town, Mariposa, Canada. In Canada, there are many places like Mariposa. But Mariposa is serene and quiet. There is a hostelry on the main street in this town, named *Jos. Smith, Prop.* Owned by a Mr. Smith. The rest of the chapter is a detailed description of the way the man runs his organization, the hardships he faces, the way he manages things and so on, it is could happen in any town and to any one running a business on a small scale. There is nothing at all remarkable or earth shattering in the events that occur. It is all very common place and mundane stuff but still typical of a small country town people and their little quirks.

Coming to the second author, the se;ections were from R K Narayan's *Malgudi Days*, a collection of short stories by R. K. Narayan published in 1943 by Indian Thought Publications. The book was republished outside India in 1982 by Penguin Classics. The book includes 32 stories, all set in the fictional town of Malgudi, located in South India. Each of the stories portrays a facet of life in Malgudi. "For conducting the thematic analysis, the researchers have chosen two of the short stories from this collection. , *An Astrologer's Day* and *Lawley Road*. *An Astrologer's Day* is a short story about a man who knows nothing about stars or astrology. The second short story , *Lawley Road*, is about a town suffering from a bout of patriotism, soon after India's independence.

Malgudi is a fictional town located in South India in Ramanathapuram in the novels and short stories of R. K. Narayan. It forms the setting for most of Narayan's works. including fifteen of his novels and most of his short stories. Malgudi was a portmanteau of two Bangalore localities - Mallechwaram and Basavanagudi.

While Leacock's Mariposa is a real town in Canada, situated on the coast of Lake Wissanotti, Ontario . Narayan's town was a fictitious one , a sincere portrayal of Malgudi as a microcosm of India. While Malgudi was created, Mariposa really existed.

The researchers who read the works of both the authors, decided to do an analysis of selected works of the two authors to see how similar or dissimilar they were thematically. The selections were purely the personal preferences of the researchers'.

2. Coding into themes :

The selected texts were read and re read , and then coded into meaningful units . Coding reduces the data into manageable chunks. Researchers recognize coding as one level of abstraction, because they use intuition to extract the meaning of data and present this data in accordance with research questions. The coding process itself starts to reveal explicit and implicit meanings. In the coding process care has to be taken to prevent losing out subtle shades of meaning.

3. Categorising themes into meaningful units

The codes are collected and listed randomly. They are then labeled . The definition, translation and description of these labels are the parameters by which the data analysis is taken forward and themes are identified. For the present analysis, the labels that were used for coding were elements of humour, usage of gentle irony, usage of short crisp sentences, examples of visual imagery, idioms, metaphor, easy familiarity of style, understanding of human psychology, public opinion, and expressions of local pride.

Classifying the themes into categories - The data that was collected under various themes were then classified according to similarity of types. They are grouped into clusters having similar ideas. Thus the next step in the coding process was classifying the clusters into categories that can move the data analysis forward. Here the four categories of themes were :
1. Stylistics 2. Figurative language 3. Observation of human behavior 4. Relating with the reader

4. Quantifying the data from the selected texts.

The 5th step in the analysis is the quantification of data stage . The data after having been coded and classified into categories were then quantified as follows , according to the number of occurrences in the selected texts. :-

1. Stylistics

Stylistics	Stephen Leacock	R K Narayan
Gentle irony	12	17
Humour	12	10
Short crisp sentences	47	47
Visual imagery	10	5

2. Figurative language

Figurative language	Stephen Leacock	R K Narayan
Idioms	8	6
Metaphor	2	1

3. Observation of human behaviour

Observation of human behaviour	Stephen Leacock	R K Narayan
Understanding human psychology	13	10
Public opinion	7	4

4. Relating with the reader

Relating with the reader	Stephen Leacock	R K Narayan
Easy familiarity	10	4
Local pride	21	14

5. Statistical Analysis

CALCULATION OF TEST STATISTIC STYLISTICS

-	STEPHEN LEACOCK	R K NARAYAN
GENTLE IRONY	12	17
HUMOUR	12	10
SHORT CRISP SENTENCES	47	47
VISUAL IMAGERY	10	5
TOTAL	81	79

The grand total (or) T = 81+79

$$=160$$

$$\text{Correction Factor (CF)} = \frac{T^2}{N}$$

$$= \frac{160^2}{8}$$

$$= 3200$$

$$\text{Total sum of squares} = 12^2 + 12^2 + 47^2 + 10^2 + 17^2 + 10^2 + 47^2 + 5^2 - \text{CF}$$

$$= 5220 - 3200$$

$$= 2020$$

$$\text{Sum of squares between the authors} = \frac{81^2}{4} + \frac{79^2}{4} - \text{CF}$$

$$=1640 + 1560 - 3200 = 0.5$$

Sum of squares within the authors = Total sum of squares - Sum of squares b/w the author

$$=2020 - 0.5$$

$$= 2019.5$$

ANOVA TABLE

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean sum of squares	Variance or F-ratio

Between authors	0.5	1	$0.5/1 = 0.5$	$336.6/0.5 = 673.2$
Within authors	2019.5	6	$2019.5/6 = 336.6$	

Calculated value of F is 673.2

Tabulated value of F at level of significance 5% for degree of freedom (1,6) is 5.99

Calculated value of F is greater than Tabulated value of F

$$F_{cal} > F_{tab}$$

So, there is a significant difference in Stylistics between the two authors.

CALCULATION OF TEST STATISTIC FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

-	STEPHEN LEACOCK	R K NARAYAN
IDIOMS	8	6
METAPHOR	2	1
TOTAL	10	7

The grand total (or) T = 10+7

$$=17$$

$$\text{Correction Factor (CF)} = \frac{T^2}{N}$$

$$= \frac{17^2}{4}$$

$$= 72.25$$

$$\text{Total sum of squares} = 8^2 + 2^2 + 6^2 + 1^2 - \text{CF}$$

$$= 105 - 72.25$$

$$= 32.75$$

$$\text{Sum of squares between the authors} = \frac{10^2}{2} + \frac{7^2}{2} - \text{CF}$$

$$= 50 + 24.5 - 72.25$$

$$= 2.25$$

Sum of squares within the authors = Total sum of squares - Sum of squares b/w the authors

$$=32.75 - 2.25$$

$$= 30.5$$

ANOVA TABLE

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean sum of squares	Variance or F-ratio
Between authors	2.25	1	$2.25/1 = 2.25$	$15.25/2.25 = 6.78$
Within Authors	30.5	2	$30.5/2 = 15.25$	

Calculated value of F is 6.78

Tabulated value of F at level of significance 5% for degree of freedom (1,2) is 18.57

Calculated value of F is lesser than Tabulated value of F

$$F_{cal} < F_{tab}$$

So, there is a no significant difference in Figurative language between the two authors.

CALCULATION OF TEST STATISTIC - OBSERVATION OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

-	STEPHEN LEACOCK	R K NARAYAN
UNDERSTANDING HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY	13	10
PUBLIC OPINION	7	4
TOTAL	20	14

The grand total (or) T = 20+14

$$=34$$

$$\text{Correction Factor (CF)} = \frac{T^2}{N}$$

$$= \frac{34^2}{4}$$

$$= 289$$

$$\text{Total sum of squares} = 13^2 + 7^2 + 10^2 + 4^2 - CF$$

$$= 332 - 289$$

$$= 45$$

$$\text{Sum of squares between the authors} = \frac{20^2}{2} + \frac{14^2}{2} - CF$$

$$= 200 + 98 - 289$$

$$= 9$$

$$\text{Sum of squares within the authors} = \text{Total sum of squares} - \text{Sum of squares b/w the authors}$$

$$= 45 - 9 = 36$$

ANOVA TABLE

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean sum of squares	Variance or F-ratio
Between authors	9	1	$\frac{9}{1} = 9$	$\frac{18}{9} = 2$
Within Authors	36	2	$\frac{36}{2} = 18$	

Calculated value of F is 2

Tabulated value of F at level of significance 5% for degree of freedom (1,2) is 18.57

Calculated value of F is lesser than Tabulated value of F

$$F_{cal} < F_{tab}$$

So, there is a no significant difference in Observation of human behaviour between the two authors.

CALCULATION OF TEST STATISTIC - RELATING WITH THE READER

-	STEPHEN LEACOCK	R K NARAYAN
EASY FAMILIARITY	10	4
LOCAL PRIDE	21	14
TOTAL	31	18

The grand total (or) T = 31+18

$$=49$$

$$\text{Correction Factor (CF)} = \frac{T^2}{N}$$

$$= \frac{49^2}{4}$$

$$= 600.25$$

$$\text{Total sum of squares} = 10^2 + 21^2 + 4^2 + 14^2 - \text{CF}$$

$$= 753 - 600.25$$

$$= 152.75$$

$$\text{Sum of squares between the authors} = \frac{31^2}{2} + \frac{18^2}{2} - \text{CF}$$

$$= 480.5 + 162 - 600.25$$

$$= 42.25$$

Sum of squares within the authors = Total sum of squares - Sum of squares b/w the authors

$$= 152.75 - 42.25$$

$$= 110.5$$

ANOVA TABLE

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean sum of squares	Variance or F-ratio
Between authors	42.25	1	$42.25/1 = 42.25$	$55.25/42.25 = 1.307$
Within Authors	110.5	2	$110.5/2 = 55.25$	

Calculated value of F is 1.307

Tabulated value of F at level of significance 5% for degree of freedom (1,2) is 18.57

Calculated value of F is lesser than Tabulated value of F

$$F_{cal} < F_{tab}$$

So, there is a no significant difference in Relating with the reader between the two authors.

6. Discussion of findings

From the analysis of the data, the following conclusions are to be seen :-

1. There is a significant difference in stylistics between the two authors
2. There is a no significant difference in observation of human behaviour between the two authors.
3. There is a no significant difference in usage of figurative language between the two authors.
4. There is a no significant difference in relating with the reader between the two authors.

7. Limitations of the study

The research that was undertaken, is not without its limitations. The present study analyzed the selected authors only on the basis of certain stylistic and semantic features. Only selected works of the authors were taken up for comparison. Computer coding would have been easier, but this inter textual contrastive analysis was done manually. It was felt that while a computer will only analyze using pre- programmed codes, if coding were done manually the researcher can add codes and themes as and when they come up. Manually collecting data and looking for themes will be more time consuming but more accurate.

Researchers in future could select authors whose works are translations in English. They could analyze thematically writers of aboriginal literature versus native English writers , Commonwealth writers versus Ancient Classical writers and so on.

9. Conclusion

The relation of researcher to data is changing. We are living in a data-producing era . There is a new culture of shared knowledge. The current research is in line with this new scenario. This research itself is a new and novel way of comparing two authors , totally divergent in style and country of origin. It also goes to show that comparison can be undertaken at a thematic level of authors whether English was their native tongue or not. The present study involved two authors, for one author English is the L1 ,and for the other English is L2. Apparently dissimilar writers' can still be analysed using similar criteria of categorical coding. This is the significance of the study wherein any two writers can be compared as long as the coding is sincere and as close to accuracy as possible.

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