EXPLORING LEXICAL VERBS IN A POPULAR SHORT STORY

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Abstract

This is a syntactic analysis on lexical verbs found in a popular short story. It specifically aimed to identify the types and the forms of lexical verbs in a popular short story *The Gift of the Magi*. Based distributional method analysis on the data gathered through non-participatory observation, six types of lexical verbs were identified: intensive verbs, transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, prepositional verbs, ditransitive verbs, and complex transitive verbs. Intensive verbs appeared to be the dominant in the short story from which the data were obtained. In terms of forms, five forms were identified: past form, base form, -s form, -ing participle, and -ed participle. The base form occurs as a finite form as well as a non-finite form. The -s form occurs only as a finite form in the third person singular present tense.The past form occurs as a finite form in the past tense. The -ing participle and the -ed participle occurs only as a non-finite form. Past form occurs dominantly in the data analyzed.

Keywords: Lexical verb, verb types, verb forms

I. INTRODUCTION

As generally acknowledged, the basic sentence in English has two immediate constituents. One of the two constituents is a noun phrase. The noun phrase functions as the subject. The other one is a verb phrase. The verb phrase, which is sister to the noun phrase occupying the subject position, functions as the predicate. (Burton-Roberts, 2016; Fenn and Schwab, 2018)

A verb phrase which is an immediate constituent of a sentence must contains a verb. The verb which a verb phrase must contain is a lexical verb. This reveals that a lexical verb is of paramount importance in an English sentence. Sentences (1a), (2a), (3a), (4a), and (5a) are well-formed. However, (1b), (2b, (3b), (4b), and (5b) are ill-formed. The sentences are ungrammatical due to the absence of the lexical verbs.

(1) a. The man loves the women.
    b. *The man the woman.
(2) a. They look very happy.
    b. *They very happy.
(3) a. I am not your enemy.
    b. *I not your enemy.
(4) a. Why didn't you attend my class?
    b. *Why didn't you my class?

(5) a. How are you today?
    b. *How you today?

In terms of quantity, lexical verbs are much more than auxiliary verbs. As Burton-Roberts observes (2016), "Lexical verbs are the ones that belong to indefinitely large general vocabulary of the language". Unlike lexical verbs, those called auxiliary verbs are limited in number. The phrase may contain auxiliary verbs. However, the presence of the helping verbs depends the lexical verb, which functions as the head of the verb phrase.

Lexical verbs, which belong to indefinitely large general vocabulary of the language, reveal different behaviors. For instance, some lexical verbs exclude the noun phrase functioning as a direct object; some require the noun phrase which is a direct object; and still some permit the noun phrase functioning as a direct object but do not actually need it. Lexical verbs also show variability in terms of form (Bresnan et al, 2016). For example, some lexical verbs take bare infinitive form; some take -ing form; and still some take past form.

This research aims to shed light on variability performed by lexical verbs. It specifically sees as to what extent

lexical verbs vary in terms of forms they take as well as the behaviors they perform. Data will be obtained from a popular short story *The Gift of the Magi* authored by O. Henry.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Verbs and Their Categories

Verbs are generally considered most complex in terms of word category. They determine the kinds of sentences, such as statements and questions. Besides, they have the grammatical properties of person and number, showing agreement with subject. They have properties such tense, voice, mood, and aspect.

Some verbs denote actions or states. Some function to connect the subject and the complement. Some verbs take a direct object. Such verbs take two arguments. One is the noun phrase occupying the subject position; the other is the noun phrase functioning as the object. Some verbs do not allow the presence of the noun phrase functioning as the object. Such verbs require only one argument (noun phrase), which functions as the subject. Besides, there are some helping verbs. Auxiliary verbs such as *may* and *should* are included within this group. (Frank, 1972).

Verbs can be classified in terms of whether they function as copula or non-copula. A copula verb links the noun phrase (NP) functioning as the subject to the adjective phrase, the noun phrase or the prepositional phrase occupying the complement slot. This means that the clause to which the connected by the copula verb is ascriptive, equative, or locative. Non-copula verbs are 'ordinary' verbs. Verbs belonging to this category may denote actions or states. (Miller, 2008)

Verbs can also be grouped according to their function within the verb phrase. By this way, verbs are divided into three major groups. One of the three groups is the open class of full verbs. This class of verbs is also called lexical verbs. Most verbs belong to this class. The other group is the closed class of primary verbs. The verbs *be*, *have*, and *do* belong to this group. Still the other is the closed class of modal auxiliary verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs such as *will* and *might* belong to this group. (Quirk et al., 1985)

2.2 Lexical Verbs and Their Behaviors

As Burton-Roberts (2016) observes, lexical verbs belong to indefinitely large general vocabulary of the language. Such verbs are central not only in the verb phrases. They are also central in sentences. In verb phrases, lexical verbs determine the presence or absence of auxiliary verbs. In sentences, lexical verbs select the number and the sort of argument. For instance, the verb *drink* requires only one argument (noun phrase) whose grammatical function is the subject, but it allows the presence of the argument whose grammatical function is the object. Besides, the verb *drink* determines the sort of noun phrase which can precedes and the one which can follow it. The noun phrase preceding the verb *drink* should refer to entity that can do the act of drinking. The noun phrase which follows the verb *drink* should refer to something liquid.

Lexical verbs can be classified into six categories (Burton-Roberts, 2016: 68): transitive, intransitive, ditransitive, intensive, complex transitive, prepositional. The first category is transitive verb. A transitive verb is the verb which has two valencies. The verb requires two noun phrases to complement it. The first noun phrase comes before the verb; the second noun phrase comes after it. Sentences (6) and (7) can clarify this phenomenon.

(6) a. A tiger *killed* a deer

    b. *A tiger killed.

(7) a. Fierce dogs *frightened* children

    b. *Fierce dogs frightened me children.

Sentences (6a) and (7a) are accepted or well-formed because each of them has two noun phrases. The verb killed in (6a) is complemented with the noun phrases *a tiger* and *a deer*; the verb frightened in (7a) is complemented with the noun phrases *fierce dogs* and *children*. Sentence (6b) does not fulfill completeness condition; sentence (7b) violates coherence condition. Therefore, they are not accepted.

The second category is intransitive verb. Unlike a transitive verb, which requires two noun phrases, an intransitive verb does not require the noun phrase functioning as the object. This kind of verb has only valency. It requires only one noun phrase. The noun phrase appear before the intransitive verb and it functions as the subject. This phenomenon can be

observed in sentences (8) and (9) below.

    (8) a. The old man cannot walk.

       b. *The old man cannot walk the car.

    (9) a. The child is crying.   [

       b. *Is crying a cake

Sentences (8a) and (9a) are well-formed. This is due to the fact that each of them contains the grammatical function, which the verb requires. Sentence (8b) violates coherence condition; sentence (9b) violates completeness condition. For this reason, the sentences are ill-formed.

The third category is ditransitive verb. A ditransitive verb requires three noun phrases complement it. The first noun phrase comes before the ditransitive verb, and it functions as the subject. The second and the third noun phrases follow the ditransitive verb respectively.

The fourth category is intensive verb. An intensive verb requires one complement. Three types of phrase can go into the complement slot. One of them is called adjective phrase, which can be observed in sentence (10). The other is noun phrase, whose example appears in sentence (11). Still the other is prepositional phrase. Sentence (12) contains an example of the prepositional phrase.

    (10) My wife is rather short.

    (11) Wise is my first son.

    (12) My college students are in the classroom.

The fifth category is complex transitive verb. A complex transitive verb requires two complements. One of them is direct object. The other is the object-predicative. The object-predicative can take an adjective phrase, a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase. Example of the adjective phrase can be observed in sentence (13). Example of the noun phrase can be seen in sentence (14). Example of the prepositional phrase can observed in sentence (15).

    (13) Some students find several courses extremely difficult.

    (14) We have made Jane our spokesperson.

    (15) James put his books under the table.

The sixth category is prepositional verb. Prepositional verbs can only complemented by a prepositional phrase. Each prepositional verb generally requires that the head of the prepositional phrase be one particular preposition. The verb *glance*, for instance, demands preposition *at,* not preposition *to*.

2.3 Forms of Lexical Verbs

Lexical verbs vary in terms of form. Verbs such as *cut* and *put* have three forms. Verbs such as *call* and *study* have four forms. Verbs such as *speak* and *choose* have five forms. The verb *be* has eight forms. However, lexical verbs can be grouped into five. (Quirk et al, 1985; Cruz-Ferreira and Abraham, 2011; Burton-Robert, 2016)

One of the forms is called the base form. The base form occurs as a finite form in the present tense in almost all persons and numbers,in the imperative, and in the present subjunctive. The base form also appears in a nonfinite form in the bare infinitive and in the to infinitive.

The second form is called the -s form. The -s form occurs as a finite form in the third person singular present tense. This form of lexical verb can observed in the sentence *My son talks to me almost every day.*

The third form is the -ing participle. The -ing participle occurs as a non-finite form in the progressive aspect following *be* and in participle clauses. Non-finite form in the progressive aspect can be observed in the sentence *I am talking to my mother now*. Example of non-finite form in -ing participle clause can seen in *Arriving early, I found my son at home.*

The fourth form is the past form. The past form occurs as a finite form in the past tense. This can be observed in the sentence, for instance, *Nobody called me this morning.*

The fifth form is the -ed participle. The -ed participle occurs as a nonfinite form in the perfective aspect following *have*, in the passive voice following *be*, and in -ed participle clauses. Example of -ed participle occurring as nonfinite form in the perfective aspect following *have* can be observed in (16). Example of -ed participle which occurs as nonfinite form in the passive voice following *be* can be observed in (17). Example of -ed participle which occurs as nonfinite form in -ed participle clause can be seen in (18).

(16) My friend has called me twice today.

(17) My wife is called Saribarasi.

(18) Called early, we had a quick breakfast.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The source of the data in this research is *The Gift of the Magi*, a classic short story written by O. Henry. The data are written sentences. Since the data are written sentences, the writer employs non-participatory observation as the method considered reasonable to collect the data. The

writer, as the leading instrument, functions as an observer, in line with Creswell (2009), Suwartono (2014), and Mahsun (2017). There are two main activities at this stage. The writer observed the sentences in the short story used as the data source to have an overall picture of the data, and then he marked all lexical verbs in the sentences picked up, before he proceeded to data analysis.

With referential method as well as distributional method proposed by Sudaryanto (2015) in mind, the writer analyzed the data of this research. By referring to Creswell (2009), Suwartono (2014) and Mahsun (2017), the writer went through several steps in analyzing the data of this research. First, the writer organized and prepared the data for analysis. Second, the writer read all through the sentences, whose lexical verbs were already marked. Third, the writer did detailed analysis with a coding process. Fourth, the writer used the coding process to generate a description of the English lexical verbs. Fifth, the writer advanced a narrative description of the English lexical verbs. Sixth, the writer made an interpretation to draw conclusion from the analysis.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

What follows is the finding and discussion on lexical verbs.

4.1. The Types of the Lexical Verbs in *The Gift of the Magi*

Six types of lexical verbs were identified in the popular short story *The Gift of the Magi*. One of the six types was intensive verb. Five intensive verbs were identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. The five intensive verbs were be, become, grow, look, and seem. The five intensive verbs can be observed in (19-23) below.

(19) And the next day would be Christmas.

(20) But when Mr. James Dillingham Young entered the furnished rooms, his name became very short indeed.

(21) While the lady of the home is slowly growing quieter, we can look at the home.

(22) Within forty minutes her head looked a little better.

(23) Now, when he was being paid only ＄20 a week, the name seemed too long and important.

As a matter of fact, each of the intensive verbs in (19 - 23) requires a complement. The complement

Christmas in (19) is required the intensive verb *be*. The intensive verb *became* in (20) requires the complement *very short indeed*. The complement *quieter* is required by the intensive verb *growing* in (21). The intensive verb *looked* in (22) requires the complement *a little better*. The complement *too long and important* is required by the intensive verb *seemed*. Without complement, a clause whose predicate is intensive verb breaks completeness condition (Bresnan et al., 2016)

The second lexical verb found in *The Gift of the Magi* was transitive verb. Transitive verbs identified were ask, bring, clean, count, cover, do, dry, eat, finish, find, get, have, hear, hold, kill, know, leave, lift, like, lose, love, make, master, meet, need, own, pay, say, see, sell, understand, and wash. Examples of the transitive verbs identified in *The Gift of the Magi* can observed in (24-28) below.

(24) Della counted it three times.

(25) Della finished her crying and cleaned the marks of it from her face.

(26) A person could see only a little of himself at a time.

(27) Della, being quite thin, had mastered this art.

(28) Each sold the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other.

The transitive verbs in (24-28) require a noun phrase which functions as the object. The noun phrases functioning as the objects are *it* in (24), *crying* and *the marks of it from her face* in (25), *only a little of himself* in (26), *this art* in (27), and *the most valuable thing he owned in order to buy a gift for the other* in (28).

The third type of lexical verbs identified in *The Gift of the Magi* was intransitive verb. Unlike intensive verb, which requires a complement, and transitive verb, which requires the object, intransitive verb does not require a noun phrase functioning as the object. The presence of a noun phrase occupying the object position in a clause whose predicate is intransitive verb violates coherence condition (Bresnan et al., 2016). Examples of the intransitive verbs found in *The Gift of the Magi* can be observed in (29 - 33).

(29) She stood by the window and looked out with no interest.

(30) The door opened and Jim stepped in.

(31) Jim stopped inside the door.

(32) And then she jumped up and cried, "Oh, oh!"

(33) Jim sat down and smiled.

Intransitive verbs *stood* in (29), *opened* in (30), *stopped* in (31), *jumped* in (32), and *sat* in (33) do not allow a noun phrase functioning as the object. Each of these verb requires only one noun phrase, which functions as the subject.

Ditransitive verbs were also identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. Ditransitive verbs require two noun phrases functioning as the objects. One of the two noun phrases is the direct object; the other is the indirect object.The ditransitive verbs found in *The Gift of the Maggi* were *buy*, *give*, and *tell*. These verbs can be observed in (34-36).

(34) Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only ＄1.87 with which to buy Jim a gift.

(35) I couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a gift.

(36) And here I have told you the story of two children who were not wise.

As a matter of fact, the ditransitive verb *buy* in (34) subcategorizes for two noun phrases, besides the noun phrase functioning as the subject. The two noun phrases are the indirect object *Jim*, which stands between the ditransitive verb *buy* and the noun phrase *a gift,* and the direct object *a gift,* which appears behind the indirect object *Jim*. The ditransitive verb *giving* in (35) also requires two noun phrases. The two noun phrases are the indirect object *you* and the direct object *a gift*. Like the ditransitive verb *buy* in (34) and the ditransitive verb *giving* in (35), the ditransitive verb *told* in (36) requires two noun phrases functioning as the objects. The two noun phrases are the indirect object *you* and the direct object *the story of two children who were not wise*.

Two complex transitive verbs were found in *The Gift of the Magi*. The two complex transitive verbs are *called* and *put*. Each of these verbs requires a direct object and a complement. The complex transitive verb *called* can be observed in (37). The complex transitive verb *put* can be observed in (38).

(37) Jim put his arms around his Della.

(38) Mrs. James Dillingham Young put her arms warmly about him and called him "Jim."

The complex transitive verb put in (37) requires the direct object *his arms* and the complement *around his Della*. The direct object *his arms* is a

noun phrase; the complement *around his Della* is a prepositional phrase. The complex transitive verb *called* in (38) also requires a direct object and a complement. The direct object is *him* and the complement is *Jim*. Both the direct object *him* and the complement *Jim* in (38) are noun phrases.

Prepositional verbs were also identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. The prepositional verbs found are look at, look for, look in, look around, put on , and step in. These prepositional verbs can be observed in (39-44).

(39) While the lady of the home is slowly growing quieter, we can look at the home.

(40) She put on her old brown coat.

(41) There was no other like it in any of the shops, and we had looked in every shop in the city.

(42) The door opened and Jim stepped in.

(43) Jim looked around the room.

(44) "You don't have to look for it, "said Della.

As a matter of fact, each of the prepositional verbs in (39-44) is complemented by a prepositional phrase, a set interrelated words headed by a preposition. The prepositional verb *look* in (39) is complemented by

the prepositional phrase *at the home*. The prepositional verb *put* in (40) is complemented by the prepositional phrase *on her old brown coat*. The prepositional verb *looked* in (41) is complemented by the prepositional phrase *in every shop in the city*. The prepositional verb *stepped* in (42) is complemented by the prepositional phrase *in*. The prepositional verb *looked* in (43) is complemented by the prepositional phrase *around the room.* The prepositional verb *look* in (44) is complemented by the prepositional phrase *around the room*.

Data (19-44) support the types of lexical verbs set out by Burton-Roberts. The lexical verbs are intensive verbs,transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, prepositional verbs, ditransitive verbs, and complex transitive verbs. Intensive verbs appear to be most dominant in *The Gift of the Magi*. Transitive verbs turn out to be the second dominant. Complex transitive verbs are the least dominant. Ditransitive verbs appear as the second least dominant.

4.2 The Forms of Lexical Verbs in The Gift of the Magi

Lexical verbs found in *The Gift of the Magi* vary in terms of forms. One of the forms identified was base form.

The base form appears as a finite form in the present tense as well as in a non-finite form. Examples of the base form can be observed in (45-50).

> (45) Be good to me, because I sold it for you.
>
> (46) "Don't you like me now?"
>
> (47) My hair will grow again.
>
> (48) Give me your watch.
>
> (49) "Take your hat off and let me look at it."

Each of the lexical verbs in (45-50) is in the base form. The lexical verb in the base form is *be* in (45), *like* in (46), *grow* in (47), *give* in (48), and *take*, *let* and *look* in (49).

Another form of lexical verbs found in The Gift of the Magi was -s form. As generally acknowledged, -s form of lexical verb occurs as a finite form in the third person singular present tense. The -s form of lexical verbs can be observed in (50-51).

> (50) "If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he looks at me the second time, he'll say I look like a girl who sings and dances for money"
>
> (51) My hair grows very fast.

As a matter of fact, the 'ordinary' verb whose base form is *look* takes the form l*ooks* in (50) and the 'ordinary' verb whose base form is *grow* takes the form *grows* in (51). These two 'ordinary' lexical verbs occur as a finite -s form in order to satisfy agreement condition with their subject. The subject of the verb *looks* in (50) is personal pronoun *he*. The subject of the verb *grows* in (51) is the noun phrase *my hair*.

Besides the -s form of the 'ordinary' lexical verbs, the '-s' forms of link verb *be* were found. Three forms were found. The first is the clitic form of *am* namely '*m* in (52). The second is *is* in (53). The third is *are* in (54)

> (52) I'm the same without my hair.
>
> (53) There is a little more to say about it.
>
> (54) All good things are like this.

The third form found was the *-ing* participle. The *-ing* participle form can be observed in (55-57).

> (55) Her eyes were shining brightly, but her face had lost its color.
>
> (56) He looked very thin and he was not smiling.
>
> (57) Della, being quite thin, had mastered this art.

The -ing participles in (55-56) occur as non-finite forms in the progressive aspect following be. The

non-finite forms in the progressive aspect are *shining* in (55) and *smiling* in (56). The -ing participle in (57) also occurs as a non-finite form. However, unlike the -ing participle in (57) occurs the -ing participle clause. The clause -ing participle clause is *being quite thin*.

The fourth form identifies in *The Gift of the Magi* was the past form. The past form occurs as a finite form in the past tense. Some of the past forms are regular verbs; some are irregular verbs. Examples of verbs occurring the past form can be observed in (58-62).

(58) That was all.

(59) The counted it three times.

(60) Della finished her crying and cleaned the marks of it from her face.

(61) Mrs. James Dillingham Young put her arms warmly about him and called him "Jim."

(62) She paid twenty-one dollars for it.

The regular verbs occurring as a finite forms in the past tense are *counted* in (59), *finished* and *cleaned* in (60), and *called* in (61). The irregular verbs occurring as a finite form in the past tense are the link verb *was* in (58), the complex transitive verb *put* in (61), and the transitive verb *paid* in (62).

The fifth form identified in *The Gift of the Magi* was the -ed participle. The -ed participle in The Gift of the Magi occurs as a non-finite form in the perfective aspect which follows *have* and in the passive voice which follows *be.* Examples of the -ed participle can be observed in (63-67).

(63) Everything had cost more than she had expected.

(64) She had put it aside, one cent and then another and the another, in her careful buying of meat and other food.

(65) You have already met her.

(66) Now, when he was being paid only ＄20 a week, the name seemed too long and important.

(67) It surely had been made for Jim and no one else.

The verbs in the -ed participle occurring as a non-finite form are *cost* and *expected* in (63), *put* in (64), and *met* in (65). Each of these -ed participle forms occurs in the perfective aspect which follows *have.* The verbs in the -ed participle occurring as a non-finite clause in the passive voice following *be* are *paid* in (66) and *made* in (67).

V. CONCLUSION

Six types of lexical verbs were identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. The first is intensive verb, which requires a complement. The second is transitive verb, which requires a noun phrase functioning as the object. The third is intransitive verb, which does not allow a noun phrase occupying the object position. The fourth type is prepositional verb, which can only be complemented by a prepositional phrase. The fifth type is ditransitive verb, which requires two noun phrases; the direct object and the indirect object. The sixth type is complex transitive verb, which requires a complement. Intensive verbs appear to be the most dominant.

Five forms of lexical verbs were identified. One of them, which appear to be the most dominant, is the past form. The second form is the base, which occurs as a finite form and a non-finite one. The third is the -s form, which occurs as a finite form in the third person singular present tense. The fourth is the -ing participle, which occurs in the progressive aspect following *be* and in the -ing participle clause. The fifth is -ed participle, which occurs as a non-finite form in the perfective aspect following *have*

and in the passive voice following *be*. The past form appears to be the most dominant

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