

KAROLINA KOZŁOWSKA

CONTEXT-RELATED SEMANTICS: EVALUATION OF EXPRESSIVE QUALITY OF LEXICAL ITEMS

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to point out and analyse the closest environment of lexemes that are intended to have expressive qualities within the given contexts. The analysis focuses on words, whose primary meanings are not characterised by expressiveness, and, if found in a different (neutral) context, they would not necessarily be perceived as subjective, emotionally loaded expressions. The material analysed in this paper consists of selected volumes of the popular series of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. The introductory part of the paper is theory-based: it clarifies the reasons for such choice of the material; it also explains why the semantic and stylistic character of a larger context is significant in understanding the connotation of a particular word within this context. The analytical part is divided into three sections, focused on three major types of contextual indicators of expressiveness, which were distinguished in the analysed material.

Key words: expressiveness; semantics; context; audio description.

1. INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS

1.1. CONTEXT-BASED EXPRESSIVENESS—THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Language is the basic and the most important means of interpersonal communication. Despite, however, such a well established position, its nature is not settled and fixed. The major quality of language is an enormous complexity and ability to assemble and compact within itself certain contexts and experiences founded on the centuries-old, multidirectional relationships between us—human beings and everything we come in contact with. Those countless experiences piled up and embedded in language give us the ability, not only to make objective statements about the reality, but also to make

KAROLINA KOZŁOWSKA, MA—PhD student, Institute of English Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: Al. Raławickie 14, PL 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: karolinakozlowska170@gmail.com

subjective, emotionally loaded and evaluating judgements (Lucy 2010, 266–86). Of a great significance are especially those items whose semantics is characterised by a particular expressive connotation, rather than denotation. In other words, those are the elements whose expressiveness is somewhat inconspicuous, opaque, and indefinite. The general aim of this article is to specify different types of expressive semantic categories, and to analyse various ways of linguistic manifestation of those categories.

Researching the expressive nature of words and phrases is a highly problematic procedure, especially when working on texts which were not written in the most recent period, or whose language is deliberately fashioned in an archaic manner. The language used in such works may vary from the modern one, and numerous expressions might have, either changed their meanings, or be altogether incomprehensible for the contemporary reader (Fonagy 2001, 685–7). Therefore, one of the primary dilemmas is not evaluation of the type of expressive function that a given lexical item represents, but rather the question of whether such an item is in fact subjective and emotionally loaded, or if its meaning is explicit.

There are some timeless, common-sense-based, universal perceptions of human beings, nature and the world in general; they are nonetheless rather arbitrary, in the sense that they may be questioned or undermined on the basis of personal and/or cultural relativity (Gumperz & Levinson 1996, 21–36). As it is not satisfactory to simply decree by *fiat* that certain items do, or do not have expressive qualities, it is helpful (or we may even say—essential) to focus on other levels of linguistic analysis in order to support the stylistic interpretation of a lexical item. As it has already been mentioned, even those expressions which appear to have somewhat conspicuous connotations, may have changed their meanings over the years. In the case of expressive lexemes, it is therefore of the utmost importance to consider and analyse the context in which a given word or a phrase is used. This is quite understandable, given the fact that the vast majority of words may have (or possibly will) acquire a whole range of various meanings depending on the context in which they are used and due to the appearance of new objects, mechanisms of action, cultural qualities and developments, political circumstances, and so on (Closs Traugott & Dasher 2004, 19–21).

1.2. REFERENCE MATERIAL SELECTION

The material analysed in this article is composed of texts written by J.K. Rowling, namely the adventures of the world famous young wizard—Harry Potter (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*). Such a choice of texts stems from three major reasons: firstly, the writer is well known for using a florid, sophisticated language; secondly, the language used in those stories is truly peculiar (mainly due to the fact, that most of the events that take place within the books are rather indescribable by everyday language), and this results in some kind of a mixture of science-fiction story with an old folk legend; the last (but definitely not least) reason for this particular selection of texts is fact that there are audio description (AD) scripts available for the Harry Potter films. Looking into some expressive devices and elements which are present within the written versions of the stories, may be a useful foundation for the analysis of the language of audio description, which would aim to prove the need for more extensive employment of subjectivity and expressiveness during the process of creation of audio description scripts (Braun 2007, 357). Even though this article will not focus on a comparative analysis of the expressive versus neutral elements of description still, availability of audio description for the Harry Potter films, opens possibilities of conducting such a study in the future. The aim of this work, however, is to point out and give examples of syntactic and contextual indicators of expressive qualities of lexical items.

2. DEVICES OF CONTEXT-BASED EXPRESSIVITY

Comprehensibility of contextual indicators of the expressive quality of lexical items, in most cases, turns out to be rather apparent and automatic. On the one hand, this may be connected to the stability and continuity of the semantics of the expressive lexical items, on the other hand, this must be also related to universality and timelessness of ways in which emotionally loaded messages have been conveyed (Narrog 2012, 68–70). This part of the paper focuses on several linguistic devices which help highlight the expressive character of certain elements.

2.1. EXPRESSIVE LOAD EXCESS

In order to highlight the expressive character of a lexical item, the author may implement the overload of those elements which have a particular semantic value. This is often achieved through enumeration of items which are supposed to evoke certain emotions.

- [1] *She looked the youngest there; she had a pale heart-shaped face, dark twinkling eyes, and short spiky hair that was a violent shade of violet. (Rowling 2004, 47)*

The above sentence is, colloquially speaking, packed with elements describing a certain young girl. If each of those items were taken out of the context, it could be understood in various ways. For instance *short, spiky hair of a violent shade of violet*, in some other context, could as well be associated with a dangerous, wild, unpleasant character. However here, all the underlined elements irresistibly evoke an impression of liveliness, youthful wildness and quirkiness. Additionally, an adjective in the superlative form *the youngest* presupposes this abovementioned impression.

The effect of an expressive load excess can also be created via the excessive use of synonyms, or by repetition of syntactic structures. Such constructions are meant to draw attention to equal, or similar, semantic status of given lexical items.

- [2] *[...] its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet. (Rowling 1997, 139)*

In [2], each body part of a character is unchangeably described by two adjectives, and then compared to a certain object (*boulder, coconut, tree trunk*). This symmetry of description somehow urges the reader to visualise each of the mentioned body parts as equally stocky, large and unattractive. Moreover, *a coconut*, (which may hardly be connected with anything negative, neither is it anywhere near as large as the other two object of comparison) here, being in the same syntactic position as *a boulder* and *tree trunks*, automatically becomes unattractive, unappealing to the reader.

Judgements about the expressive value of a lexical item may be established on the basis of this item being positioned among, or in a close vicinity of, its synonyms. If, within a considerably small textual space, there is a notice-

able excess of semantically equivalent or related expressions, this might be an indicator of an intended expressive quality of the analysed item. In [3], words such as *tiny* and *dark* gain a new connotation while being accompanied by *grubby-looking* and *shabby*.

- [3] *It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. [...]. For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby.* (Rowling 1997, 52)

An even more prominent indication of a need for such observation is a situation in which the above-mentioned lexical items are boldly listed in an uninterrupted chain, for instance:

- [4] *The forest seems to grow bigger, thicker, darker.* (Rowling 2016)

An expression whose expressive status (or the lack of it) might have been, until now, unknown or indiscernible, gains, through being a part of such sequence, a well-defined expressive status. This is exemplified in [5], where the meaning of *student beastie* is not particularly clear, however *ghoulie* and *ghostie* may, if not explain, then at least hint at the meaning of the expression in question.

- [5] *Are you ghoulie or ghostie or wee student beastie?* (Rowling 1997, 219)

Also, if the expressive status of the words has been considered ambiguous, semantic environment may help confirm it one way or the other.

- [6] *Her voice was high-pitched breathy and little-girlish [...].* (Rowling, 2004, 161)

In [6], the expression *little-girlish*, if present in some other context, would not necessarily have a negative connotation (indeed, it would be rather the other way around); however, in the given sentence, the expression is preceded by elements of a slightly pejorative meaning, and therefore *little-girlish* is automatically associated with something (or someone) childish, annoying.

It is, however, important to note, that the whole issue of context is a “two-way street”: it is not only the surroundings of a given lexical item that determine its expressive value, but also a single word may automatically attach certain meanings and connotations to all the neighbouring elements. The beginning of the below description, which has already been used in this work, makes the relevant character rather likeable, but while the reader encounters a one single word: *violent*, the whole idea of the described girl somehow evolves into a more negative one.

- [7] *She looked the youngest there; she had a pale heart-shaped face, dark twinkling eyes, and short spiky hair that was a violent shade of violet.* (Rowling 2004, 35)
- [8] *Her eyes were large, round, and slightly bulging.* (Rowling 2004, 111)

Here, while round and large eyes are generally considered a fairly attractive feature, the whole supposedly positive impression is dominated by the adjective *bulging* (definitely nothing appealing when it comes to eyes!), whose effect is not even alleviated by the adverb *slightly* which belongs to a group of downtoners and it has a diminishing quality (Quirk et al. 1992, 387).

The excessive use of somewhat similar elements may be therefore a confirmation of the meaning of a message conveyed, or/and make such a message more precise—comprehensive.

Additional indicators of the expressive value of a lexeme, might be a deliberate overuse of conjunctions while enlisting synonymous or topic-related elements. This gives the recipient the impression of an expressive pile-up, which, in turn, is a clear signal for a particular interpretation of a given message.

- [9] *He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide, and he looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild—long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins.* (Rowling, 1997, 11)

In [9], conjunction *and* does not connect single words, but whole segments of description, and each of those adds up to the highly negative perception of the picture. It is also important to point out that repetitions are one of the most basic and uncomplicated ways of syntactic strengthening of lexemes' expressive quality. It is worth mentioning that when the overall character and/or topic of a message is known to its recipient, enlisted or piled-up lexical items may be automatically perceived as synonymous and also as having a topic-congruent character. In [10], the word *cold* normally denotes a certain degree of temperature; here however, it is apparent that this lexeme is somehow synonymous with *sharp*, and that it indicates a figuratively expressed harsh and cynical attitude, as opposed to what is usually understood by the quality of being cold.

- [10] *Quirrell laughed, and it wasn't his usual quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp.* (Rowling, 1997, 232)

Sometimes, the similarity of two or more expressive elements is based on the type of derivation they have undergone, e.g. a series of diminutives derived through the attachment of a suffix *-let* or *-y*. While on the subject of diminutives, it must be kept in mind that this category is very often ambiguous since not every diminutive carries a subjective, expressive meaning. For instance words such as *leaflet*, *booklet*, *bracelet*, *piglet*, etc., even though they do bear the meaning of the quality of being young, or being of an insignificant size, they can hardly be said to have any strictly expressive value (Fortin 2011). Such value is rather more frequent among diminutives derived by the *-y* suffix, e.g. *mummy*, *daddy*, *girly* (as a noun, not as an adjective meaning relating to or characteristic of a girl), *Mickey*, the eponymous *Harry*, etc. These lexemes are seldom used to denote a physical smallness (especially when it comes to words like the above-mentioned *mummy* and *daddy*), and the vast majority of them may be claimed to express particular emotions. Therefore, as it is shown by the examples provided, emotionally loaded diminutives may signal an affectionate, friendly attitude, or serve as derogatory terms indicating disdain or disrespect. This is well presented by the excerpt:

[11] *Are you ghoulie or ghostie or wee student beastie?* (Rowling 1997, 219)

In [11], diminutives clearly do not indicate politeness, though they do convey the feeling that they concern some young, small characters. Therefore, even in their expressive form, it is not impossible for diminutives to denote certain physical aspects. Still, such relations to physicality would sooner express fragility or tininess of something in more subjective manner than simply signify the mere size of it.

Diminutives can also be created, not through derivation, but through the addition of a preceding modifier *little*. Similarly to what was written above, these diminutives also do not have to denote an actual physical size, but may have strong expressive connotations.

[12] *Now you don't have to whip your wands out for every tiny little thing!*
(Rowling 2004, 63)

[13] *Nasty little brat of a blood traitor it is.* (Rowling 2004, 82)

[14] [...] *and there's its twin, unnatural little beasts they are.* (Rowling 2004, 82)

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this section, some lexical items acquire their expressive nature on the basis of the semantic value of the

neighbouring elements. In such cases, emotionally loaded items might be spotted through certain semantic uniformity of the adjacent syntactic elements.

[15] *Both of them were thickset and looked extremely mean. [...], they looked like bodyguards.* (Rowling 1997, 86)

In [15], the word *bodyguards* on its own has a certain denotation—bodyguards are usually well-built. However, through the provision of additional modifier *extremely mean*, the above-mentioned, conventional connotation of the underlined word, is expressively amplified.

Moreover, an item, which would otherwise be perceived as neutral, often gains a status of an expressive lexeme via the influence of a neighbouring item of a blatant and/or unambiguous expressive denotation.

[16] *[he] was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut.* (Rowling 1997, 53)

Here, *walnut*, which is rather unlikely to be associated with something negative, by the addition of the preceding adjective *toothless*, automatically gains a negative connotation, bringing into the mind of the reader its other features, such as dryness, hardness, roughness of the shell and so on. Simply speaking, syntactic chain structures do not consist of synonymous items serving as mutual intensifiers, but they rather tend to complement and clarify the meaning of one another.

[17] *[...] it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut.* (Rowling 1997, 135)

[18] *If that's what I think it is - they're really rare, and really valuable.* (Rowling 1997, 160)

Similarly to how it was in the case of examples [3] and [4], here, there is a sense of semantic overload, but it must be noted that the apparent abundance is the very essence of the expressive value of a message. Putting it in other words, in [17], the author of the book might have written that the creature described in the above passage is of an insignificant size, but she (the author) decided to supplement it with comparing the subject to a walnut, the size of whom is clearly miniature. Regarding [18], even though *rare* and *valuable* are not straightforward synonyms, having removed one of the adjectives, the meaning of the message conveyed would have the same implication. All in all, by creating the sense of overload, not only does the author point out the pieces of information which are meant to be the most signi-

ficant ones, but she is also able to strengthen and/or confirm a particular message conveyed by them.

2.2. SEMANTIC UNIFORMITY AND APPROPRIATENESS

Contextual strengthening of the expressive value of a message might be achieved by assuring, not only semantic, but also stylistic concord among the neighbouring elements. Those elements do not necessarily have to be pronouns, nouns, verbs, etc., but they might also be stylistic devices such as comparisons, metaphors and so on. If all these have a similar connotation and provide the same “semantic aura”, they will support and strengthen the expressive character of the lexeme in question. Such stylistically and semantically related items might also be somewhat complementary towards each other.

The interpretation of expressive nature of lexemes is often facilitated by the use of comparisons. Both, correlation and juxtaposition help establish the degree of the expressive nature of a given item. A lexeme whose expressive quality is to be analysed, can appear either as subject of comparison (the element to which something or someone else is compared), or as an object of it (an item which is compared to the subject of comparison), for example:

[19] *Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat.* (Rowling 1997, 17)

[20] *They watched a gorilla scratching its head who looked remarkably like Dudley.* (Rowling 1997, 19)

In [19], one of the characters is compared to a rat, and since the boy is also described as *scrawny*, the meaning of *rat* is quite obviously to have a negative connotation as well. In the second example, a gorilla is compared to Dudley—a boy whose unattractiveness and awkwardness is mentioned in the book a number of times. As Dudley’s appearance is well known to the reader, it is therefore the *gorilla* (which is in the position of the object of the comparison) that acquires all the negative qualities of the character.

Regardless of the place that the item of interest occupies within the structure of comparison, it always demonstrates some suggestive quality. It either already has some intrinsic expressive meaning that can be only understood in one particular way (such as for instance vulgarisms), or it is compared to some well-defined item in order to assure the reader of an underlying connotation.

- [21] *His bitten hand had developed an unpleasant crusty covering like a tough brown glove.* (Rowling 2004, 88)

In [21], we at first may not be able to visualise what the injured hand may have looked like, but it does become much easier when it is compared to *a tough brown glove*. Similarly in

- [22] *He turned right around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beet with a moustache.* (Rowling 1997, 19)

we are able to decipher from the whole of the message, that the character is angry, but comparing his face to *a gigantic beet* gives us a better account of the state of the character, and assures us about the supposed level of emotions. Such assurance turns out to be extremely important especially when it comes to, what might be called, a “semantic generation gap”, where the meaning of some lexeme has changed over the years, causing an unnecessary confusion for the recipient.

Going back to the structure of comparisons, when the analysed lexical item occupies the position of the subject of a comparative structure, its expressive nature is plain and unmistakable. However, when such an item appears as a “comparatee” (meaning, the object of comparison), its expressive quality (if it is not comprehensible in itself) is drawn from the structure subject.

- [23] *Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog.* (Rowling 1997, 12)

- [24] *The tub was full of what looked like dirty rags swimming in gray water.* (Rowling 1997, 24)

- [25] *A loud, echoing crack broke the sleepy silence like a gunshot.* (Rowling 2004, 3)

- [26] *Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like a giant elastic band.* (Rowling 1997, 25)

It is rather evident that words like, for example, *a howl* do not mean anything neither positive nor negative. Whereas, a sound made by *a wounded dog*, need not be explained any further. It is important to note, that at least one of the elements of a comparative structure must be rather concrete and simple, especially when the other one is particularly ambiguous or abstract, such as a *twanging heart*.

On the other hand, the whole idea of extracting lexical expressiveness from comparisons, becomes far more problematic in the case of those less concise structures, or those which only acquire certain meaning when being a part of a larger utterance.

[27] *Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel. Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.* (Rowling 1997, 15)

The short and very concise comparison at the very beginning of [27], at first glance does not carry any expressive connotation. However, as the text goes on, it is clearly revealed that being Uncle Vernon's lookalike, is not something one should boast about.

It often happens that even though one of the elements of a comparative structure is already generally perceived as having an expressive character, the other element boosts this emotional load pushing closer to the extreme point on the expressive continuum scale. In [28], the adjective *lumpy* already carries certain expressive character, but here it is additionally amplified by being compared to a boulder. It is important to note that this comparison does not introduce any new information, it only strengthens the meaning of the already provided message.

[28] [...] *its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder.* (Rowling 1997, 139)

However, there might be also a situation where one of the elements of comparison alleviates the expressive value of another expressive element:

[29] *They had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. "Pig snout," they said and entered.* (Rowling 1997, 143)

Here, as we read the expression *the Fat Lady*, we may think it boldly offensive. Once we, however, move onto the *pig snout*, *the Fat Lady* does not seem that unmannerly any more.

Modifiers are of such a great significance due to the fact that they are adjacent to the elements they characterise, which in turn results in them having a powerful influence on the literal as well as connotative meaning of a given lexeme. Expressive lexemes may be also additionally strengthened by the presence of a modifier characterised by similar semantic and/or stylistic qualities.

[30] *Nasty little brat of a blood traitor it is.* (Rowling 2004, 82)

Somebody described as a *brat*, is almost certainly nasty. Moreover, this expression is often used in relation to a young, disorderly person.

[31] *I've heard Snape can turn very nasty.* (Rowling 1997, 111)

[32] *I'm sat on my backside here having a nice comfortable time.* (Rowling 2004, 63)

One may notice that if a particular element is analysed in relation with its expressive character, it must already be subjective, without any additional element supporting its qualities. This is of course true, but as it has been already stated, the greater the number of semantically related elements, the more evident the expressive function of the utterance. Moreover, it is noticeable that some lexical items, which otherwise would not be considered expressive, acquire a certain “expressive feel” if they are modified by an intensifier. It is the case of expressions which, semantically, do not require a modifier in order to be understood correctly, because either with it or without it they have a fairly similar meaning. If one of such elements is modified by an adverb, we may expect, there is a second, more expressive, meaning to it.

[33] *It happened very suddenly.* (Rowling 1997, 100)

[34] *The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.* (Rowling 1997, 53)

[35] *Harry and Ron managed to get on the wrong side of him on their very first morning.* (Rowling 1997, 105)

Semantics of the word *suddenly* implies that something described as such, happens without a warning, unforeseen or that it is done hastily. Therefore, if those conditions are not fulfilled, the action in question, simply should not be described as *sudden*. A logical assumption would be that nothing can happen *less*, or *more suddenly* as it is not a gradable quality. Moving onto [35] and *very first* (so often used an expression), it must be admitted, that nothing is ever described as *a little bit first* or *slightly first*. We may therefore decipher, that if such adverbs or adjectives are additionally intensified by *very*, the author's intention might have been to highlight the distressing, astounding or unusual character of the circumstances. In [34], the same thing happens with adjectives *still* and *silent*, which are modified by adverb *completely*, as if there could be various degrees of silence or

stillness: if you move, even slightly, you are not still any more. It must be noted that the above-mentioned words are gradable from the grammatical point of view (Quirk et al. 1992, 219–22), but what we focus on here, is a common-sense-based, semantic aspect of these expressions.

We are faced with a similar situation in the case of modifiers which are “spare” due to some evident or well-known qualities of elements or actions described by them.

[36] [...] *the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march.*
(Rowling 1997, 102)

A funeral march is usually, if not always, slow, and therefore, describing it as such is simply unnecessary.

What is more, there are theoretically no limitations on the number of modifiers that can be used, and surely a chain of such expressions must be most impressive for the recipient.

[38] *miserable little Underground station* (Rowling 1997, 94)

[39] *high-pitched, breathy, and little-girlish* (Rowling 1997, 161)

The function of modifiers is particularly important when it comes to lexemes whose expressive character was acquired through the derivation process. This is so, due to the fact that the connotation of derived lexemes may not always be clear. Let us consider, for instance, the already mentioned diminutives: such terms may have totally opposite meanings, and be either perfectly endearing, or extremely disdainful. Therefore, providing such an element with an unambiguous modifier helps prevent any profound confusion.

[40] *nasty little laugh* (Rowling 1997, 185)

[41] *tiny little thing* (Rowling 1997, 63)

[42] *unnatural little beasts* (Rowling 1997, 82)

Little laugh on its own may be understood as an expression with positive connotation of a *subtle, delicate, feminine laugh*. If it is, however, preceded by *nasty, little* acquires a completely different meaning. In [41], the expression *little thing* is often used to signify something unimportant, irrelevant. Here, since the expression *little thing* is additionally modified by *tiny*, we may expect that the description is a literal one and that it denotes something

characterised by a small size. And finally, *little beasts* in [42] can be understood as a derogative term, meaning *perfidious, insidious creatures*. Nevertheless, the connotation of the same expression shifts in the presence of *unnatural*, since, as we know, the word *beast* means also an animal, a creature that is not a human being.

Another group of items which may significantly modify (in this case there is usually no need for clarification, but it is mostly the matter of modification only) an expressive lexeme, are determiners, such as articles, demonstratives and possessives. These items are rarely mentioned in texts concerned with expressive function of language, even though they might be actually used more frequently than other expressive modifiers, especially in a spoken language.

Just for clarification, it has to be noted that those elements do not always have expressive connotation and in most cases they serve their primary functions. Let us go back, however, to those instances where determiners acquire a contextual semantic meaning. A well-known example of this kind is the use of definite article “the”. This article can attribute a fairly neutral lexeme with a new meaning, signifying something that is special, unusual or particularly important for the speaker.

Similarly, a positive familiarising and endearing connotation is provided by possessive adjectives, which are very often used to create ambience of friendliness and unity, or in order to diminish the distance between things or persons.

[43] *You'll make your real friends.* (Rowling 1997, 94)

[44] *Don't be sorry, my dear sir [...]* (Rowling 1997, 3)

[45] *My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name?* (Rowling 1997, 8)

On the other hand, determiners such as *any*, *some*, *that* or *those*, when they are used for the expressiveness-related purposes, they would usually imply a negative connotation. The expressive use of *some* and *any* usually signifies indifferent or uncaring attitude of the speaker.

[46] *Snape's refereeing this time, and he'll be looking for any excuse to knock points off Gryffindor!* (Rowling 1997, 173)

[47] *The stone will transform any metal into pure gold.* (Rowling, 1997, 176)

[48] *You fed Draco Malfoy some cock-and-bull story about a dragon, trying to get him out of bed and into trouble.* (Rowling 1997, 194)

[49] [...] *a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like some stalking beast.* (Rowling 1997, 205)

Any in [46] implies that the *excuse* will be a minor, insignificant one. Similarly in [47], *any* gives the impression that the metal that is to be turned into gold, is not only optional, but rather that the type of it is not of the utmost importance to the speaker. In [48], *some* is, as if, a synonym of *trivial*, *meaningless*; and in [49], it increases a disdainful attitude of the speaker. It has to be kept in mind, that term *negative connotation* does not always imply dislike or unfriendliness; it may as well connote an impassive attitude, which is considered “negative”, simply for the reason of it not being positive. In the case of demonstratives *that* and *those*, they might be used to create the atmosphere of alienation and disagreement.

[50] *Shaking back his sleeve to reveal the tips of those burned and blackened fingers.* (Rowling 2014, 67)

[51] *This was one of those uncomfortable things Luna often said [...]* (Rowling 2014, 138)

Generally, *any*, *some*, *that*, *those*, if used in an expressive context, signify a marginalising attitude of the speaker, and deprive the modified item of unique, individual features, usually creating a derogatory effect of unimportance. Similar outcome is also achieved when a pronoun which implicates detachment and/or a dismissive attitude of the speaker. instead of a proper noun (especially a proper noun such as a person's name) is replaced by a pronoun.

[52] *Harry was barely aware of what the others were doing.* (Rowling 2004, 223)

[53] [...] *keep our eyes on the Gurg an' ignore the others.* (Rowling 2004, 325)

[54] *But the others wouldn't let Professor Quirrell keep Harry to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all.* (Rowling 1997, 54)

2.3. CONTRAST

It is not uncommon to boost the expressiveness of an item through surrounding it with stylistically or semantically contrastive elements, or elements of a more neutral character. Before going into more detail, a few words of clarification are required regarding the latter. One must remember, that the

subjectivity and objectivity of a lexeme is not a matter of “either/or” choice between two extremes, but it is rather a problem of placing a given item on a certain continuum scale (Klein 1980, 4). Having that in mind, it appears that neutrality of lexemes is somewhat arbitrary, and therefore they can be arranged in a gradable fashion, which may, in turn, lead to the already mentioned semantic and/or stylistic excess.

An expressive lexeme often appears in a simple juxtaposition with another lexeme of an antonymous nature within a compound sentence. Such a “simple” juxtaposition implies that it is a “word-for-word” situation, where one may easily discern which element corresponds with which.

[55] *Well, one was very large and the other one rather skinny.* (Rowling 2004, 109)

[56] *Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel, Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.* (Rowling 1997, 15)

Large, in [55], is a fairly neutral adjective, but when it is “paired up” with an expressive *skinny*, it automatically gains an expressive character. Moreover, in the question of meaning, it is of course possible for them to be conspicuous, but they may as well be opaque, as it is shown in [56]: we could not be sure how to interpret *a pig in a wig*, until we have know it is juxtaposed with *a baby angel*.

Obviously, the contrastive structure does not have to be, as it was described above, a “word-for-word” one. Indeed, one or both of the contrastive elements can be more complex. Moreover, the element which constitutes a contrast for the expressive lexeme, should not necessarily be of an expressive nature. Additionally, expressiveness can be boosted by symmetrical construction of the contrastive structure, e.g. contrasting elements may be characterised by antonymous modifiers.

[57] *Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap lemon ice pop.* (Rowling 1997, 19)

Here, the contrasting elements are composed into a larger structure, and additionally they are modified by the same number of contrastive (in the case of ice cream, of course) elements.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the discussed elements which influence the contextual expressive value of a lexeme can appear simultaneously, and they either specify or increase the expressive connotation of this lexeme. The fact that several indicators of expressiveness appear within a single utterance or context, is a good evidence for the structural complexity of expressive elements (meaning, it is not the question of a single lexical item) and their closest environment. Moreover, the above analysis shows the significance of the “micro-semantics”, which, simply speaking, means that a lot of semantic information can be sourced by scrutinising the local context of a given lexeme, as opposed to studying the larger, general implication (Fortin 2011). In fact, comprehension and interpretation of the closest vicinity of a lexeme is sometimes the only way of learning about expressive nature of a seemingly neutral element, meaning one that is generally perceived as such. This, again, shows a dubiety and arbitrariness of the expressivity-based selection.

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ZNACZENIE A KONTEKST —
OCENA EKSPRESYWNEJ WARTOŚCI SŁÓW

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wskazanie i analiza najbliższego otoczenia leksemów, które — według zamierzenia autora — mają w danym kontekście pełnić funkcję wyrażen o charakterze sugestywnym. Analiza obejmuje słowa, które odznaczają się cechami ekspresywnymi jedynie w tymże kontekście, podczas gdy ich podstawowe znaczenie nie ma cech ekspresywnych. Niniejsza publikacja opiera się na analizie tekstów wybranych książek z popularnej serii, której bohaterem jest Harry Potter. Pierwsza, teoretyczna część artykułu uzasadnia wybór analizowanych tekstów; odpowiada również na pytanie, dlaczego semantyczny i stylistyczny charakter szerszego kontekstu ma istotne znaczenie dla konotacji danego słowa znajdującego się w tym kontekście. Część analityczna podzielona jest na sekcje skupiające się na trzech typach sygnalizatorów sugestywnej natury leksemu z uwzględnieniem zagadnienia kontekstu.

Streszcila Karolina Kozłowska

Słowa kluczowe: ekspresywność; semantyka; kontekst; audiodeskrypcja.