

Semiotic Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meaning: A study of the Poem “The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost

Düz Anlam ve Yan Anlamın Göstergebilimsel Analizi: Robert Frost’un “Alınmayan Yol” Şiiri Üzerine Bir İnceleme

ABSTRACT

The poem “The Road Not Taken” explores personal experience and perception of the universe by the author. The poet establishes emotions and imagination by using connotative, denotative and myth meaning in the poem. This research examines denotative, connotative and myth meaning. In order to understand and interpret implied and hidden meaning denotation and connotation are needed for target readership. The researcher tries to reveal connotative, denotative and myth meanings and their unique and hidden meaning in the text. Literature is based on creative phenomenon. From a semiotic point of view, the researcher investigates the implied meaning that exists in poem, particularly the denotative, connotative and mythical meaning. Based on this, the study deals with intended meaning of words that are taken from Robert Frost’s selected poem the Road not Taken. The poem is investigated descriptively by using Roland Barthes’ (1957) semiotic theory of signs. In this case, this study focuses on semiotic analysis on Robert Frost’s selected poem “The Road not Taken”. This paper tries to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings included in the poem. In this sense, this study tries to investigate myth in Barthes’ theory by analyzing how the words and phrases to Rober Frost’s poem relate to the denotation and connotation meanings. This research is based on descriptive qualitative method. This work reveals that words not only have denotation but also connotation in the selected poem. This study concludes that the poem reflects symbolic connotations. This study suggests that majority of the words in this poem have hidden meaning. The connotative words included in the poem reflect aspect of human life, human consciousness, human circumstances, humans’ destiny in the universe. The study reveals that connotative meaning is more dominant than denotative meaning in the selected poem.

Keywords: Meaning, Semiotics, Denotative, Connotative, Myth, Robert Frost

ÖZET

“Alınmayan Yol” şiiri, yazarın kişisel deneyimini ve evren algısını araştırıyor. Şair, şiirde yan anlam ve mit anlamlarını kullanarak duyguları ve tasavvuru kurar. Bu araştırma kelimelerdeki yan anlam, çağrışım ve mit anlamlarını incelemektedir. Hedef okuyucu kitlesi için ima edilen ve gizlenen anlamı anlamak ve yorumlamak için yan anlam ve çağrışım gereklidir. Araştırmacı, şiirdeki çağrışım, yan anlam ve mit anlamlarını ve bunların biricik ve gizli anlamlarını ortaya çıkarmaya çalışır. Edebiyat, yaratıcı olguya dayanır. Araştırmacı göstergebilimsel bir bakış açısıyla şiirde var olan ima edilen anlamı, özellikle düzanlamsal, yananlamsal ve mitsel anlamı araştırır. Buradan hareketle bu çalışma, Robert Frost’un Yol Alınmaz adlı şiirinden seçilmiş kelimelerin amaçlanan anlamlarını ele almaktadır. Bu şiir, Roland Barthes’in (1957) göstergebilimsel gösterge kuramı kullanılarak betimsel olarak incelenmiştir. Bu durumda, Robert Frost’un seçilmiş şiiri “Alınmayan Yol” üzerine göstergebilimsel çözümlenmeye odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada şiirde yer alan yan anlam ve yan anlamlar çözümlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu anlamda, bu çalışma, Rober Frost’un şiirindeki sözcük ve tamlamaların düzanlam ve çağrışım anlamlarıyla nasıl ilişkili olduğunu inceleyerek Barthes’in kuramında miti incelemeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma betimsel nitel yöntemle dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, seçilen şiirde kelimelerin sadece gönderen değil çağrışım yapan da olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Buradan hareketle bu çalışma, şiirin sembolik çağrışımları yansıttığı sonucuna varmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu şiirdeki kelimelerin çoğunun gizli anlamlara sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Şiirde yer alan çağrışım sözcükler, insan yaşamının, insan bilincinin, insan koşullarının, insanın evrendeki kaderinin bir yönünü yansıtır. Bu çalışma seçilen şiirde yan anlamın düz anlamdan daha baskın olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlam, Göstergebilim, Düz Anlam, Yan Anlam, Mit, Robert Frost

INTRODUCTION

Literature is based on creativity and imagination and it employs an idea and feeling, emotions (Leech,1974). Literature also deals with aspect of life and life experiences. The words, phrases and and sentences are effective and powerful in literature. In this sense, literature can be considered as an imaginative and creative writing. Poetry is a literary genre and it reflects author’s expressions (Schneider,1931). Poetry includes lyrics, rhymes and rhythms in each stanza (Lynen,1960). Imaginative and figurative language are used in the poems and it contains aesthetic

Serda Güzel ¹ 

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¹ Assist. Prof. Dr., Istanbul Arel University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Translation and Interpretation, İstanbul, Türkiye. ORCID:0000-0001-5212-9891

value (Tyson,2006). Word reflects expressions and meanings. By means of language people are able to convey their actions, their thinking, their feelings and emotions. There are two main types of word meaning. These are conceptual or denotative meaning and connotative meaning (Crystal,1985). Denotative meaning does not express or explain any other meanings, beliefs or values and it reflects dictionary meaning. On the other perspective, connotative meaning reflects additional value and sense. It can be stated that denotation reflects literal meaning and it is based on linguistic expression and connotation reflects social and affective meaning (Barthes,1957). Based on this, meaning is crucial in written, spoken and visual texts (Fiske,1990). Because they construct relationships, thoughts and emotions. In this case, words may have more than one meaning and words explore people's emotions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values beyond denotative meaning in other words literal meaning (Danesi,2004). The main goal of this paper is to investigate denotative and connotative meaning in the selected poem. The manipulation of language is seen in poetry as a literary work. In this sense, people sometimes cannot perceive or understand the essence of the poem in terms of explicit and implicit meaning in other words visible and invisible meanings. From this perspective, by this analysis the study aims at exploring denotative, connotative and myth meaning of the words in the selected poem. In this regard, this study tries to explore connotative meaning in Robert Frost's selected poetry.

RESEARCH METHOD

This work tries to identify the aspect of intended and implied meaning in connotative words. This study focuses on the poetry texts by Robert Frost. This research uses qualitative descriptive method in order to explore the hidden and implied meaning behind the diction used by Robert Frost in his poetry. In this regard, the selected poem is analyzed for connotative meaning, denotative meaning and mythical meaning.

ROLAND BARTHES' SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is a part of disciplines of linguistics and it focuses on structure and meaning of language. Semiotics focuses on sentence, pictures, gestures, music, sounds and objects. Semiotics deals with sign and symbols in texts (Barthes,1967). In this study, the researcher uses Barthes' theory in order to analyze the implied and intended meaning in the selected poem. Barthes' theory focuses on the denotation, connotation and myth meaning. Barthes' Semiotic Theory investigates the process of interpreting signs and deals with how different and various cultures and communities understand or perceive them. Signs have a signifier and it is physical form of the sign and we perceive them by means of our senses and the signified reflects meaning or content, the notion employed by the signifier (Barthes,1977). In this sense, a sign can be anything that maintain meaning, for example, written words, spoken utterances, a sign or a myth (Barthes,1957). Myth is seen as phenomenon of connotative meaning and denotative meaning because it is based on beliefs and values within a community or society. Semiotic analysis studies of meanings existing in daily communication and it deals with signification systems. Based on Roland Barthes' semiology, the denotation can be considered as a system of signification in other words meaning and it is the first level in other words stage, on the contrary connotation meaning is a second order and myth meaning is the final order. Denotation reflects literal meaning, connotation explores culture and individual associations (Barthes,1957). The term connotative is derived from Latin language and it means "to be a sign". In addition, myth meaning stems from connotative meaning and it is considered and accepted as true in a particular community. Semiology contains image, gesture, musical sounds and objects. By means of semiotic message, the authors try to establish social context. The term orders of signification is used by Barthes (Barthes,1967).The first order of signification is called denotation and the second order of signification is called connotation. Primary in other words dictionary meaning reflect denotative meaning. Denotative meaning reflects original meaning in other words true meaning. Denotation reflects a true statement about the world. Denotative meaning points out that the relationship between the concept and the world of reality. Denotative meaning explores real meaning and it focuses on what is seen and it does not cover implied or hidden meaning. In addition denotative meaning is named as a conceptual meaning and it is also considered as referential meaning because denotative meaning reflects sight, smell, hearing and feeling or other sense experiences. Denotative meaning can be seen as objective (dictionary) meaning (Hartley,2002). It can be noted here that denotative meaning deals with natural meaning and it does not include any hidden or implied meaning. Denotative meaning is a base meaning and it relates to linguistic forms with the objective references (Chandler,2007). This means that denotation can be considered as literal meaning and it focuses on one specific meaning. Denotation does not deal with society, culture, ideology or values. In this sense, denotation reflects basic meaning in the text. In this regard, denotation is the first level of signification. Based on this, denotative meaning is seen as conceptual meaning and it reflects literal meaning. Readers can easily find denotative meaning of the lexis in the dictionary because it reflects direct meaning. Denotative meaning does not include additional, suggested meaning, implied idea (Leech,1983).The term connotative is derived from Latin language and it means "to be a sign" (Dyer,1993). Connotative meaning reflects cultural meaning. It reflects

memories, feelings and our senses. Connotative meaning deals with thoughts, feelings and it establishes sense of value. This points out that connotative meaning reflects particular meaning and it contains hidden meaning. As it is mentioned before, connotative meaning is based on sense of values and feelings, in this sense it does not reflect essence of reality (Hartley,2002). In addition, connotative meaning can be considered as subjective. Because of this reason, connotative meaning and value can be different for every individual, group and community. Connotative meaning reflects individual experience. In this respect connotative meaning reflects culture, geographical area and historical period. Connotative meaning can be divided into two groups (Freeman,1971). They are positive and negative connotative meaning. Apart from negative and positive connotative meaning, there is also neutral connotative meaning (Dyer,1993). It can be stated that, connotative meaning is more sophisticated than denotative meaning because connotative meaning reflects different feelings, experience and values. The denotation of a lexis depends on objective meaning but the connotation of a word can be seen as a subjective and an emotional meaning. In connotation, the meaning of a word does not reflect dictionary meaning. This points out that connotative meaning focuses on presupposition of a sentence or a phrase. In this sense, the denotative meaning reflects an explicit meaning but connotative meaning reflects implicit or hidden meaning of the word (Barthes,1967). Based on this, the connotative meaning reflects human feelings and emotions and it deals with particular sense of value and it can be positive, negative and neutral.

Myth can be seen as a story and it gives a particular direction to a group of people. Myth focuses on human behavior and human wisdom. The connotation reflects ideology and this ideology is called myth. Myth reflects dominant values in a particular society or community (Barthes,1967). Myth can be seen as a fairy tale, it is considered as a strange story and it is hard to understand or perceive its essence of meaning or accepted values because story (myth) is irrational and it does not make sense if one does not know the cultural or social qualities or background of myth (Freeman,1971). In this sense, connotation in broader sense, myth represents social tones, cultural implications and emotional values. Connotation, denotation and myth are not separate, these three concepts exist together. To sum up, based on Roland Barthes' semiology, the denotation meaning can be considered as a system of signification (meaning) and it is the first stage, the connotative meaning is second order and myth meaning is the final order (Barthes,1967). Denotation reflects literal meaning, connotation reflects cultural and personal associations. In addition, myths are improved by associating connotative meanings that are seen to be true in a particular community and society. Based on Barthes' theory, myth meaning is a second order of semiology. Literal meaning is conveyed at the linguistic level in other words first level, cultural and personal associations are expressed at mythological meaning or level and this is the second order (Barthes,1957).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.What are the connotative, denotative, myth meaning conveyed in the selected poem?
- 2.What are the hidden messages being employed in the selected poem?

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this article to reveal the connotative, denotative, myth meaning that are included in the selected poem. In addition, the researcher tries to reveal the hidden messages those are included in the selected poem.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The denotative meaning of the poem stems from the poem itself. Denotative meaning is based on the words and phrases used by the poets. Denotative meaning can be seen as extrinsic element and it excludes or omits the feelings, emotions and ideas that individuals may connect with that lexis (Barthes,1957). As it is mentioned before, denotative meaning reflects literal meaning but connotative meaning reflects explicature and implicature meaning. In broader sense myth meaning reflects ideology and sense of values and beliefs. This study analyzes the denotative, connotative and myth meaning of the words (the two roads, yellow woods, weary traveler, the choice) using Roland Barthes'(1957) semiotic theory of signs.

This research uses descriptive qualitative research and it deals with connotative, denotative and the myth meanings included in the Robert Frost's selected poem " The Road is not Taken". This study tries to examine words, phrase and sentences that contain connotative, denotative and the myth meaning.

The researcher uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of signs such as denotation, connotations and myths. As it is mentioned before, denotation is the first level connotation is the second level and myth is the final level. Denotation reflects literal meaning, connotation reflects cultural, personal and social values and the myth meaning reflects the relationship between denotative and connotative meaning. This study analyzes Robert Frost's poem The Road not Taken in terms of denotative, connotative and myth meaning. The authentic atmosphere of the poem

is conveyed by means of connotative, denotative and myth meaning. Robert Frost is considered as poet of nature, he explores natural phenomenon and he conveys moral lesson to human beings in poems (Schneider,1931). The concept of nature and theme of the wood connotatively represent personal emotions and life experience of a human being. The theme of the wood connotatively represents whole life of a person. In the poem the concept of path connotatively represents future. His poems deals with life, death and humans' destiny in the world. Natural features and senses such as flowers, woods "The Road not Taken" can be considered as a rich in use of symbols and connotative meaning. This study is based on Roland Barthes' order of Signification Theory (Barthes,1957). The yellow wood represents autumn and it connotes death, decay and ageing. From this perspective, the concept of autumn connotes maturity leaves change their colors and it represents ageing and maturity. In this sense it connotes idea of change and revolution. In addition, "two roads" is the central topic of the poem and two roads connotes life itself. The poem includes many themes and these are choice, fate and overthinking. These themes are narrated by means of connotative and mythical meaning in the poem.

Roland Barthes Map Sign

Signifier

Signified

Denotative Sign

Connotative Sign

Connotative Signified

Connotative Sign

In this paper, the Barthes' Sign Map (1957) is used in order to explore connotative, denotative and myth meaning in the selected poem. First, the researcher identifies the markers and signs in the poem. The researcher interprets the signs at the level of denotative meaning and then the meaning to a deeper stage that is connotative that produces a myth and it develops in the wider society and community.

SEMIOTIC STUDY OF "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN"

The poem includes multidimensional and metaphorical meanings. The title of the poem has symbolic connotation. "The Road Not Taken" indicates naturalist signification of the poet and title of the poem reflects his indecisiveness of life. Denotatively, "road" means path, route. Connotatively, the "two roads diverged" in a wood are more than roads and paths, this phrase can be considered as extended metaphor. Connotatively, the road or two roads represent choice, and poet's inner being in the journey of life. They represent life, journey of life and its various paths. Each road reflects a different choice and different series of events. The myth meaning is humans' choices (own their free will or not) determine their destinies.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

This poem reflects poet's personal experience. The usage of singular pronoun "I" connotatively represents poet's inner being and sole presence. The myth meaning is subject pronoun "I" represents that we are lonely in the universe. The setting of the poem reflects connotative meaning. Denotatively, the narrator is in a "yellow wood." Connotatively, yellow represents fall season and pale leaves. Connotatively, the wood reflects life itself, in broader sense, "yellow woods" connotes that the narrator is nearing the end of life. Autumn of life connotes death. In this sense, the yellow woods represent narrator's mortality. It can be stated that, the myth meaning indicates that human beings are mortal and they are doomed mortality in addition human beings cannot escape harsh realities what ever they do in life. The setting of the poem creates connotative and myth meaning in the poem. It contributes to the overall meaning of the poem.

Weary Traveler

The narrator in the poem is a traveller. Denotatively, "traveler" means one who is on a journey. Connotatively, traveler means inner journey of a narrator. The myth meaning reflects that human beings are on a journey through life.

The Choice

The narrator says that “two roads diverged in a wood, and I -/ I took the one less traveled by,/ And that has made all the difference.” Connotatively, the word of choice symbolizes life itself. The myth meaning is human beings are making choices that will influence the patterns of their lives. As human beings, we are on the road of life and we are making decisions every day. This making decision process alters our path and it allows us to grow as human beings. It can be stated here, the topic of the poem is about making choices in life. Denotatively, from the first line to the final stanza, the narrator talks about making decision in life. The narrator focuses on how making decision is hard and confusing during the life process. In the last stanza in line 4 “I took the one less travelled” connotatively, represents that narrator is a non conformist. The narrator does not want to obey the norms, standards of life. The narrator makes non conformist choice. According to narrator this choice seems that it is the right one. To summarize “road connotatively represents “choice” and “the two diverged road” connotatively represents “two choices”. The myth meaning is making the decision is not an easy thing, making decisions reflects harsh realities of life. Human beings face with choices in everything. The narrator tries to explain that people should be wise and open minded when they are making a choice in life. In general, it can be noted here that the central myth meaning in the poem is age, time cannot be turned back that’s why people should make wise choices in life. Human beings have choices in life. People should think about their consequences while they are making decisions because age and time never come back. This myth meaning dominates the poem.

CONCLUSION

This present study tries to reveal connotative, denotative and myth meaning in the poem. This study points out that connotative and myth meaning are established by means of figurative language in the poem. This present paper tries to reveal that Frost’s verse is designed by extensive use of symbols. He uses the words from nature and he uses them in a symbolic way. The Road not Taken is one of example of it. This poem is about making the decision in life and elements from nature and life woods, yellow woods, roads, leaves, roads are mentioned in the poem. Based on this, all these words have connotative and symbolic and myth significance. The first person point of view “I” is used in the poem in order to construct poet’s moment and milieu. This suggests that poet’s feelings and emotions and his free will are conveyed by using the first person point of view. Connotatively, the first person point of view represents poet’s naturalist significations, confusions and ambiguities in life. This study concludes that the connotative meaning, in broader sense, the myth meaning reflect aspects of human life, effect of time, human consciousness and human circumstances. In sum, Frost uses denotative, connotative and myth meaning in order to explore aspects of human life in an ordered and organized world.

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