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9. Thomas Hardy: Statistical Analysis of Writing Style

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Abstract

Use of statistical tools and techniques in languages, literature and linguistics is not very old. It has developed recently, say, not more than last 100 years. However, literary scientists using statistical tools to deal with literary issues is very rare scenario even today.

This research paper is an effort to disseminate the results how statistical linguistics can help litterateurs in their studies. The discussion about the use of the statistical tools and techniques, what are their basic assumptions, how to choose a sample etc. is beyond the scope of this paper.

For this study we have considered the famous English author Thomas Hardy. His career as a writer spanned over 50 years. His literary career can be divided as a Novelist, a Poet and a Lyrical Poet. The position Thomas Hardy occupied in English literature is unique. His death seemed to snap the last link connecting the famous nineteenth century litterateur.

Three novels of the author are undertaken for the application of statistical tools and techniques. These novels are written at almost equidistant points in time..

We have considered three measurable characteristics as style parameters. These are sentence length, richness of vocabulary and marker word. There can be many more such parameters which can distinguish authors' style. For example, use of adjectives, use of nouns etc.

Thus we hence studied if the author Thomas Hardy has maintained his writing style pertaining to the style parameters within the novels under study. Also if his writing style has changed over a period of time regarding the style parameters.

Keywords : Sentence length, Richness of Vocabulary, Marker Word, Statistical Linguistics

Introduction

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet. He was born in Dorsetshire in England on 2nd June 1840. His family was one of the branches of Dorset Hardys. His father was a master mason and building contractor.

“Two On A Tower” was published in 1882.

In 1886 Hardy’s next novel “The Mayor Of Casterbridge” was published. It was a turning point of Hardy’s career. The novel represented his belief that “Character Is Fate”. This novel is filled with overt Biblical references that form the base of this tragic and agonistic novel.

The “Woodlanders” was published in 1887.

His first collection of short stories “Wassex Tales” was published in 1891 and third collection of stories “Life’s Little Ironies” was published in 1894.

Meanwhile in 1891 “Tess Of The D’Urbervillies” was published, which was a story of poor village girl. Originally it was named as “Too Late Beloved!” The novel received mixed criticisms, many of them regarding morality of the story.

In 1895, the novel “Jude the Obscure” was published. This was his most thoughtful book. It aroused even more debate than “Tess Of The D’Urbervillies”. It was a story which dramatized the conflict between carnal and spiritual life.

In 1897 “The Well Beloved” was published after extensive revisions. It was a reprint of a story originally published in the “Illustrated London News” in 1892.

The last two novels were filled with issues of sex and death, the two topics which were taboos at that time.

“Jude The Obscure” created highest debate. A bishop burnt the book, critics abused him as degenerate and called the work disgusting. The criticism and ruthless treatment Thomas Hardy received after writing this novel was so much that he decided not to write henceforth. Accordingly his career as novelist came to an end & he did not write for another thirtytwo years, till his death.

Table : 1: Thomas Hardy’s Literary Career at a Glance

Sr No	Title	Year of Publication
1	Desperate Remedies	1871
2	Under The Greenwood Tree	1872
3	A Pair Of Blue Eyes	1873
4	Far From The Madding Crowd	1874
5	The Hand Of Ethelberta	1876
6	The Return Of The Native	1878
7	The Trumpet Major	1880
8	The Laodicean	1881
9	Two On A Tower	1882
10	The Mayor Of Casterbridge	1886

punctuations, synonyms etc. used by crores of people for speaking and by lakhs of people for writing will constitute infinite number of styles.

Writing style is selection of set of linguistic features and their interactions from all the possibilities in a language. The variation in the effect of these features can be understood intuitively by linguists. But there are often occasions when we have to have an analytical approach than to have intuition only. Rather intuition needs to be supported by more objective account of style. It is this approach which is known as stylistics or statistical linguistics or quantitative linguistics.

Statistical Linguistics

A study of linguistic style of linguistic problems, through statistical techniques is termed as statistical linguistics or quantitative linguistics. Statistical methods are concerned with broad tendencies or general characteristics of data. The limitation being, application of statistical methods is possible only to those features which are measurable.

There are varied areas wherein Statistical Linguistics is applied, among them the two are,

- i. To know about Author's style and consistency in his style or
- ii. Objective comparison of styles of two or more authors

Linguists will find interesting to use statistical techniques to study the problems in their area and arrive at great objective results.

In this study, we have considered different measurable style parameters. We have studied whether the author Thomas Hardy has maintained his style within his novels and between his novels under study. We have also studied if the author has changed his style pertaining to different style parameters over a long period of time, say more than 20 Years.

The measurable style parameters considered here are

- Sentence length
- Richness of vocabulary
- Marker Word

Study of Sentence Length

Sentence length is defined as, "Number of words between two full stops". Yule (1938) suggested that sentence length could be used as a criterion of writing style. It is common experience that, some people make use of long and complicated sentences, whereas some use short and simple sentences.

If two independent samples are drawn from populations with continuous or discrete distributions, both of them are of the same type and these samples are to be compared as to whether they were drawn from the same population, then Kolmogorov (1933) and Smirnov (1939)

We have studied vocabulary richness of the author Thomas Hardy for the three selected novels. Measure of Apparent Richness of Vocabulary suggested by Prof. Yule (1944) is the parameter of interest.

The richness of vocabulary is the total number of words in a person's treasure. Consequently a measure of Apparent Richness of Vocabulary is a function of the number of different words one uses in the text. It is the ratio of different words used to the total number of words utilized. The relative richness of vocabulary is the ratio of number of different words used by two different persons or by the same person in two different texts.

The measure of apparent richness of vocabulary is defined as

$$\Phi = \frac{V}{S_1} = \frac{\text{TotalNumberofDistinctWordsUsed}}{\text{TotalNumberofWordsUtilised}}$$

Φ is hypothetical. It is not possible to determine Φ based on samples, hence we obtain its estimate $\widehat{\Phi}$. Further, large sample tests were used to study and compare the style regarding richness of vocabulary within the three novels and between the three novels.

Conclusion 2

From the results obtained by using Φ , we have concluded the author Thomas Hardy does not maintain uniformity in his writing style pertaining to stylistic parameter richness of vocabulary, except in novel "Two on a Tower", out of the three novels under study.

Further, if uniformity within any two novels would have been concluded, we would have tested whether these two novels are showing consistency in writing style with respect to measure of Apparent Richness and Vocabulary or not.

But since only one novel "Two on Tower" shows consistency within the novel, there is no question of further comparison of the two novels.

Marker Word

Marker word is a word occurring frequently in the text. The words "The, Of, And etc." are termed as marker words. The marker words distinguish author's style and could be utilized to throw light on it as parameter of style. In this study we have considered marker word "The".

Here we have studied whether the author exhibits the same pattern of use of marker word in all his selected novels. Further, it was of interest, if a marker word follows some standard probability distribution in the three selected novels. We have used Test of Homogeneity of Parallel samples to study the homogeneity of stylistic parameter "The" in the samples of selected novels. Total six samples, two from each novel are compared by using the test. If they do not exhibit same pattern of behavior, further homogeneity within each novel is tested by the above test. To study if some standard discrete probability distribution is followed by the marker