Proposal for the analysis of inner speech structure from a literary viewpoint

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose an analysis of inner speech with a work featuring stream of consciousness in order to overcome the difficulties in investigating inner speech, and I analyze it with a Virginia Woolf work, "The mark on the wall (1917)." Through the analysis, I found some unique features that are different from those of usual written work, and these features have some similar points to those of inner speech.

1   Introduction

From a long time ago, people have wanted to know how their mind works while thinking silently. Plato, one of the most famous classical Greece philosophers, was one researcher who made mental functioning a central topic. Plato said, *"To form an opinion is to speak, and opinion is a word spoken, –I mean, to oneself and in silence, not aloud or to another"* (Plato, 1892, p. 1769).

Later, what happens while thinking silently was reconceptualized as *inner speech* (Vygotsky, 1934/1987) by L. S. Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist. He associated inner speech with children's psychological development, and his ideas influenced many researchers in psychology. Then, recently, more and more kinds of researchers are focusing on inner speech, such as María de Guerrero (2005), a Spanish researcher in second language acquisition, Norbert Wiley (2016), a sociologist, and Charles Fernyhough (2017), a psychologist.

However, most researchers who are focusing on inner speech

have the same big problem, that is the way they investigate inner speech. As you know, inner speech is not a written language, so you cannot look at its words or sentences. Moreover, it is not a voiced language, so you cannot hear the words or sentences someone produces in his/her mind. Vygotsky (1986) expressed this difficulty as follows: "The area of inner speech is one of the most difficult to investigate" (p. 226).

In order to solve this problem, researchers have tried various things. Vygotsky (1986) observed a child who played alone and recorded what he/she spoke aloud for him/herself. Such speech that is meant for oneself but is voiced is called private speech. De Guerrero (2005) also adopted the diary method to collect inner speech data.

In this paper, I propose another way to reveal the structure of inner voice through literature. Some literary works are written along the character's thought process, and this literary technique is called stream of consciousness. The works where this technique is used are usually distinctive in character, and it seems likely that the stream of consciousness represents something similar to inner or private speech. For this purpose, I analyze Virginia Woolf's 1917 work, "The mark on the wall".

2   Features of inner speech

Before conducting my analysis of a work with stream of consciousness, I would like to introduce some features of inner speech that are generally recognized. There are many unique features that are never seen in external speech, but in this paper, I would like to focus on two features of special interest.

The first feature is the conversational one. Although inner speech is conducted by only oneself, it is said that inner speech has conversational features. Wiley (2016) advocated that there are three kinds of self, *I* (present self), *me* (past self), *you* (future self). When you think what you did yesterday, or who the man you met a little while ago is, for instance, it is said that you begin to communicate with the *me*. On the other hand, when you think what you will do tomorrow, or how the weather will be

tomorrow, it is said that you have already started to communicate with the *you*. This feature is one of the most famous concepts of inner speech, and it is often called *intrapersonal communication* (de Guerrero, 2005, p. 7).

The second one is the flexibility in the structures of inner speech. As you know, inner speech has not a role to transmit information to another, but it is for the intrapersonal self. Therefore, you can manipulate the structures semantically and syntactically. Vygotsky (1934/1987) advocated features of inner speech, *fragmentation and abbreviation* (p. 266). For example, when it is lunchtime, you may think as follows: "Lunch. What do I want to eat? Hamburger. McDonald's, where nearby? Over there." It is not easy to understand for others because others do not have complete access to the context.

3 An analysis of The Mark on the Wall from the perspective of inner speech

3.1 Stream of consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a narrative device in which the characters' thoughts are recorded more or less directly, so the structure of its work is not bound by typical narrative conventions or typical grammatical rules. This structure seems to be similar to that of inner speech as well because it is based on human thought processes, and it seems to me that works with stream of consciousness have both written structures and inner speech structures.

3.2 The mark on the wall

In this paper, I adopted Virginia Woolf's work *The mark on the wall* (1917), a very short work of only eight pages included in her collection of short stories, "The mark on the wall and other short fictions". It is written in the first person, as a "stream of consciousness" monologue. The narrator finds a mark on the wall, and while looking at the mark, he/she muses and

covers a range of topics including religion, self-reflection, and nature.

3.3   Procedure

In order to analyze this work, I adopted ATLAS.ti, a software that is frequently used in qualitative data analysis. Firstly, I added some tags ("codes" in the figure) to points that struck me as I was reading (Figure 1). Secondly, I grouped these tags into categories ("code groups" in the figure). This analysis yielded 17 tags divided into two major categories (Figure 2).
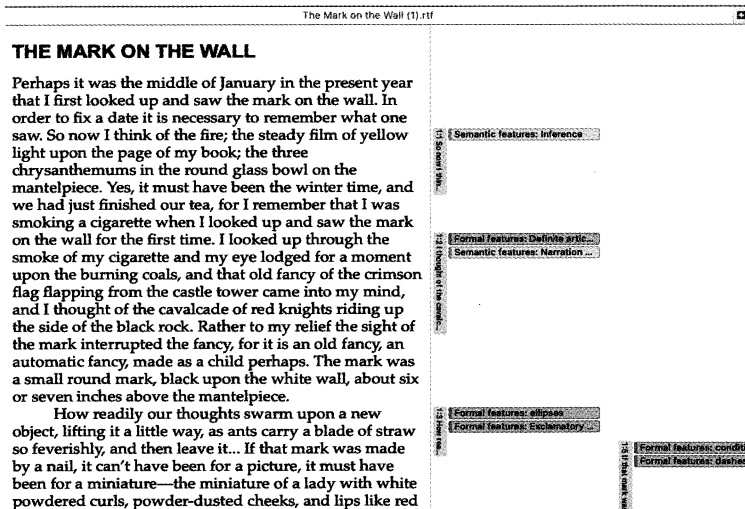

Figure 1. Screenshot of ATLAS.ti (Menu bar on the left, text in the center, and tags on the right)
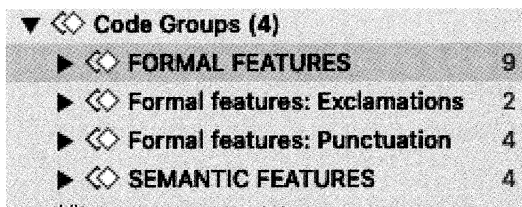

Figure 2. List of code groups

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Unique features from a semantic view

From semantic construals, it is the most remarkable point that the topics of this work change quite rapidly and dramatically. At the beginning, the character found a mark and began to think about the mark, and he associated it with another topic "life". Then he changed his narrative topics at least ten times, and there were six topics at least.

Moreover, there are some expressions that the main character narrates as if he/she talked with someone although there is nobody except for him. For example, when he inferred what the mark is, he said: "So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light upon the page of my book; three chrysanthemums in the round glass bowl on the mantelpiece. Yes, it must have been the winter time" (p. 3).

3.4.2 Unique features from a syntactic point of view

There are also unique marks, words, and sentences which seem to relate to inner speech. The most noticeable point is the frequency of emotional expressions. In conventional works, a narrator has an objective role to tell the situation of the story, so he/she tends to avoid some emotional expressions. However, in this work, the narrator expresses his emotional movement with exclamation marks and exclamatory sentences, e. g. "How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object" (p. 3), "What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure!" (p. 4), and "What an airless, shallow, bald, prominence it is! (p. 6)."

In addition, I should mention two marks that are seldom seen in a written text: dashes (—) and ellipses (…). The number of dashes is 25 (Picture 2), and there is even a sentence that has four dashes as follows:

To show very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization—let me just count over a few of the things

lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of bookbinding tools? (p. 4).

Furthermore, the frequency of ellipses is also interesting. There are 16 ellipses in this work. Here are some examples: "as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it . . . If that mark was made by nail" (p. 3).
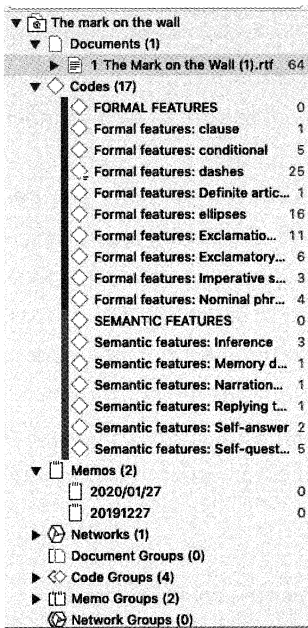

Figure 3. Screenshot of a list of codes

4.   Discussion

I found there were some remarkable points from both meanings and structures. Here, I will discuss the relationships between these features and those of inner speech.

Focusing on the semantic features firstly, I can see some similarities to features of inner speech. One of the notable features in this work is the rapidity of topic changes. It seems to be caused by the flexibility

that is a feature of inner speech (see section 2). As usual, it is important for most written works to make the topics clear and stable. However, in the case of this work, the topics changed rapidly without enough explanations because this story is not written for telling someone something.

In addition, another semantic feature of this work and of inner speech seems to be also alike. As I mentioned in the Results section, there is a conversational expression instead of the single narration. For example, the sentences that I dealt with in section 3.4.1. have the expression of agreement, "Yes" (Woolf, p. 3). This expression seems to be related to another feature of inner speech, intrapersonal communication. It seems to be evidence that the narrative has a conversational feature as well as inner speech.

As above, I mentioned the relationships between semantic features of the work and those of inner speech. Here, I will discuss the relationships between its syntactic features and those of inner speech. In order to express the character's thought authentically, there are some structures, words, and marks in this work, and it seems to me that the most notable mark is dashes. This mark is usually used as an insert of additional information, emphasis, and so on. However, the dashes in this work seem to be used in place of commas, and the author seems to use them in order to express the instantaneous stream of thought:

> There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour—dim pinks and blues—which will, as times goes on, become more definite, become—I don't know what… (p. 5)

Moreover, there is another notable mark, ellipses. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Richards, 2010), when you see these marks in written materials, most of them will be used as omission as below:

> … [W]hile in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner

speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings. (Vygotsky, 1986, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii)

However, in this work, the ellipses seem to be used as hesitative expression. For example, when the main character traced his memory, he/she said as follows:

To steady myself, let me catch hold of the first idea that passes... Shakespeare... Well, he will do as well as another. (p. 5)

The role of the ellipses in this passage is obviously different from its usual usage. In this sentence, the ellipses seem to be used in order to express his/her thought process naturally. Human thought is generally a sudden and unstable phenomenon, and it seems to be difficult to express their thought in written style. Therefore, it seems to me that ellipses (and dashes) are likely to be used in works with the stream of consciousness because these are able to express flexible and subtle human thought.

5.   Conclusion

In order to reveal the structure of inner speech, in this paper, I conducted literature analysis with the qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti., and adopted *The mark on the wall* as a study material. Then, I found some semantic and formal features as I mentioned in chapter 3 and 4.

After conducting this analysis for the research of inner speech, I noticed some advantages and issues in this type of inner speech research. The most notable advantage is that it facilitates collecting inner speech data. As I mentioned in chapter 1, it is very difficult to get someone's inner speech samples because of its invisibility and audibility. However, the work of the stream of consciousness has both features of written language

and inner speech, so it is easier to collect inner speech data. Meanwhile, because this collected data is not authentic inner speech, it is necessary for researchers to analyze the work deeply and carefully. Moreover, I attempted to analyze just one work in this paper, so it is also necessary to use much more work related to inner speech.

References

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