

Utilizing Greimas Semiotic Square in the Analysis of Binarism in Some Selected Fables of 'Kalila wa Dimna'

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Abstract—'Kalila wa Dimna' fables are tales which include short tales revolving around two human-characterized animals which are often in opposition. This opposition gives rise to the existence of a binary implying two contrasting concepts ascribed to these two animals. (positive and negative terms), which in turn are linked to further semiotic relationships constituting the oppositional binary. To arrive at the meaning of a binary, it must be analyzed to show how the fable's meaning is constructed. The most workable model is that of Greimas' Semiotic Square which can be utilized to distinguish the types of opposition involved and to explore the types of the relationship underlying the oppositional relationship constituting the fable's binary. Two fables of 'Kalila wa Dimna' have been selected to be analyzed in terms of Greimas' square

The study concludes that the two animals in Aesop's Fables generally represent two opposing terms (positive and negative) which are semiotically further analyzed into two implicit relationships (contradiction and implication). In other words, the componential meaning of a binary is based on the interrelations between these contrasting terms.

Keywords—Binarism, fable, folktale, Greimas, Kalila Wa Dimna, semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION

A fable is a folk-saying which entails short tale concerned with stories and experiences related to humans and animals, envisioned to give a moral lesson. Animals "play the role of the characters", and thus, fables are "characterized by animals behaving in human way" (Chlopek and Nekvapil, 1993:129). Fables set up a very vibrant part of "human communication and interaction". They form stories basically derived from the truthful portrayal of animals, i.e. "nature and morality". For Calder (2001: 83) a fable is perceived to notify "moral lessons to humans about identifying and controlling their weaknesses; to account for authority characters in humorous and anonymous ways; to poke fun". From another angle, a fable has some characteristics combine "natural and supernatural" stories, and even the characters' names are not real but imaginative such as "Dog, Boy". However, the fable habitually ends with a moral lesson intended to instruct people through wisdom or a common

statement (ibid). One collection of the most famous fables in the eastern world is that of Kalila wa Dimna.

Further, a fable is recognized to be built on a tale consisting of two opposing concepts, ideas or images represented by the two contrasting animals; one signifies the positive attribute while the other signifies the negative one. Then, these fables must be based on binaries (representing the positive/negative sides) which in turn are linked to further semiotic relationships constituting this opposition. Thus, this paper tends to investigate the type of the oppositional binary and the semiotic relationships leading to this opposition.

II. KALILA WA DIMNA

The most well-known fables in the eastern world are the collection of Kalila wa Dimna, collected in a book and translated by Ibn al-Muqaffa'. This collection becomes one of the most popular books ever written in Arabic by two characters Kalila and Dimna. Kalila Wa Dimna is an "old Castilian collection of tales from 1251, translated

from the Arabic text by the order of the future King Alfonso while he was still a prince" (Basharin, 2007:12).

Kalila wa Dimna was originally written in Sanskrit, nearly probably in 4th century. It was written for three young princes who had driven their teachers to desolation and their father to disruption. Afraid to entrust his kingdom to sons unable to master the most elementary lessons, the king turned over the problem to his wise Wazir, and the Wazir wrote the stories, which concealed great practical wisdom in the easily digestible form of animal fables. Six months later the princes were on the path to wisdom and later ruled sensibly. Two hundred years after that, a Persian shah sent his private doctor, Burzoe, to India to find a certain herb thought to confer everlasting life upon him who contributed to it. Burzoe returned with a copy of the Panchatantra instead, which he claimed was just as good as the astounding herb, for it would bequeath great wisdom to the reader. The shah had Burzoe translated it into Pehlavi, a form of Old Persian, and liked it so much that he preserved the translation in a special room of his palace. Three hundred years later, after the Muslim conquest of Persia and the Near East, a Persian convert to Islam named 'Ibn al-Mukaffa' chanced upon Burzoe's Pehlavi copy and translated it into Arabic in a style so smooth; it is still considered a model of Arabic prose (Penzol, 1931:42). However, Klila wa Dimna fables exploit binarism which is composed of two conflicting terms representing positive and negative side of the story which ends in a moral lesson.

III. BINARISM

Binary system comprises a couple of related notions or words that are conflicting in meaning. This system relates language to thought. In this sense, "two hypothetical opposites are strictly defined and set off against each another. It is the contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, such as (on and off) ,(up and down), (left and right)" (Baldick, 2001: 27).

With reference to de Saussure theory, the binary opposition is considered to be the ways by which the elements of language have significance or meaning; each element is "defined in reciprocal determination" with another element, as in "binary code". In this sense it is seen as "structural, complementary relation" rather than a contradictory one. Further, de Saussure confirmed that "a sign's meaning is derived from its context (syntagmatic dimension) and the group (paradigm) to which it belongs". An illustrative instance is that one cannot recognize the meaning of 'good' unless he/she knows 'evil' (Chamberline and Thombson, 1998: 102).

The term binary is associated with the semiotician Greimas (1983:25) who confirms that "a structure is said to be binary when it is defined as a relation between two terms". Cognitively, in Denise's (2007: 31) words, binarism refers to "an epistemological concept which holds that the structure of binary opposition is one of the characteristics of the human mind". In fact, this term 'binarism' had been borrowed from the "work of Roman Jakobson". Later, binarism was taken to be used in syntax and semantics (ibid:130).

Oppositional terms (or simply opposites) are also found in lexical semantics; "opposites are words lying in an inherently incompatible binary relationship, like the opposite pairs" big /small, long/short and precede /follow. In other words, this type of relation which is often known as "incompatibility" can be illustrated as "one word in an opposite pair entails that it is not the other pair member". For instance, something that is 'short' implies that it is 'not long'. It is called a 'binary' relationship for two elements are put in a "set of opposites". The relation between "opposites" is referred to as "opposition" (Crystal, 2003:429).

IV. GREIMAS SEMIOTIC SQUARE

Before embarking on illustrating what is meant by Greimas Semiotic Square, it is necessary to give a short account on what semiotics is. Semiotics can simply be defined as "the theory of signification of the generation or production of meaning". Opposing to semiology which deals with the study of sign systems and their organization (e.g. traffic codes, sign language), semiotics deals with how meaning is created. Placed another way, semiotics deals with "what interests the semiotician is what makes an utterance meaningful, how it signifies and what precedes it on a deeper level to result in the manifestation of meaning" (Martin and Ringham, 2000: 117)

Etymologically, the word 'semiotics' comes from the Greek origin "seme" as in the term "semeiotikos" which indicates "signs". As a system, semiotics is identified as "the analysis of signs or the study of the functioning of sign system. The idea that sign systems are of great consequence is easy enough to grasp". Hitherto, the requirement to investigate 'sign systems' is to a great extent an updated phenomenon (Cobley and Jansz, 1999:4). One of the applications of the semiotics is the binarism or the binary opposition in the meaning implied in the text. One of the important topics in semiotics is the one related to Greimas Square.

Greimas semiotic square is one of the most important theories of semiotics to explicate binarism. The semiotic square is given as the combination of two kinds of "binary

oppositions in a single system, which governs at the same time the simultaneous presence of contrary traits and the presence and absence of each one of these two traits". Further, it can be thought that the semiotic square is "concerned at the same time with the internal organization of the category and with the delimitation of its borders" (Fontanille, 2007:27). To give a more obvious account of semiotic square, it is necessary to focus on Greimas' contribution in this respect.

Courtés defines this square as "the visual representation of the logical structure of an opposition" (cf. Courtés, 1991, 152). The semiotic square is a means of refining oppositional analyses by increasing the number of analytical classes stemming from a given opposition from two (for instance, life/death) to four (for example, life/death, life and death (the living dead), and neither life/nor death. Here is an empty semiotic square, as presented by Greimas:

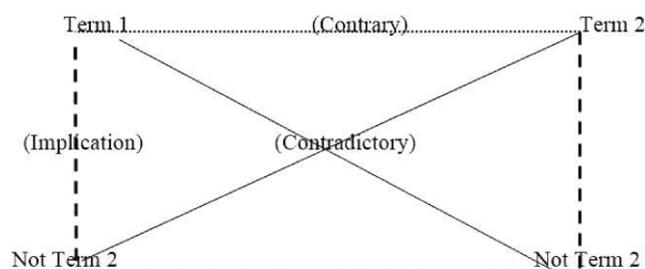


Fig.1: Greimas Semiotic Square

The semiotic square entails primarily the following elements (we are steering clear of the constituent relationships of the square: contrariety, contradiction, and complementarity or implication). The first two terms form the opposition (the contrary relationship) that is the basis of the square (Herbert,2019:18) , and the other two are obtained by negating each term of the opposition. The second relation is between the term and its negation is a contradictory relation. The final relation is the implication relation between the term and the negation of the other. This means a term is implied in the term of the other.

V. METHODOLOGY

To provide a semiotic analysis of binarism in fables of Kalila Wa Dimna a descriptive- qualitative method is followed. It is concerned with the investigation of the types of semantic-semiotic relations observed in the binaries constituting the stories of these fables. Greimas semiotic square is utilized as a model for the analysis of semiotic meaning of binarism in the fables. The aim of applying this square is to explore the type of relations (e.g. implication and contradiction) involved in constructing a binarism. That is this model aims at "mapping opposites"

and their "implications, intersections and contradictions" found in fables.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Based on Greimas s square, this part is mainly dedicated to the semeiotic analysis of the binaries found in KALila Wa Dimna fables. Three different subjects are chosen to represent the data for this study. In order to give a satisfactory analysis, it is necessary to begin each analysis with the background of the fable to provide the story comprising the involved binary. Then, an identification of this binary is made in terms of Greimas semiotic square to arrive at the relationships between the conflicting elements in the binary. The first topic to begin with is concerned with Strong and Weak binary.

6.1 THE SNAKE AND THE FOOLISH FROGS

Once a snake who had grown weak with old age came across a pond where many frogs lived with their king, queen and little prince. The snake had not eaten for many days. He tried to catch some of the frogs, but was too weak to catch any of them. "I will have to think of some solution or I will soon die," the snake thought.

Just then he saw the frog prince and his friends. They were busy in their game and did not notice the snake. When they came very close, one of them saw the snake and jumped up, "Oh, a snake," he shouted in fear. All of them ran for their lives. But when the snake did not move, the frog prince went up to it. The snake still did not move. "Let me see if he is dead?" said the frog prince and knocked on the snake's head and jumped away quickly.

The snake slowly opened its eyes and said, "Do not worry. I will not get angry no matter what you do."

The frogs were very surprised. "I once bit a sage's son," explained the snake. "The sage got angry and cursed me that I would carry frogs on my back for the rest of my life."

Hearing this, the frog prince jumped up with joy. "Then I will ride on your back," he said. So the frog prince jumped on top of the snake and commanded, "Take me to my parents."

The king and the queen were amazed at the sight. "Father, look, I am riding a snake," shouted the prince. "Let us also ride the snake," the queen urged the frog king. So they all sat on the snake.

"You are moving very slowly," complained the prince. "What can I do," answered the snake sadly. "I have not eaten for several days." "Why have you not eaten? The royal mount should be fast and strong," said the king.

"I can eat only with your permission," answered the snake. "Your subjects are my food."

“How can I permit you to eat us?” asked the king. “Not the royal frogs,” explained the snake. “I cannot permit you to eat my subjects,” said the frog king. The prince was upset and cried. “Father, please permit him. I don’t want to lose him.” Even the queen spoke up. “Do permit the snake. How many frogs can he eat anyway? We have many subjects.” At last the king had to grant permission. The snake began to eat many frogs every day. Soon he was very strong and healthy. Now, he moved very quickly. The prince was thrilled to ride a snake that moved so fast. One day the snake went to the frog king. “I am hungry O king. There are no more frogs left in the pond. So now I am going to eat you all.”

And the wicked snake pounced on all the three royal frogs and ate them up. (At1l, 1981:20)

The fable carries the tale that there was once an old snake, who had grown weak and could no longer hunt. So one day he lay down near a pond, which was home to an army of frogs. The ruler of the frogs approached the snake and asked him why he looked so down. The snake replied that he had bit the finger of the son of a pious man, resulting in the boy’s death. The pious man had then chased him out and cursed him to be the mount of the frog king and that he could only eat the frogs that were gifted to him by the king. The king frog, eager to ride the snake to show off his status, took the snake’s word and made him his mount, and would feed the snake two frogs daily. Thus, the snake lived happily amongst his former prey (Tales of Panchatantra, 2010)

The theme of foolishness is dominant on the universe of the fable and the reader can catch the idea from reading the title "The Snake and The Foolish Frogs". The foolish king and his family paid for their foolishness when they started to feed the snake their food for the sake of being joyful.

Logically, two contrasting semes are recognized: 'Foolishness and Intelligence'. They are in opposition, yet, these two semes are hyponyms and are related back to one larger semantic universe involving having intelligence or not. The left side of the square represents the positive element (assertion of Intelligence), and the right side represents the negative element (lack of Intelligence).

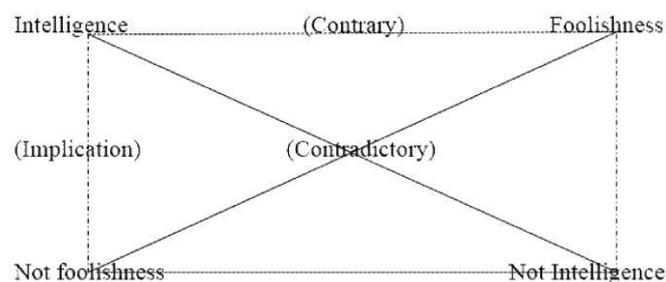


Fig.2 : Greimas Square for the Opposition in "The Snake and The Foolish Frogs"

According to Greimas' analysis, the binary opposition between 'Foolishness and Intelligence' generates two other semantic relations: (1) implication represented by the association between 'intelligence' and 'not foolishness' and the association between 'foolishness' and 'not intelligence' and (2) contradiction signified by the association between 'intelligence' and 'not intelligence' and the association between 'foolishness' and 'not foolishness'. In this respect, 'intelligence' implicates the meaning of 'not foolishness', and 'foolishness' implicates the meaning of 'not intelligence'. Notably, the existence of this binary relies on the historical, conventional and contextual circumstances of a fable.

6.2 THE CARPENTER AND THE MONKEY

There was a group of monkeys who resided together close to a small, carpenters’ village. They would feed on the peanuts and bananas that the carpenters and their families would throw out to them from time to time. But there were one monkey who has been very curious. He would always be informed by his friends, who would tell him, “Don’t allow your curiosity get you into problem!” But the monkey would always respond, “I am more smart compared to all of you. I like to learn about new things which is not bad at all!” The other monkeys would shrug and move on.

One day, the curious monkey sat observing a carpenter who was dividing a log of wood with two wedges. He first forced the smaller wedge into the crack, so as to keep it open. Then when the crack has become larger, he put in a bigger wedge by hammering it in. And then, he pulled out the smaller wedge that he had put in. The monkey thought to himself, “How exciting is that! I wish I really could do it as well.” But, how could he when the carpenters were around? So he sat with patience, waiting for the carpenters to go away. Soon it was lunch break and the carpenters decided to go home for their meal. The monkey was happy. He jumped on to the carpenter’s seat. Unfortunately for him, his tail slipped into the crack in the wood, without his knowledge. He put in the first wedge, just the manner the carpenter had done. However he had neglected the other steps and pulled out the first wedge before hammering in the second one. The two sides of the wood immediately sprang together, and trapped the monkey’s tail between them! The monkey was now trapped and in pain! Soon he could see the carpenters walking in direction of him. But he could do nothing! The carpenters spotted the caught monkey and realised what he had done. They

gave him a strong beating and then let him go. The monkey ran back to his friends, but had learned never to meddle with other people's things!

(Atil,1981:71)

This fable is about a carpenter who had a pet monkey that watched him work all day. The monkey dreamed of using the hammer and pegs of the carpenter, and so one day when the carpenter went for a break he seized the opportunity. The monkey grabbed the hammer and went to hammer a peg into the piece of wood, but unwittingly his tail had got caught in the gap without him noticing, so when the hammer came down the peg was driven into the monkey's tail and he fell unconscious from the pain. However, when the carpenter returned to find the monkey's handiwork, the monkey became victim of an even more painful punishment for his foolishness (Himmelreich, 2013:8)

The theme of foolishness is dominant on the universe of the fable. The reader could implicitly find foolishness in the sentence 'he had neglected the other steps' and the word neglect means 'not pay proper attention to' and that mentions to the foolishness of the character of the monkey. Logically, two contrasting semes are recognized: 'Foolishness and Intelligence'. They are in opposition, yet, these two semes are hyponyms and are related back to one larger semantic universe involving having intelligence or not. The left side of the square represents the positive element (assertion of Intelligence), and the right side represents the negative element (lack of Intelligence).

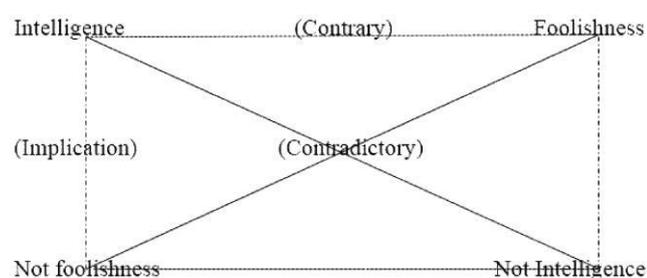


Fig.3: Greimas Square for the Opposition in "The Carpenter and the Monkey"

According to Greimas' analysis, the binary opposition between 'Foolishness and Intelligence' generates two other semantic relations: (1) implication represented by the association between 'intelligence' and 'not foolishness' and the association between 'foolishness' and 'not intelligence' and (2) contradiction signified by the association between 'intelligence' and 'not intelligence' and the association between 'foolishness' and 'not foolishness'. In this respect, 'intelligence' implicates the meaning of 'not foolishness', and 'foolishness' implicates the meaning of 'not intelligence'. Notably, the existence of this binary relies on

the historical, conventional and contextual circumstances of a fable.

VII. FINDINGS

The semiotic investigation of these two fables has shown that animals in fables are publicly recognized as having either good or bad motivation and intention which are reflected in the binary by the positive and negative terms. The positive and negative meaning in a binary is comprised of two opposing terms (intelligence/foolishness). These binaric terms further lead to the existence of two main implied relationships (contradiction and implication) which can be semiotically analyzed utilizing Greimas Semeiotic Square. The implication relation is represented by the association between positive and not negative and the association between negative and not positive. In this sense, 'Intelligence' implicates the meaning of 'not foolishness' and 'foolishness' implicates the meaning of 'not intelligence'.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In EFL teaching classrooms, teachers are required to give their students a clear idea about semiotics and how to translate the human signs into meaningful messages used in social life. Kalila Wa Dimna fables can be used as good teaching aids as they involve simple structures with simple vocabulary. In addition, stories in fables can motivate students to learn language as they offer an interesting material connecting between imagination and reality. Fables are short narratives often ending in moral lessons which help teachers to guide their students towards the good.

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