POSUDEK OPONENTA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk a literatura (dvouoborové studium)**

Název práce: **Semantic relations applied in the Codenames board game**

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Short characteristics of the thesis

In her BA thesis, Eva Kluzáková set out to identify sense relations amongst associative meanings of words used as clues in the award-winning board game Codenames. The analysis centres on the description and categorisation of sense relations of 202 word pairs that were recorded during two teams playing the game. Theoretically, the study draws on Cruse´s (2010) to establish the notion of word meaning and to explain the sense relations identified. To embrace the notion of associative meanings, the author draws on the work of George Lakoff (1987) to introduce the concept of an idealised cognitive model (ICM). This is also integrated into the classification of the sense relations observed. The section labelled as Data describing the considerations regarding data collection, the actual process of collecting the data and their preparation for the analysis is not present. Otherwise, this BA thesis unfolds conventionally and finishes on p. 50 with a Conclusion.

Overall assessment

The intention of the thesis to analyse the strategies individuals adopted in playing a word game based on words association and wit and to then interpret these through the lens of semantic concepts is adventurous and is certainly to be appreciated. The applied setup of this BA thesis not only invites the researcher to create linkages between theory and the use of language in context, but also creates the potential to contribute to the examination of the mental lexicon of a speaker, a theme standardly pursued in cognitive linguistics research. In addition, it may inform the creativity, sophistication and ultimate playability of games which designers in this expanding genre of social gaming strive for. Despite stimulating great expectations, the overall achievement of this BA thesis is, in my view, disappointing.

Firstly, the aim of the work formulated as "to find out which sense relations in the mental lexicon of a speaker are most commonly used in the Codenames board game" (p. 8) is, however, neither accurate nor would be feasible to describe through the analysis undertaken where 202 word pairs were randomly extracted from the turn-by-turn unfolding of the game. In my opinion, the objective of the thesis should have been articulated as "to identify sense relations amongst associative meanings of words used as clues", which gives a rather different impetus to the design of the analysis. It is the associative meaning that should have been investigated by applying the ICM concept together with analysing the various associative word combinations that players (the spymasters who create the initial association of the 25 random words) use to guide their

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teams who then need to identify the "common denominator" between the clues used and the word cards in each respective turn of the game. This also needs to be counterbalanced by not linking the clues to words which although unknown at that point are owned by the opposing team and must not be selected. This creates a subtle blend of choice and communication for the spymaster.

Secondly, the 202 pairs of words that were subjected to the analysis arose in the context of the game, and in direct relation to the spymaster's skill at estimating the players' abilities and experience in making associations (here, clearly, applying the ICM creates a useful framework for understanding). The author, however, does not at all engage with the concept of a dynamic formation of meaning in interaction. In the game, the clues are used to create "common denominators" for the sets of words selected by the spymaster in every single turn of the game whilst at the same time not linking these to words the other team owns (or the "assassin card"). Unfortunately, the formation of associative meanings across word groups has been completely neglected, i.e., this part of the work has not been elaborated at all. Furthermore, neither the rules of the game have been described in a meaningful way and in relation to the intent of the paper (i.e., the author does not clearly describe how the rules of the game were considered in the design of her analysis and how the analysis will help reveal the goal of the thesis). The clinical extraction of the word combinations from the turn-by-turn unfolding of the game thus completely undermined the possibility to gain an insight into the formation of the associative meanings in the context of the game in which these associative meanings originated in the first place. To achieve the aim of the thesis, it was important to gather and analyse both the intention of the spymaster in how they constructed the word associations and in how the team interpreted the clue from the spymaster and applied it to the 25 cards on the table.

In sum, insufficient planning and a lack of clear structure have impacted on the content and on the value of the overall contribution of this otherwise very interesting thesis.

The other comments note on the more formal shortcomings of this submission:

1) A six-tier outline in a 50-page BA thesis seems entirely unjustified, especially as some tier 6 sections are substantially longer than tier 2 parts. This I feel is very unfortunate as it turns the thesis into a catalogue describing individual categories of semantic relations rather than developing a more sustained discussion of the phenomenon at hand.
2) The Methodology section, constituted of one paragraph, enters the thesis in Section 5.2 (which makes a rather delayed introduction) and is integrated – rather loosely – into Chapter 5 describing Sense relations. The objective of Chapter 5 is not stated as tier 5 contains no text whatsoever. The outlined classification clearly aims to embrace the phenomena identified but the mixture of theory and data analysis is rather disorganised and confusing at places.
3) As pointed out above, a proper section devoted to the discussion of the data is completely absent from the thesis.
4) In terms of References, George Lakoff is cited as one of the main sources. The text, however, also quotes Lakoff and Johnson, clearly a reference to a different publication. The Lakoff and Johnson´s work, however, is not listed in the References. Not only is this unprofessional but it also confuses the theoretical basis on which the author defines the ICM (a key concept in the thesis). Moreover,

the style of referencing does not comply with the MLA style guide – sometimes the author lists the page, sometimes the year of publication. This is, for example, also true of references listed under Palmer. A further point of negligence occurs when referencing the work of Professor Aleš Klégr whose name is in the References misspelled as "Krégl".

5) The level of English used and specifically the ability of the author to explain the underpinning theory and to formulate arguments are of a lower standard. Examples include:

p. 8 – "It emerges ten specific categories" or "The diagram will show us"
p. 45 "the former is almost 20% more successful than the letter". And again, p. 49 "In the letter, there are"
p.18 – In a sentence like *I drank a glass of X*, it is presupposed that X is a liquid, like milk, juice, or beer because another expression would miss the coherence.
P. 50 – Two of the main conclusions reads as "The relations were fully described, and the analysis shows the periphery of them. The presumption of the thesis was fulfilled because the analysis of the material shows that the peripheral cases have lower success rate than the recurrent".

Undertaking an applied semantic relations study with an objective to describe and systematise the rich network of possible meanings is a challenging task especially when a board game as sophisticated and clever as codenames is used to generate the core data. Therefore, despite the reservations listed above and I would like to recommend this work for defence and propose a borderline grade C (good).

Areas for discussion:
It would be interesting to hear what the author has to say about her work now that she has had the time to reflect on it and to consider the assessments received.

How would you plan to get the spymasters to articulate how they made their choice of clues given the 25 words and their associations and the considerations of the teams to the linkages proposed?

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **dobře**

___20 August 2021___   _____
Datum   Podpis