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What does make it feel cerebral? Investigating Readers' Responses to Literature Using Corpus-Based Techniques

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INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, epistemic relations to the knowledge structure are weakly classified and framed (Maton, 2014). To counter this tendency, our study aims at explaining online readers' interpretations of the novel *The Sense of an Ending* on Amazon.com. A qualitative analysis of the lengthier reviews has shown that readers think that *The Sense of an Ending* is a cerebral novel.

METHODOLOGY

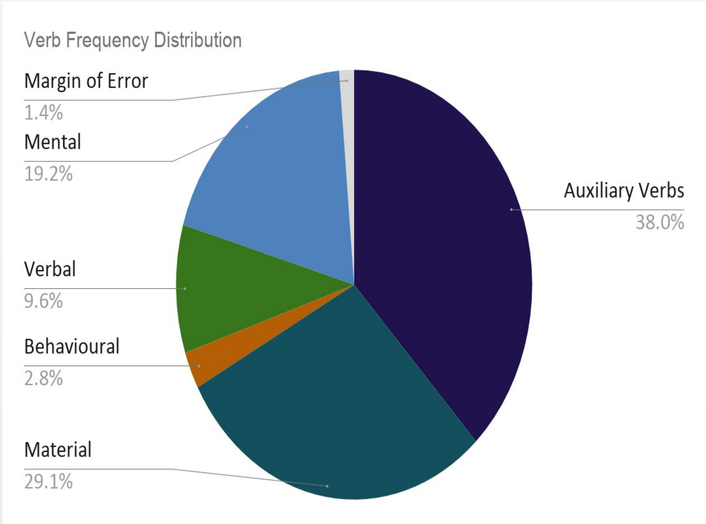
Step 1: Classifying the most frequent verbs of the corpus (> 5) into categories using Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

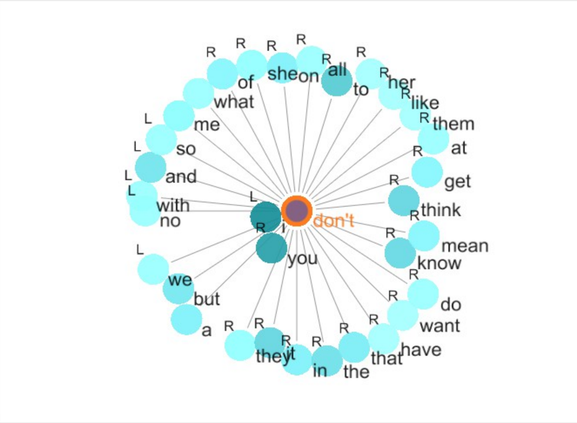
Step 2: KWIC analysis of material verbs

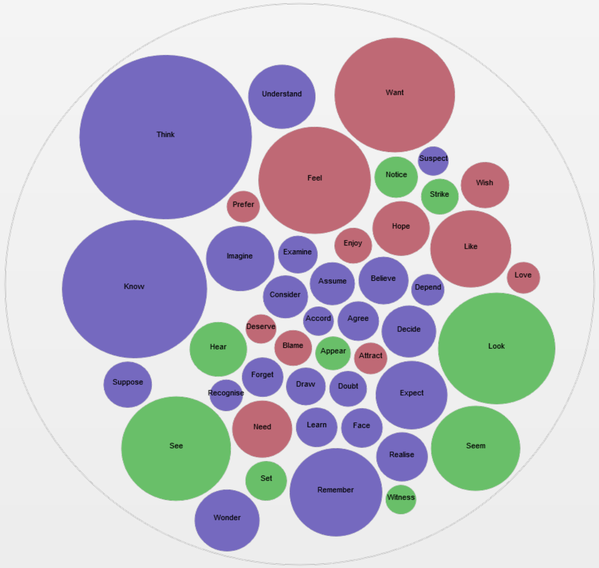
Step 3: Benveniste (1971):

The linguistic manifestation of subjectivity does not stand out except in the first person singular. Run a chi-square test to see if the pronoun "I" precedes mental verbs more than any other pronouns do.

Step 4: In fiction, negation makes non-events and non-states more salient than events and states and is thus a natural foregrounding device (Hidalgo-Downing, 2003). Investigate correlation between negative adverbs and types of verbs.







- Cognition
- Emotion / Desiderative
- Perception

Don't

Collocate	Freq (coll.)	Mu	MI	MI2	MI3	LogLik	Z	Dice
Think	17	89.715	6.487	10.574	14.662	126.104	38.617	0.191
Know	16	84. 437	6. 399	10.399	14.399	116.355	36.320	0.179
Mean	9	142.488	7. 154	10.324	13.494	75. 497	35.559	0.147
Get	9	68. 787	6. 104	9. 274	12.443	60. 722	24.519	0.118
Want	5	48. 184	5. 590	7. 912	10.234	29. 760	15.199	0.071
Like	5	21. 945	4. 455	6. 777	9. 099	21. 818	/	0.051

RESULTS

1: There are more 'material verbs' than mental verbs' in our corpus.

2: However, this does not mean that readers are wrong. A KWIC analysis of the material verbs GET, MAKE, COME, GIVE & PUT showed that they were also used to realize mental processes.

3: There is a statistically significant correlation between the use of the pronoun I and that of mental verbs ($p < .05$).

4: All the lexical verbs that correlate with "do not" are mental verbs.

CONCLUSION

Readers' interpretations can be explained by a variety of factors: (i) the most frequent material verbs also realize mental processes, (ii) The first-person narrator does all the cognition, whereas other verb types are realized by both first-person narrator and characters (iii) Mental verbs, as opposed to other verbs, are negated and negation, stylistically speaking, stands out.

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