

A Study of the Use of First Person Pronouns in a Corpus of Vampire Fiction

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Abstract

A word is said to be “key” if

- it occurs in the text at least as many times as the user has specified as a Minimum Frequency
- its frequency in the text when compared with its frequency in a reference corpus is such that the statistical probability as computed by an appropriate procedure is smaller than or equal to a p value specified by the user.

WordSmith Tools Help (c) Mike Scott

In comparing a corpus of vampire fiction against two other comparable corpora, one consisting of horror fiction and the other of mixed fiction genres, the first person singular pronouns were identified as ‘key’ in both instances.

This paper will introduce the patterns of use that these pronouns reveal. The analysis will take into account a number of factors that affect pronoun usage within the corpus. It will consider how the frequency and distribution of the pronouns is affected by author gender. It will then go further to consider the impact at the level of voice, comparing first person to third person narratives and will further divide the first person narratives on the basis of narrator gender.

Having established the general patterns the paper will then consider the reflexive pronoun ‘myself’, its collocates and in particular the most frequent 3-word cluster. This cluster will be discussed in terms of the Hallidayan process type identified in the full clause.

This paper will show that at the level of author there is an identifiable gender based trend in the usage of pronouns. It will also show that at the level of narrator there is a gender based trend that is broken only by the reflexive pronoun ‘myself’.

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