

# AN EXPERIENTIAL SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF “EXHIBITION” AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION ON ENGLISH FOR ARTS PURPOSE A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Defining an exhibition as a museum object, Ntzani (2015) indicates that they are metaphorically conceptualised as a container and a conduit. The container account contends that displayed objects have intrinsic value as they are filled with messages from the past. The conduit account sees museum objects as conduits of messages, the signs of a language that museums employ to build their narratives. However, Ntzani's (2015) account of museum objects runs into entailment problems. Therefore, the study examines clauses containing EXHIBITION in the discourse of arts and detect how it is interpreted through its co-occurrence with English verbs as well as associated process types and participant roles. The finding provides a new window on the notion of EXHIBITION and demonstrates the significance of using linguistic features appropriate for the subject field. In a word, the study opens the possibility of an interdisciplinary research between arts and linguistics.

**Keywords:** *exhibition, experiential semantic representation, arts discourse, English for Arts Purpose*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

This study seeks to explore arts-related notions from a linguistic perspective. To this end, the word EXHIBITION is chosen as the case of study, for exhibitions play a very important role in the arts-related profession. Therefore, the experiential construal of this word is approached through the investigation of its linguistic context in genuine data. Since this work characterises the linguistic features prompted in sentences containing EXHIBITION, the finding can also increase the understanding of the language use in English for Arts Purpose.

### 1.2. An exhibition as a container and a conduit (Ntzani, 2015)?

Closely related to the discussion is the work of Ntzani (2015), who investigates the effects that conduit and container metaphors (Reddy, 1979) have on visitor's experience in museums. Defining exhibitions as museum objects, transformed from cultural artefacts and displayed inside museum premises, she examines and analyses the metaphorical expressions obtained from official museum discourses. In her view, museum objects, as substantial particles of exhibits, are conceptualised through container and conduit metaphors. The first approach that she adopts, underlined by Reddy's container metaphors, contends that displayed objects have intrinsic value as they are filled with messages from the past, and where information could be extracted. Ntzani pronounces that although containers also transfer their contents, their primary function is to hold them and shape them. Witness the data provided by Ntzani:

(1) Maintenance of the material form of an object readily allows us to believe that it continues to represent the same things and therefore holds the same meanings (MacGregor, 1999).

As in (1), the use of the verb *hold* indicates that exhibited museum objects maintain and preserve certain meanings. In other words, museum objects are seen as sealed containers of cultural values that speak for themselves in the container metaphor approach.

The second approach that she uses is supported by Reddy's conduit metaphor. According to Ntzani, this approach sees museum objects as conduits of messages, the signs of a language that museums employ to build their narratives. Since conduits are involved in the act of transmission in a passive fashion, the passivity often renders the content invisible. As illustration, consider the data offered by Ntzani:

(2) In this case, the museum object—musealium or musealia— does not have any intrinsic reality. . . Objects can thus be used as signs, just like words in speech, when they are used in an exhibition ... (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010).

With respect to (2), exhibited objects are understood as signs, which are conveyed from people to people just like language. In short, museum objects are conceptualised as conduits of information that are communicated from museum curators to museum visitors.

While Ntzani's (2015) analysis is impressive, it appears that her metaphorical account of museum objects runs into some difficulties. A consequence of metaphorical interpretation is that metaphors have entailments (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) for the target domain that they thereby

organise far beyond any initial structural similarity (Krippendorff, 1993). An entailment of container metaphor renders communicated contents as entities with objective qualities. As objective entities, contents must exist independent of human experiences. Krippendorff (1993) offers a good analogy: it is difficult to imagine that one can pour wine or milk out of a bottle filled with water. That is, the physics invoked by the container metaphor implies that one can remove from a message only, what had been put into it, and that this would have to be the same for everyone. Under such an entailment, as Krippendorff (1993) notes, metaphorical accounts offer no logical place for variations or discrepancies in interpretation.

The conduit metaphor account faces the entailment issue as well. The conduit metaphor entails a transfer of possession: the sender that possesses the object ejects it, and the receiver picks it up and subsequently possess it (Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez & Mairal Usón, 2007). However, it must be noted that museum objects transmit other phenomena than thoughts and ideas, which cannot be “possessed” by exhibition viewers. Consider (3) and (4):

(3) Many of the exhibited objects display a curious balance of utility and excessive luxury.

(4) This exhibition displays the diversity of contemporary Asian American identity through the collaboration between the National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Programme.

As in (3) and (4), *display* is a verb of communication, which is metaphorically comparable to an act of transferring. In terms of the conduit metaphor, *display* indicates that an exhibition is conceptually profiled as an agent transferring an object to others, whereas the exhibited content is encoded as the object being transferred (Dabrowska, 1997). In these two examples, what are being exhibited are a balance of utility and excessive luxury and the diversity of contemporary Asian American identity. Although these two phenomena are perceivable from the displayed objects just like the message or idea being delivered, they cannot be taken away and kept in possession. In a word, the conduit metaphor account is also subject to the entailment gap as demonstrated in the sentences (3) and (4).

### 1.3. Key issues

In this work, the aim is to solve the following issues: What verbs does the word EXHIBITION co-occur with in the discourse of arts? What are the process types of the verb collocates and the associated participant roles activated by EXHIBITION? What do these linguistic features reveal regarding the experiential representation of EXHIBITION? Lastly, what do the features imply with respect to the writing for arts purpose? Having presented the critical issues to pursue, a theoretical basis for this work is offered in the subsequent section.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

### 2.1. The verb dynamic paradigm

In this study, the issues raised above is assessed by focusing on how the English word EXHIBITION is profiled by its co-occurring verbs. In the experiential terms, language contains resources for construing world entities: Verbs represent our experiences of the goings-on of an

entity. As Langacker (1987) stresses, the same entity can be construed in different ways depending on how the speaker construes or views the entity. Also, Castro (2012) shows that the basic meaning of each verb construes the meaning of a term in different dimensions. Hence, it is decided that the concept of EXHIBITION is explored in the noun-verb paradigm.

## 2.2. Process types and participant roles

In Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) systemic functional grammar theory, our impression of experience consists of a flow of events. This flow of events is portioned into quantum of change by the grammar of the clause. Each quantum of change is modelled as a figure-one of happening, doing, sensing, saying, being, or having. All figures are made up of a process unfolding through time and of participants being involved in this process. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) pinpointed that a figure is basically composed of three components:

(5) process unfolding through time; the participants involved in the process; circumstances associated with the process

The three components are typically realised by grammatical elements in grammar:

(6) processes as realised by verbal groups; participants as realized by nominal groups, including directly and indirectly involved ones; circumstances as realised by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases

The six process types and relevant participant roles directly and indirectly involved in them are presented in (7). These properties determine the configuration of clauses, i.e., (in-)/transitivity.

- (7) a. Material: Actor, Goal/ Recipient, Client, Scope, Initiator, Attribute  
b. Behavioural: Behavior/ Behaviour  
c. Mental: Sensor, Phenomenon  
d. Verbal: Sayer, Target/ Receiver, Verbiage  
e. Relational: Carrier, Attribute; Identified, Identifier; Token, Value/ Attribute, Beneficiary, Assigner  
f. Existential: Existent

With Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) framework, it is detected how an exhibition interacts with other participants of the processes in the experiential realm. It is crucial to distinguish participants from circumstantial factors of processes. Circumstantial elements are always optional augmentations of the clause. In contrast to circumstances, participants are inherent in the process. Viewing that this study discusses the co-occurrences of EXHIBITION with its verb collocates, the discussion is focused on the processes and corresponding participants directly engaged in the usage sentences.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Data collection

The data was collected from BNCweb that was developed by the University of Zurich (Lehmann et al., 2000). Akin to many other corpus tools, BNCweb offers a range of additional features for the analysis of the retrieved data. The corpus text on BNCweb is classified by domain, including

applied sciences, arts, belief & thought, commerce & finance, leisure, natural & pure science, social science, and world affairs.

### 3.2. Procedure

Clauses containing the word EXHIBITION were extracted from the data and the verbs appearing with it as situated in the subject position of sentences are investigated. The survey is based on the text obtained from the domain of arts. On the basis of Hardy and Colombini (2011), only collocations with an MI (Mutual Information) score of 3.0 or higher are taken to be of sufficient interest in the survey. However, since MI overestimates the importance of collocations of low frequency (Hamilton et al., 2007), what is considered for analysis are only collocations with five or more occurrences. Using the KWIC Concordance, it is analysed that all the occurrences of the word EXHIBITION in the span of three words to its right (R1 to R3). Once the data are screened, the verbs collocating with the subject noun EXHIBITION are identified. Subsequently, their semantic relations with the other participants that directly engaged in the processes denoted by the verbs are probed.

### 3.3. Results and discussion

Now, the analysis of the results shall be presented. The verbs co-occurring with the word EXHIBITION include *feature*, *display*, *examine*, *open*, *coincide*, *continue*, and *travel*.

#### 3.3.1. Verb Collocate *feature*

*Feature* co-occurs with EXHIBITION at the frequency of 18 with the MI score of 5.82. The data containing *feature* are exemplified as in (8):

(8) Intriguingly, the **exhibition** *features* several pictures and objects which date from the beginning of Bacon's career, when he was employed as a decorator and influenced by Picasso.

Given that the verb *feature* refers to including something as an important part, the word EXHIBITION in the context is best interpreted as an entity, which contains specific work(s) of arts as an important component.

With respect to the intra-sentential semantic-role relation, the study resorts to Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) theory of process types. According to Halliday & Matthiessen, the verb *feature* denotes a relational process representing the notion of "being" and "having", which can further be divided into two modes of relation: attributive and identifying. Subsumed under the mode of identifying relation, the verb *feature* specifies a kind-part relation between the participants of events. In terms of participant roles, the word EXHIBITION in the subject position and the noun groups in the object position play the roles as Token and Value respectively: An exhibit collection is portrayed as a representative type consisting of divergent artworks.

#### 3.3.2. Verb Collocate *display*

In addition to *feature*, the verb *display* is also attested with 5 occurrences at the MI score of 3.38 in the corpus data. The appearance of *display* with EXHIBITION shows that an exhibition is responsible for showing objects to people. The instance containing *display* is provided in (9):

(9) Several **exhibitions** have recently *displayed* the art branded as ‘degenerate’ by the Nazis in their notorious show of 1937.

With the verb *display* denoting the act of showing, the word EXHIBITION obtained in the corpus data is felicitously encoded as an entity, which shows objects to the public.

Again, Halliday & Matthiessen’s (2014) framework is critical for our discussion of the verb *display*. In their view, there is always one participant in the type of material process, Actor. This participant Actor leads to the unfolding of the process in time, which produces an outcome that is different from the initial stage of the unfolding. This outcome may be confined to the Actor per se on the condition that there is only one participant inherent in the process. The material process as such signifies a happening, which is dubbed as intransitive in traditional terminology. The unfolding of the process may extend to another directly involved participant of the process, Goal. When this happens, the participant Goal is impacted in a certain way: more precisely, the outcome is registered on Goal. Such a material process characterises a doing, which is labelled as transitive. Along this line of reasoning, the verb *display* is typed into the material process that requires two directly involved participants, Actor and Goal. As manifested in (9), EXHIBITION occurring in the subject position takes on the Actor Role, and the noun groups located in the object position play the Goal Role. If we take a further step in Halliday & Matthiessen’s (2014) framework, the process denoted by *display* is a transformative material process, which signifies an elaboration of the participant Goal, the displayed content in our case, leading to a change in its exterior condition.

### 3.3.3. Verb Collocate *open*

The verb *open* used with EXHIBITION encodes the starting of the operation of an exhibition. It occurs at the frequency of 33 with the MI score of 4.36. Witness the data attained from the BNCweb corpus:

(10) Exactly a month after the **exhibition** *opened*, the Secretary of State announced that state aid for churches in use would begin with immediate effect at the rate of £1 million a year.

With the occurrence of *open*, the noun EXHIBITION appears appropriate to be encoded as an entity, which offers space for people to come inside to pursue a purpose.

Now, the process type of the sentences containing EXHIBITION and *open* is analysed. Recall that material processes, as previously discussed for the verb *display*, distinguish themselves into two types by the number of inherently engaged participants: one requiring Actor and Goal, and the other requiring only Actor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The verb *open* attested in the survey is categorised into the latter type. That is, *open* in this context profiles a happening, producing an impact on the participant role Actor, which is taken up by the word EXHIBITION in the usage sentences. In a deeper analysis of the semantic property of *open*, it is suggested that it decodes an elaborating transformative material process, where the Actor is construed as being operating and running as the process goes on.

#### 3.3.4. Verb Collocate *examine*

The verb *examine* is found to collocate with EXHIBITION with 8 occurrences at the MI score of 3.48 in the domain of arts. Witness the sentence collected from the BNCweb showing *examine*: (11) The **exhibition** *examines* the period from the fourteenth century to the third century BC. The word EXHIBITION is best interpreted as an entity, which has the mental ability to focus attention and look at something carefully and thoroughly, so as to find out more about it.

In the view of Thompson (2014), the verb *examine* denotes a Behavioural process, which is in the middle area between Mental and Material processes. Behavioural processes signify specifically human physiological acts, which distinguish themselves between purely mental processes and their physical manifestations. As illustration, many Mental processes have corresponding processes that construe a conscious physical act involved in perception like *see* versus *watch* and *hear* versus *listen*. The verb *examine* as Thompson pinpoints, represents a process of this type. In this analysis, the noun EXHIBITION in the subject position plays the role as Behaver (Thompson, 2014), which has the property of being Actor on one hand and Sensor on the other hand. Aside from the participant of Behaver, the verb *examine* appears to occur with another participant in the corpus sentences. In line with Downing's (2015) analysis of *watch*, *examine* is treated as involving the participant of Phenomenon realised by the noun group in the object position of the clause: for instance, *the period from the fourteenth century to the third century BC* in (11).

#### 3.3.5. Verb Collocate *continue*

In addition to *examine*, the verb *continue* appears with EXHIBITION in the data at 19 occurrences marking the MI score of 5.82. The verb *continue* was used with EXHIBITION entails the state of existing in a period of time. Consider the instance attained from the BNCweb corpus: (12) The Jackson Pollock/Lee Krasner **exhibition** *continues* at the Kunstmuseum, Bern, until February 4, 1990.

The verb *continue* portrays the extension of an event in time. Thus, the usage sentence (12) construes an exhibition as an entity, which keeps happening and existing.

On the basis of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the verb *continue* denotes a creative Material process in this case, as do verbs *grow* and *develop*, which encode changing the state of an event with an input of impetus. If a process that instigates and affects an event is a Material process, the clause co-occurring with *continue* falls into this type because it can be interpreted as constantly initiating an event to maintain its operation. Regarding the participant role of EXHIBITION, and since EXHIBITION appears with *continue*, it takes on the role of Actor, which receives momentum input to keep operating.

#### 3.3.6. Verb Collocate *coincide*

*Coincide* is another verb that appears with EXHIBITION in the domain of arts. The use of *coincide* in this context profiles the co-occurrence of an exhibition with other events. Consider the sentence collected from the BNCweb corpus:

(13) Her **exhibition** *coincides*, of course, with the Tate Gallery's survey of Ryman's paintings. If it is the case that *coincide* denotes the co-occurrence of events, it is suggested that the word EXHIBITION collocating with *coincide* is experientially comparable to an entity, which comes into existence with another at the same time.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the type of process that designates the simultaneous occurrences of two or more entities as realised by verbs *join*, *meet*, or *crowd* is Material process. Along this line of reasoning, it is considered that the verb *coincide* to be a process of Material, signifying an extending transformation impacting the exhibition through a relation of accompaniment. Thus, the word EXHIBITION assumes the role of Actor in the context of arts discourse.

### 3.3.7. Verb Collocate *travel*

*Travel* collocates with EXHIBITION in the corpus of arts. It is attested with 19 instances at the MI score of 4.72. The use of this verb depicts the tour of an exhibition. Consider the instance obtained from the BNCweb in the following:

(14) The **exhibition** will afterwards *travel* to the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum in New York as well as another location either in the United States or Canada.

As the corpus sentence demonstrates, the presence of *travel* indicates that EXHIBITION is profiled as an entity, which tours different locations.

One category of Material processes that covers those encoding the movements of entities: *go*, *approach*, *traverse*, *follow*, or *precede*. By the same token, *travel* is a process of Material, for it codifies making movement from one place to another. In the words of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), *travel* symbolises an enhancing transformative Material process, which involves a motion construing the movement of a participant through space. In co-occurrence with a Material process, the noun EXHIBITION performs the Actor role in the arts relevant fields.

## 4. GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the analysis, it is identified that the verbs collocating with EXHIBITION in the discourse of arts in the BNCweb corpus as well as the corresponding process types and participant roles, as summarized in Table 1:

verb collocate	process type	participant role
Feature	Relational	Token-Value
Display	Material	Actor-Goal
Examine	Behavioural	Behaver-Phenomenon
Open	Material	Actor
Coincide	Material	Actor
Continue	Material	Actor
Travel	Material	Actor

Table 1: Verb collocates of EXHIBITION and relevant process types and participant roles

In terms of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), processes codify the worlds of experience, which can be distinguished into three types: the physical world, the world of consciousness, and the world of abstract relations. Material processes designate the world of physical entities. The corpus sentences containing *display*, *open*, *coincide*, *continue*, and *travel* denote Material processes. The co-presences of EXHIBITION with these verbs indicate that exhibitions are conceptualised as an actor, which implements physical events.

Relational processes symbolise the world of abstract relations. The clauses containing EXHIBITION and *feature* signify a Relational process. From the experiential perspective, the usage sentences co-occurring with *feature* communicate the message that exhibitions, being a symbol token, bear a relation with the exhibited content.

Behavioural processes are on the borderline of the world of consciousness and the physical world. In the presence of *examine*, the target sentences decode Behavioural processes, where EXHIBITION is conceptually construed as a sensor, being responsible for carrying out a mental activity that is manifested and characterized through physical properties.

The aforesaid discussion demonstrates that exhibitions perform different acts and therefore take on diverse roles in human mind, which provides a new window on what an exhibition is.

In addition, this study has pedagogical implication for arts-purpose writing. Awareness of the strategies, as Schleppegrell (2001) has noted, which are functional for effective presentation of different types of texts, can inform the analysis of student's developing writing. Therefore, given that linguistic features are specific to a given field of domain, the information as to the choices of verbs as well as the (transitive/intransitive) configuration of clauses as associated with process types and participant roles evoked by EXHIBITION is very critical to the style of language appropriate for topics related to arts, design, curating, or museology.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the experiential depiction of the English word EXHIBITION. Through the linguistic properties that it activates, what an exhibition does and what roles an exhibition assumes were sketched. This finding also indicates that English offers linguistic options for making different kinds of meanings in the arts-related context. In the future, a more systematic and comprehensive survey of the language use in the domain of arts, so as to foster interdisciplinary collaborations between arts and language science should be frequented.

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