A Study on Cognitive Identity Crisis in Dubliners
from the Perspective of Lexical Iconicity

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ABSTRACT. *Iconicity is the similarity between linguistic symbol and its signified in the levels of phonetics, lexicon, syntax and pragmatics. Recent studies have proved that iconicity is a main feature of language. Based on the theories of iconicity, this paper mainly intends to explore the cognitive identity crisis in Dubliners from the perspective of lexical iconicity. The cognitive crisis in Dubliners can be detected from the lexical distribution, the type-token ratio, and the imbalanced use of deixis. The results suggest that the stylistic analysis with the help of RANGE is a rewarding tentativeness to interpret literary theme from a linguistic perspective.*

Keywords: Lexical iconicity; Cognitive identity crisis; Dubliners

1. **Introduction.** As one of the design features of language, arbitrariness is firstly proposed by F. De Saussure. In *Course in General Linguistics*, he holds that the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Since a sign is a combination in which a signifier is associated with a signified, it can be expressed more simply as: "the linguistic sign is arbitrary" [1]. However, in contrast to arbitrariness, iconicity suggests that there is an inherent link between signifier and signified or the nepotism between language and object, and that the link or the nepotism is not arbitrary, but motivated [2]. Furthermore, cognitive linguists who stick to the principle of embodied philosophy, hold that language is formed on the basis of bodily experience and cognitive process. Accordingly, language would

eventually be related to the external world with close intimacy, and iconic with experiential structure and conceptual frame [3]. Apart from the recognition of iconicity of language, the applications of iconicity principles to literary works are under heated discussion. Based on the iconic nature of language, with *Dubliners* by James Joyce as a case, this paper tries to discuss the iconic representation of the themes of literary works, aiming to reveal the relationship between iconicity of language and the construction of literary theme. This attempt is conducive to the study of iconicity and the interpretation of literary works from a linguistic perspective.

2. **Literature Review.**
2.1. **Definition of Iconicity.**
C.S. Peirce, a nineteenth-century semiotician, claims that sign can fall into three categories: icon, index, and symbol. In his opinion, icon is not only the use of sound-symbolic expressions, but also the notion which covers similarities between the structure of language and the structure of the world [4]. Since Peirce has proposed the notion of icon, many Chinese scholars began to pay attention to iconicity, with an attempt to offer a relatively precise definition of the term. For example, Shen Jiaxuan holds that iconicity refers to the direct embodiment of conceptual structure of human [2]. In addition, Zhang Min thinks that iconicity is the relationship between signifier and signified, and this relationship is not arbitrary, but motivated [5]. Moreover, Wang Yin deems that iconicity is the similarity between linguistic symbol and its signified in the levels of phonetics, morphology and structure [6].

Based on the three definitions mentioned above, iconicity in this paper is defined as the similarity between linguistic symbol and its signified in the levels of phonetics, lexicon, syntax and pragmatics.

2.2. **Studies on Iconicity Home and Abroad.**
The origin of iconicity can be traced back to the argument about Nominalism and Naturalism. Plato, a representative of Realism or Naturalism, holds that a name is the imitation of sound [7]. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Saussure, a representative of Nominalism, has proposed arbitrariness [1], which exerts great influence on modern linguistics. However, since 1960s, ternary sign model has enjoyed more attention. For instance, Peirce has proposed the three categories of sign, namely icon, index and symbol; John Haiman also divides icon into imagic icon and diagrammatic icon, with the latter represented by syntactic icon which consists of isomorphism and motivation [7].

Although the study on iconicity in China has not been fully conducted if viewed with regard to the duration of time, there still is a heated debate about the relationship between arbitrariness and iconicity. Some linguists hold that arbitrariness is the dominant design feature of language [8, 9], while some researchers maintain that iconicity is the dominant one [10]. Additionally, some scholars support the dialectical iconicity [11]. These scholars, including Xu Guozhang [12], Shen Jiaxuan [2] and Wang Yin [13], claim that language is in the continuum of two poles between arbitrariness and iconicity, and that arbitrariness mainly exists in the level of phonetics, while iconicity in syntax. This paper mainly

supports the dialectical iconicity. It seems that iconicity is not only the main feature of language in James Joyce's writing, but also connected to the construction of literary theme.

2.3. **Iconicity and Identity Crisis.** Identity is the confirmation of one's self-identification, which is affected by many factors, such as gender, age, class, ethics and nationality. Similarly, identity crisis is the loss of one's identity [14], or the loss of one's value and importance. As an important notion in psychology and sociology, identity crisis reflects one's "mind in society" [15]. That is to say, identity crisis is closely related to one's cognition.

A basic tenet of sociolinguistics is that language displays its speakers' identity [16]. Since language is central to human condition and since many have argued that it is the most salient and distinguishing characteristic of human species, it seems that any study of identity must surely include some consideration of it [17]. Therefore, in order to depict the identity crisis in *Dubliners*, it is necessary to study the identity marker—language. Additionally, since iconicity is one important side of language, there might be some connections between iconicity and identity crisis.

As a cognitive symbol of language, lexicon reflects the power of language [18]. Contrarily, if cognitive crisis arises, there would be a lack of diversity, overuse and underuse of lexicon. Different from the previous study that has focused on identity crisis from four main aspects of language, namely phonetics, lexicon, syntax and pragmatics [19], this paper mainly emphasizes on the lexical iconicity in *Dubliners*.

3. **Methods.** This paper takes linguistic facts as data from *Dubliners*, a collection of fifteen short stories written by James Joyce (76,610 words). This fifteen short stories are: "The Sisters", "An Encounter", "Araby", "Eveline", "After the Race", "Two Gallants", "The Boarding House", "A Little Cloud", "Counterparts", "Clay", "A Painful Case", "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", "A Mother", "Grace", and "The Dead". Joyce has said: "My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the center of paralysis" [20]. One of the main themes of *Dubliners* is "paralysis", which is best manifested by identity crisis. Moreover, stream of consciousness is a narrative mode which seeks to portray an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes. Thus, as the manifestation of the external world, language in the novels featured in stream of consciousness can reveal the bodily experience and the cognitive process of its speaker or writer. In one word, *Dubliners* is an example in point to study the relationship between iconicity and identity.

RANGE is the software employed in this study to compare the lexical distribution of *Dubliners* in word lists. The words in Word List One are 1,000 frequently-used words, while the words in Word List Two and Word List Three are non-frequently used words. The words in "Not in the lists" are words created by the writers. Moreover, the type numbers, the token numbers, the type-token ratio, and the word frequency have been obtained through RANGE.

4. **Results and Discussion.** The cognitive crisis in *Dubliners* is embedded in the lexical iconicity. Embodied philosophy is the philosophical basis of iconicity or cognitive linguistics. In embodied philosophy, both cognition and language are formed on the basis of bodily experiences, and cognition determines language [21]. Sweetser also claims that language is shaped by cognition, and that human perception and understanding of the world are the basis for the structure of human language [22]. Based on the opinions above, the lexical iconicity refers to that as an important element of language, lexicon can reveal the features of one's cognition as well as one's language. Therefore, it is rational to study the lexical features in *Dubliners* to identify the cognitive crisis.

TABLE 1. THE LEXICAL DISTRIBUTION OF *DUBLINERS*

	One (%)	Two (%)	Three (%)	Not in the lists (%)
Dubliners	80.10	5.75	2.89	11.26
Chapter 1	82.59	5.58	2.71	9.12
Chapter 2	81.38	6.02	2.82	9.78
Chapter 3	80.77	5.43	3.40	10.40
Chapter 4	84.52	6.06	2.71	6.71
Chapter 5	76.52	6.40	3.46	13.62
Chapter 6	80.43	5.13	3.40	11.04
Chapter 7	81.07	6.50	2.35	10.88
Chapter 8	80.72	4.88	3.40	11.00
Chapter 9	80.29	5.84	2.57	11.30
Chapter 10	83.71	4.64	2.21	9.40
Chapter 11	77.42	6.88	8.73	11.77
Chapter 12	82.46	4.86	2.12	10.56
Chapter 13	80.13	5.62	2.72	11.53
Chapter 14	80.34	5.38	2.71	11.57
Chapter 15	77.84	6.36	2.97	12.83

The lexical features of *Dubliners* are demonstrated from three aspects: the distribution of word lists, the type token ratio, and the imbalanced use of deixis.

Firstly, one major lexical feature of *Dubliners* is represented by the lexical distribution, as shown in Table 1.

The normal percentages of the lexical distribution in the four lists for native English writers are 70%, 10%, 10% and 10% [23]. However, the percentages of the lexical distribution in *Dubliners* are 80.10%, 5.75%, 2.89% and 11.26%. Moreover, the percentages of Word List One of the fifteen short stories are 82.59%, 81.38%, 80.77%, 84.52%, 76.52%, 80.43%, 81.07%, 80.72%, 80.29%, 83.71%, 77.42%, 82.46%, 80.13%, 80.34% and 77.84% respectively, all of which are higher than 70%. Therefore, the proportions of the words in Word List One (1,000 frequently-used words) are larger than those of normal literary works, which indicates a shortage of vocabulary. In other words, Joyce tends to use simple words to portray the protagonists in *Dubliners*.

Secondly, the cognitive identity crisis in *Dubliners* can also be reflected from the type-token ratio as shown in Fig. 1.
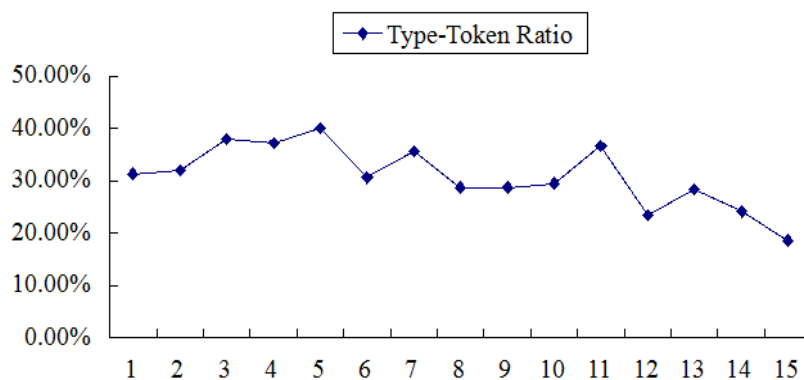

FIGURE 1. THE TYPE-TOKEN RATIOS IN *DUBLINERS*

Types refer to the total word types that occur in the text, and tokens refer to all the words that occur in the text [24]. A high Type Token Ratio (TTR for short) means that the vocabulary in the text is rich and varied, and vice versa [25]. In general, the standard TTR of English novel is 41.32% [26]. As for *Dubliners*, the overall TTR is 12.94%, much lower than the standard TTR. Moreover, the TTRs of the fifteen short stories in *Dubliners* are 31.39%, 32.07%, 38.08%, 37.26%, 40.03%, 30.65%, 35.65%, 28.80%, 28.80%, 29.59%, 36.72%, 23.43%, 28.42%, 24.14%, 18.67% respectively, all of which are lower than the standard TTR. The lower TTR shows that the vocabulary in *Dubliners* is simple and monotonous.

Additionally, according to the age of the protagonists, the fifteen short stories in *Dubliners* can fall into three groups: chapter one to chapter three are stories about children or teenagers ("The Sisters", "An Encounter" and "Araby"); chapter four to chapter six are about young people ("Eveline", "After the Race", and "Two Gallants"); and chapter seven

to chapter fifteen are stories of adults ("The Boarding House", "A Little Cloud", "Counterparts", "Clay", "A Painful Case", "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", "A Mother", "Grace", and "The Dead"). Normally, people grow with an improvement in lexical ability. After acquiring more words, the adults can express themselves in different ways. However, from Figure 1, it tends to be that the lexical variety has decreased from chapter one to chapter fifteen. More importantly, the last chapter "The Dead" is regarded as the theme revealer of *Dubliners*. The protagonist Gabriel Conroy is well-educated, and he should use various words to describe the world he perceives. Contrarily, the TTR in "The Dead" is the lowest in the collection, indicating that the protagonist Gabriel Conroy is wanting in lexicon. This deficiency in lexicon or language is an obvious sign of cognitive identity crisis [14].

Finally, the last lexical feature of *Dubliners* is manifested by the imbalanced use of deixis, as shown in Figure 2.
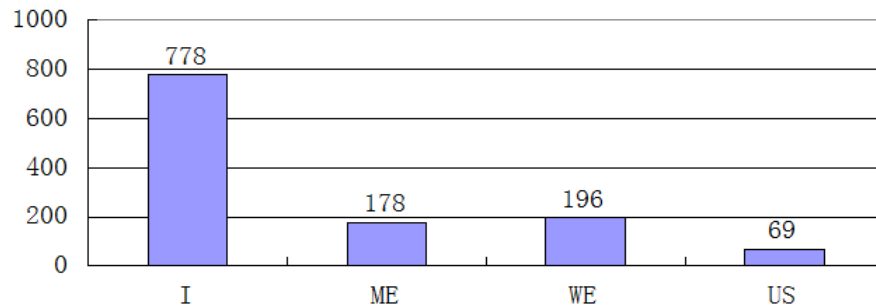

FIGURE 2. THE FIRST PERSON DEIXIS IN *DUBLINERS*

In Figure 2, the singular form of first person deixis (I; ME) occurs 956 times, while the plural form of first person deixis (WE; US) only occurs 265 times. This sharp contrast indicates that the protagonists in *Dubliners* are self-centered and distant from others.

In summary, from the analysis of the lexical iconicity in *Dubliners*—the lexical distribution, the type token ratio and the imbalanced use of deixis, it is evident that the Dubliners' cognitive crisis is serious because they lack diversified and rich vocabulary, and they are egoist and indifferent.

5. **Conclusions.** With the help of RANGE, this paper has exemplified the cognitive crisis in *Dubliners* from the perspective of lexical iconicity, which has been demonstrated by the lexical distribution, the type token ratio and the imbalanced use of deixis. Results have suggested that the Dubliners suffered from serious cognitive identity crisis. In other words, the Dubliners lacked diversified and rich vocabulary, and they were egoist and indifferent. This paper has indicated that iconicity is closely connected to the construction and the interpretation of literary theme. In addition, it has corresponded to the trend of the empirical study in literary criticism, and broadened the scope of the iconic study in linguistics.

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