

A portrait of a young man with light brown, wavy hair, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a large, white, ruffled collar (ruff) over a dark garment. The background is a dark, neutral color.

# La Historia Moderna en la Enseñanza Secundaria

Contenidos, métodos y representaciones

Francisco García González, Cosme J. Gómez Carrasco  
Ramón Cózar Gutiérrez, Pedro Martínez Gómez  
(Coords.)



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de Castilla-La Mancha



**LA HISTORIA MODERNA EN LA ENSEÑANZA  
SECUNDARIA. CONTENIDOS, MÉTODOS  
Y REPRESENTACIONES**



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# LEXICAL CHOICES IN THE CHARACTERISATION OF KING HENRY VIII IN THE TV SERIES *THE TUDORS*

VERÓNICA FALQUET APARISI  
(Universitat de València)

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## INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Tudor dynasty to power is one of the most decisive periods in English history. After the Battle of Bosworth, in 1485, the confrontation between the two branches of the Plantagenet kings –Lancaster and York– which later evolved into a civil war, finally came to an end. Thus, the main aim of the new dynasty was to maintain peace in their kingdom and consolidate their power.

One of the most entertaining ways to bring people closer to history is the use of TV series. In 2007, the historical series *The Tudors* was released. This series focuses on the character of King Henry VIII and his relationship among politicians, humanists and women. This is the reason why this paper will focus on the figure of the monarch, and how he is portrayed through his interaction with other characters in the first four episodes of the series, taking the Appraisal theory (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & White, 2005) as the framework of the analysis.

## LANGUAGE, CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND TEXTUAL CUES

Language and Identity are two concepts intimately connected: not only is one's identity constructed through the use of one's language, but so is one's identity as a member belonging to a group. In addition, "a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone's membership in a given group" (Tabouret-Keller, 1998: 317); and such features, also known as styles (Fairclough, 2010), may range from "phonetic features to lexical units, syntactic structures, and personal names"

(Tabouret-Keller, 1998: 317); thus, identities will be constructed depending on the choices made in the different language features.

As Bednarek (2010: 101) notes, a textual cue is defined as “what in the text tells us (...) something about character and identity”. Culpeper (2001) distinguishes three different textual cues to analyse dramatic texts: implicit, explicit and authorial. In implicit cues, the information about the character is inferred through the linguistic behaviour of the participants. Explicit cues deal with the statements that characters make about themselves or other characters. And regarding authorial cues, they are approximately what the author contributes to the work, for instance, in stage directions in plays.

Moreover, this classification is further divided in turn. First, explicit cues can be classified as belonging to self-presentation and other-presentation. In the first case, in self-presentation, the explicit information provided by a character is about the character him or herself. On the other hand, other-presentation deals with the explicit information about a character, provided by another character. Nonetheless, there are some aspects to take into account before starting to analyse: first, other-presentation seems to be more frequent than self-presentation and, secondly, there are some discounting effects “motivated by the characteriser or the situation” (Culpeper, 2001: 171) which need to be taken into consideration. For instance, under certain circumstances a character can present his or herself in a particular way, only to achieve his or her goals; or another character may highlight the virtues or the flaws of another character, grounded on whether they get on well together or not.

## APPRAISAL THEORY

Appraisal Theory stemmed from Systematic Functional Linguistics so as to analyse evaluative language. As Martin (2003) argues:

This theory developed so as to obtain a comprehensive map of appraisal resources that we could deploy systematically in discourse analysis, with a view both to understanding the rhetorical effect of evaluative lexis as texts unfold, and to better understanding the interplay of interpersonal meaning and social relations in the model of language and the social we were developing, especially in the area of solidarity (p. 148).

Martin and White (2005) define Appraisal as follows:

appraisal is one of three major discourse semantic resources construing interpersonal meaning (...) Appraisal itself is regionalized as three interacting domains – ‘attitude’, ‘engagement’ and ‘graduation’. Attitude is concerned

with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. Graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred (pp. 34-35).

On the other hand, Eggins and Slade (1997) provide a different definition:

Appraisal refers to the attitudinal colouring of talk along a range of dimensions including: certainty, emotional response, social evaluation, and intensity (...). Appraisal is mainly realized lexically although it can be realized by whole clauses (p. 124).

This theory can be divided into Affect, Judgement and Appreciation. For the scope of this paper only Affect and Judgement are taken into account. Affect, which deals with the emotions and reactions of a person (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & White, 2005; Primo-Pacheco, 2014), is normally conveyed by lexical items –adjectives, verbs, nouns, adverbs- related to emotions, being its purpose to trigger empathy (González, 2012) with the other characters or even, in this case, with the audience. On the other hand, Judgement deals with the assessment of a particular behaviour (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & White, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007; Primo-Pacheco, 2014).

## TV SERIES

The main reason why television studies are important is due to the fact that television has, consciously or not, an influence on us on a daily basis. To start with, the first classification to be made, applicable both in literature and in TV series or films, is to determine to which TV genre *The Tudors* belong. 'Genre' can be generally defined as "sort, or type, of text: thriller, horror movie, musical, autobiography, tragedy, etc.," taking into account certain typical features which distinguish one genre from another, and therefore, they are the "generalisation or abstraction from specific textual properties" (Durant & Lambrou, 2009: 21). In addition, critics (Durant & Lambrou, 2009) have divided genres depending on which criterion they based their classification: structure, topic, mode of address, and type of response, as well as power relationships and the functioning of turn-taking mechanisms (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2000). Therefore, basing my classification on the topic of the series, *The Tudors* is a historical TV series that focuses on the life of King Henry VIII.

In addition, once the genre is established, audiences raise some expectations about the series they are going to see and know that "what is probable in, and

appropriate to, a specific genre must be intelligible and believable” (Durant & Lambrou, 2009). Therefore, in order to fulfil the requirements of a genre, it must embody “rules, norms and laws that make the genre intelligible” and features that “create an appearance of truth” (Durant & Lambrou, 2009, pp. 23-24); this latter aspect is known as verisimilitude. Consequently if such verisimilitude and authenticity satisfy the audience’s expectations, it will be acceptable to classify a particular TV series or film into a particular genre. Therefore, even though some inaccuracies are to be found in the series, so as to make the story more appealing to the audience, *The Tudors*, as a biographical and historical TV series, combines personal features from the life of Henry VIII, as well as it provides the audience with a historical context; thus, meeting the standards of a historical TV series.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on Gregori-Signes (2017), the choice of features to be analysed here has been limited according to the objective of the study. It is not of interest here to find out what Henry VIII did or possessed in life but how the series chooses to portray him. Consequently, I have only analysed those examples which deal with the description of the king and paid attention only to explicit lexical cues such as adjectives, verbs or nouns that make reference to Henry VIII explicitly, and, particularly, those interactions that only provide “factual character description” (Gregori-Signes, 2017) of the king.

First of all, the instances have been classified according to whether they belong to self-presentation or other-presentation. Having completed this, and bearing in mind this is a historical series, a further division has been necessary in order to distinguish which statements are historical facts proper and which statements actually construct the identity of the fictional character Henry VIII. Nevertheless, in making such a division, some ambiguity has risen, since some features do characterise the king, but are, at the same time, historical facts. Consequently, it is worth bearing in mind that some of these instances may overlap and could be considered to belong to both categories (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2017). For the sake of simplicity, those which present both historical and characterising traits have been brought together as characterising features. After that, those statements that can be said to represent historical facts have been classified as “factual description” (Gregori-Signes, 2017), whereas those statements that characterise him as a TV character have been further divided into affect and judgement, which have, in turn, been classified into positive and negative value judgements, based on the Appraisal Theory as the framework for the analysis (Martin & White, 2005).

## RESULTS

A total of 57 statements have been analysed and, as Culpeper (2001) notes, the number of other-characterisation instances appears to be higher for, out of this fifty-seven statements, twenty-two belong to self-characterisation, and the other thirty-five fall into the category of other-characterisation. Those instances classified as historical facts have been analysed relating them to the history of England, whereas those statements in the category of characterising traits of Henry VIII have been further divided into positive and negative features. Nevertheless, some of these statements, even though they seem to be either positive or negative at first sight, they also have a counter implication when related to the context.

## SELF-CHARACTERISATION

### *HISTORICAL FACTS*

Out of the twenty-two instances of self-characterisation, five of these deal with historical facts. In these statements, Henry claims that he married his brother's wife Catherine of Aragon, with whom he has a living daughter. Nevertheless, this does not comfort him, for he wishes to have a male heir; for this reason, it is worth mentioning that the most repeated word in these statements is the word "son", which leads to the conclusion that Henry is portrayed as a king, whose principal and growing concern was to have a male heir to continue the Tudor dynasty, for if he did not have a son, this could consequently be the cause of the outbreak of another civil war.

Example 1:

King: But not a son. I have no son.

Michael Hirst. 2007. *In Cold Blood*.

Example 2:

King: I have a son. I have a son. I have a son. Thank God. Thank God.

Anthony: Come on, you charlatan.

King: I have a son! I have a son, God. Can you hear me? I have a son.

Michael Hirst. 2007. *Simply Henry*.

### *CHARACTERISING TRAITS*

As far as characterising traits in self-characterisation are concerned, the number of positive attributes is higher; thus, Henry VIII is prone to highlight his

strong points, whereas he seems to minimise his poor qualities. In this case, words that contribute to the construction of Henry's identity are:

Lexical items in self-characterisation

Verbal constructions	intend, desire, dreamt of, disagree, want, knew, speaks for me, would sacrifice, almost believe, beg
Adjectives	proud, forced, just, immortal, invincible, happy, eager
Nouns	confidence, joy, contentment, glory, fault, pleasure, fool, affection
Adverbs	truly, too long, directly
Phrases	(with) all my heart, (with) the hand of your servant

Henry VIII characterises himself positively as a father who takes pride in his daughter and he is also portrayed as a Renaissance king, a humanist who is against the outbreaks of wars; he is a monarch who attempts to be a just ruler for England, and at the same time, he is a person who relies on Cardinal Wolsey. Nevertheless, the most recurrent feature that he mentions is that of being a famous monarch.

Example 3:

King: And I shall claim the crown. And once more truly be King of England, Ireland and France. [...]

King: [...] Together, we shall be invincible [...]  
[...]

Charles V: And then, together, we shall invade France and bring to an end the adventures of that libertine monarch King Francis.

King: That will make me very happy.

Michael Hirst. 2007. *Simply Henry*.

The negative traits are most related to war and it is suggested that he spends a lot of money. The other negative trait is that he considers himself to be the one to blame for not having thought about the future, that is, not having been concerned enough about producing a male heir to the dynasty.

Example 4:

More: I must urge you that instead of spending ruinous amounts going to war you should spend it rather on the welfare of your people.

King: Thomas, I swear you I intend to be a just ruler. [...]

More: As a humanist, I have an abhorrence of war. It's an activity fit only for beasts yet practised by no kind of beast so constantly as by man.

King: As a humanist, I share your opinion. As a king, I'm forced to disagree.

Michael Hirst. 2007. *In Cold Blood*.

## OTHER-CHARACTERISATION

### *HISTORICAL FACTS*

With regard to historical facts, in these instances Henry is described as being a king who has ancient a right to the French throne.

Example 5:

Norfolk: [...]The King of England has an ancient and historic right to the French throne which the Valois have usurped. [...]

Michael Hirst. 2007. *In Cold Blood*.

Henry VIII is also characterised through the description of his relationship with other characters. In this case, Charles V seems to get along with Henry since he considers him to be his uncle, due to the fact that he is married to Catherine of Aragon. He is also characterised in relation to other different characters: the series presents Henry as being the godfather of Lord Norfolk's son and it also appears to foretell the future More's fall from royal favour.

### *CHARACTERISING TRAITS*

Those cues describing the king are mainly uttered by Wolsey, Boleyn and More. Other characters participating are Catherine, Buckingham, Anne Boleyn, Charles V, among others. The fact that Wolsey, Boleyn and More are the characters that talk about the king the most may be connected with different aspects of Henry's life: Wolsey deals with politics, Boleyn is concerned about getting Henry to become obsessed with his daughter, and More is considered to be one of Henry's friends that advices and teaches him. As opposed to self-characterisation traits, the number of negative statements is much higher when other characters describe the figure of the king. In addition, as previously stated, other-characterisation also deals with another problem, which is related to the discounting factors that may characterise Henry VIII in a certain way, depending on their relationship with the king or with the goal they want to achieve when making use of such terms.

Lexical items in other-characterisation

Verbal constructions	Wants, doesn't know, be known as, can do, conquer, loves, blames, makes, glances, looks
Adjectives and adjective phrases	best, strong, changeable, shallow, intemperate, incapable of keeping his word, greater, more powerful, afraid, hot, cold, attentive, good, obvious, young, whetted, closer
Nouns and phrases	interests, good humour, architect of a new and modern world, the king, calves like yours, no boundary or frontier, champion of the Church, everything, fault, love, illness, liaisons, devotion, masker, declaration, hold, belief, young man, appetite for war, servant
Adverbs and phrases	Not well
Whole clauses	(With) you beside me

With regard to positive traits, Henry VIII is characterised by other characters as the authority, and therefore, being against him would be considered as high treason. In addition, the person he estimates the most seems to be Thomas More. Nevertheless, as previously claimed, there are some discounting elements that should be taken into account. As an example, Thomas More states that Henry can do many things himself, when he is talking to the ambassadors, which may actually be true, but in this case More attempts to make a good impression of Henry on them; Anne Boleyn tells him he is everything when refusing a present he has just given her, but this may only indicate an asymmetry of power between them and Anne is acknowledging his power. In addition Thomas Boleyn flatters Henry when he is with him:

Example 6:

King: [...] Are his (Francis I's) calves strong, like mine?

Boleyn: Your Majesty, no one has calves like yours.

Michael Hirst. 2007. *In Cold Blood*.

Regarding the negative traits, the relationship between Henry and Catherine is not a good one. He blames her for not having had a living son, but in front of her nephew, he pretends theirs is a happy marriage. Furthermore, not only is he

portrayed as someone too dependable on Cardinal Wolsey's advices, but he is seen as an over-impulsive monarch, who is not always up to his position's standards:

Example 7:

More: All right. If you want the world to know that the king is changeable, shallow, intemperate, incapable of keeping his word [...]

Michael Hirst. 2007. *Simply Henry*.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the figure of Henry VIII as portrayed in the TV series *The Tudors*. There are some aspects that highly rely on historical facts, since, in order to meet the audience's expectations about the genre of historical series, it is virtually inevitable. Nevertheless, characterising traits have revealed that the king is prone to speak positively about himself; therefore, the identity of the king seems to be positive when he characterises himself. Contrary to this, the number of negative statements increases when it is the other characters who talk about him and, as a consequence, the image portrayed by the other characters seems to be rather negative. In addition, as Henry has a tendency to define himself positively, contrary to what other characters do, it highlights the fact that it should be taken into account that the characterisation of speakers is a subjective issue.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that not only has this analysis been carried out focusing on the first four episodes of Season 1 of the TV series, but also that only affect and judgement have been borne in mind. As a consequence, a more exhaustive research should be done in order to obtain more precise results on the figure of Henry VIII. In addition, it should be taken into account the fact that some of the instances may be regarded as belonging to overlapping categories; therefore, depending on whether a statement is considered to belong to either factual description or not, the results obtained would differ from the results of this paper.

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