



COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE ECONOMY IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17440719>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18th October 2025

Accepted: 24th October 2025

Online: 25th October 2025

KEYWORDS

Linguistic economy, pragmatics, cognition, short story, implicit meaning, pragmatic inference, implicature, ellipsis.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the application of linguistic economy through a cognitive-pragmatic lens in two short stories. Linguistic economy refers to the use of linguistic resources, forms, such as words, structures, and meanings in order to achieve maximum communicative effect, but with minimum form. This study examines how this economy is reflected with the help of ellipsis, implicit meaning and context-dependent inference in narrative texts. The analysis highlights both author's use of minimal linguistic forms to express deep cognitive and emotional meanings, through several strategies which reflect various cultural and pragmatic norms. The findings contribute that rich understanding of linguistic economy can operate as a universal yet culturally inflected principle of narration.

Introduction

Language is not just a system of communication between people, societies and nations, but also a medium which thought and emotion, culture and identity are condensed, stylized, demonstrated, and made efficient. The concept of language economy refers to the tendency to express the meaning with the least possible linguistic effort and has always been seen as a fundamental property of language use (Zipf, 1949; Levinson 2000). In literary texts, linguistic economy has a function of providing aesthetic and cognitive impact by conveying complex ideas, emotions, and imagery through minimal, but meaningful linguistic means which allow readers to infer, interpret, and engage deeply with the text. Therefore, writers select and compress some linguistic materials to evoke imagery, emotions without open elaboration.

This study investigates also compares how linguistic economy operates within O. Henry's *The Last Leaf* and Abdulla Qahhor's *The Thief*. Although they belong to different literary and cultural traditions, such as American realism and Uzbek socialist realism accordingly, they are seen as good examples of masterpieces with brevity and emotional resonance. Through a cognitive-pragmatic approach, this paper analyzes how minimal linguistic choices- ellipsis, implication and contextual inference- could produce rich communicative and emotional effects on readers in each text.



The central research questions include:

1. How is linguistic economy realized through the linguistic features of *The Last Leaf* and *The Thief*?
2. What cognitive and pragmatic devices make readers infer implicit meanings from minimal linguistic cues?

Literature Review

Theoretical foundations of Linguistic Economy go back to Zipf's (1949) Principle of Least Effort, which claims that communicators-speakers and listeners seek the ways of minimizing effort in interaction, conveying the message. According to Zipf, humans develop their language by striking the balance of efficiency and clarity, which leads to shorter words, phrases, reduced structures and implicitness.

In pragmatics, Grice's (1979) Cooperative Principle is a core source which refines this notion with his Maxims of Quantity, which urge speakers to be informative, but not excessively. His model suggests that conciseness and relevance are cognitively economical which means listeners infer unstated meanings through assumptions and context. Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory argues that utterance is processed by searching for optimal relevance.

In terms of literary discourse, Leech and Short (2007) and Stockwell (2002) points out that this linguistic economy is already a stylistic principle where writers make use of ellipsis, deixis, and inference to involve readers in interpretive participation. Green (2007) highlights that linguistic economy is not a reduction in literature, but refinement which makes language, meaning compact to intensify the message.

According to a cognitive-pragmatic approach, linguistic economy embodies how readers can mentally reconstruct implied meaning with the help of their own background knowledge, context, and inference. Gavins (2007) and Semino (2008) argue that cognitive stylistics can help to analyze how textual minimalism can activate mental simulation and emotional resonance. Pragmatic scholars, including Levinson (2000) and Thomas (2013) emphasizes that economy relies on implicature where unstated meanings are expressed through shared contextual knowledge. Therefore, linguistic economy can be defined as both a cognitive process (how meaning is made with minimal linguistic structure) and a pragmatic process (how writers guide readers' inference with subtle cues).

In English literature, O. Henry is acknowledged for short stories with concise narration and implied morals. His stories are known for compressing complex human emotions into brief, ironic dialogues which exemplify linguistic efficiency at the same time. Similarly, in Uzbek literature, Abdulla Qahhor's works are linguistically and morally precise. However, under Soviet influence, he reinforced the art of understatement where his concise language shows social realism and deep moral reflection. As Abduazizov (2008) notes, his economy in using linguistic structures to convey the message lies in "compressing the critique of social and ethical concerns into the smallest linguistic space".

This comparative analysis of two authors' short stories within a broad framework of cognitive-pragmatic economy demonstrates how linguistic conciseness operates differently, but purposefully in two different cultural traditions.

Methodology



This study uses qualitative text analysis in terms of pragmatics and stylistics. Both short stories are analyzed for their linguistic and pragmatic features which provide linguistic economy- specifically:

Ellipsis (omission of words and structures that can be inferred by readers, listeners)

Implicature (not mentioned meanings derived from context)

Lexical compression (use of minimal, but expressive lexis)

Pragmatic understatement (implied emotion or morality without direct statement)

Each short story is examined deeply with extensive reading, identifying linguistic cues that gives cognitive inference. Quotations are analyzed on the purpose of finding implicit meaning of author, characters, contextual economy and readers' interpretation.

Analysis

O. Henry's *The Last Leaf* is a good example of use of linguistic economy through brevity of narration, implicit moral inferencing and elliptical dialogue. The story of Johnsy, a young woman who loses hope of recovery from pneumonia, and Behrman, an old painter who sacrifices his life to save Johnsy, provides emotional impact on readers with minimal language and pragmatic inference rather than commenting everything in an explicit manner.

O. Henry makes use of short, precise sentences that convey maximum meaning with the least effort. For example, when describing Johnsy's despair, he writes:

"She was looking out the window and counting – counting backward." (*The Last Leaf*, O. Henry, 1907)

The repetition of "counting" with a hyphen operates as an elliptical device. The omitted object, "the leaves" is for the reader to infer. This economy is inviting the reader to the cognitive participation of readers in reconstructing the referent through context.

Similarly, O. Henry's description of the final leaf is short but symbolically dense:

"It was Behrman's masterpiece – he had painted it there the night the last leaf fell.

The author is not giving detailed account of Behrman's thoughts or feelings, but giving the chance to the readers to infer about what Behrman is like and what he is feeling by his actions towards Johnsy's case. The author implicitly shows the act of self-sacrifice can allow readers see how kind-hearted he is. The author himself doesn't give the conclusion, but guides by compressing moral meaning with linguistic economy. This aligns with Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory: minimal linguistic input puts cognitive and emotional effect.

The author does not elaborate when Johnsy says: "I have been a bad girl". This pragmatic context tells readers that she feels guilty for losing hope and regrets. This implicitness reflects linguistic and emotional economy and moral realization is being expressed without any stated and explicit commentary. This understatement is intensifying the meaning and these narratives depend on reader's cognitive capability to fill semantic gaps.

Qahhor portrays a poor man whose ox was stolen, which reflects moral tension and social criticism. Qahhor achieves emotional impact through linguistic restraint and pragmatic suggestion instead of narrating the exposition explicitly.

Qahhor's sentences are given with conciseness and local idiomatic power.



“The death of the horse is the holiday of the dog.”

Here, a proverb is compressing a full moral lesson about envy, misfortune, and opportunism into one line. Author is criticizing, showing the situation where people take advantage of others' misfortune.

One more example is “Let the farmer's house burn, let his ox not be lost.”

In Uzbek culture, this expresses both irony and fatalism — valuing the ox (livelihood) over the house (shelter). It makes the reader infer that ox is such an important property in the lives of people. Here the author is describing the traditional rural life. The author is suggesting moral messages through the story indirectly, expecting readers infer what is wrong and right. The corrupted officials are shown as exploiters of the poor farmer, although no explicit judgement is given; the injustice speaks for itself. The proverb and the ending statement (“a small condition will be known in the fall”) imply that moral consequences — the “gift” has strings attached.

In addition, the author is using the character's silence to show the emotions, shame or social hierarchy -beyond words. For example, “Grandfather Qobil was alone looking at the ground.”

His silence expresses humiliation and helplessness which can be stronger than any words. Another example can be when Amin laughs instead of answering, or when the “translator” takes gifts without any explanation, silence is used to avoid responsibility. The point is that readers can interpret these linguistic economies, compressing in different ways. The economy of Qahhor's narrative aligns with culturally rooted pragmatics, characteristics of Uzbek discourse traditions.

Although both writers use linguistic economy as a cognitive and ethical strategy, they are different in the orientation towards cultural aspects. O. Henry's economy in this short story is individual-centered and compresses moral message into personal act of sacrifice. Qahhor's economy in his story is more socially centered and compresses collective moral reflection, criticism of society and authority into brief, dialogic or silent moments. However, cognitive efficiency still drives interpretation of readers. Pragmatically, both authors make use of understatement, ellipsis, and contextual implicature to provide narrative conciseness and emotional impact.

Comparative Features of Linguistic Economy in The Last Leaf and The Thief

Feature	O. Henry The Last Leaf	Abdulla Qahhor The Thief
Narrative focus	Individual sacrifice	Social morality
Primary device	Ellipsis, irony	Silence and ambiguity
Emotional tone	Sentimental restraint	Moral decline
Cognitive effect	Emphatic inference	Ethical reflection of society

Table 1.

Discussion

The findings show that linguistic economy in short fictions is cognitive-pragmatic phenomenon which formally manifests through structural brevity, ellipsis, and implicature and cognitively relies on reader's background and inferential processes to



reframe the meaning, and pragmatically include involvement of readers in interpreting the message with the cues that author provides.

In the Last Leaf linguistic economy mirrors Western humanist individualism where moral truths are discovered through internal struggles and subtle irony. Readers feel the internal feelings and thoughts of characters by actions they are taking. In the latter one, it shows collectivist and realist ethics and truth is seen within silence, restraint, and shared suffering.

These findings proves that linguistic economy functions not solely as a stylistic choice, but as a reflection of cultural cognition in the way how societies encode their moral and emotional experience through language.

Conclusion

This study highlights how O. Henry and Abdulla Qahhor employ linguistic economy as a way of achieving cognitive and emotional conciseness. Through elliptical narration, pragmatic implicature, and strategic silence, their stories give examples of how linguistic form can be minimalized, yet yield maximal communicative effect. A cognitive-pragmatic perspective demonstrates linguistic economy embodies the cooperation of author with a reader: authors minimize expression; readers maximize inference. Whereas O. Henry's linguistic economy foregrounds irony and redemption, Qahhor's dignity and social realism, criticism. In conclusion, linguistic economy appears as a universal, but culturally flexible principle of human communication and artistic expression through a balance of brevity, relevance, and moral resonance.

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