



THE CONCEPT OF “HEART” IN LITERARY DISCOURSE: A LINGUOCOGNITIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of “heart” in literary discourse from a linguocognitive perspective. The study explores the semantic, metaphorical, symbolic, and cultural characteristics of the concept and its role in representing emotions, inner experiences, moral values, and human cognition. Particular attention is paid to the verbalization of the concept in literary texts and its contribution to the creation of artistic imagery. The analysis demonstrates that the concept of “heart” functions as a universal cognitive unit reflecting both individual and collective perceptions of the human inner world. Literary discourse reveals the multidimensional nature of the concept through metaphorical models, symbolic meanings, and culturally specific interpretations.

Keywords: heart concept, literary discourse, linguocognitive analysis, cognitive linguistics, conceptualization, metaphor, symbolism, verbalization, emotions, literary text.

Introduction

The anthropocentric paradigm in modern linguistics has significantly increased interest in the relationship between language, cognition, and culture. Within this framework, cognitive linguistics focuses on the ways language reflects human conceptualization of reality. One of the central notions of cognitive linguistics is the



concept, which represents a mental structure containing knowledge, cultural values, and collective experiences shared by members of a linguistic community.

Among the universal concepts that occupy an important place in human consciousness, the concept of “heart” deserves particular attention. Although the heart primarily denotes a physiological organ, it has long acquired symbolic, emotional, and cultural meanings in various languages and literary traditions. In literary discourse, the concept of “heart” often serves as a means of expressing emotions, moral qualities, spiritual experiences, and personal values.

The concept has become one of the most productive elements of artistic representation because it enables authors to depict the inner world of characters and convey complex emotional states. Therefore, studying the concept of “heart” in literary discourse contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, cognition, and culture.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the linguocognitive features of the concept of “heart” in literary discourse and to identify its semantic, metaphorical, and symbolic functions in literary texts.

Theoretical Background

In cognitive linguistics, a concept is understood as a mental construct that organizes knowledge about a particular object, phenomenon, or experience. According to conceptual theory, concepts form the basis of human cognition and are reflected in language through lexical units, phraseological expressions, metaphors, and symbols.

The concept of “heart” belongs to the category of universal anthropocentric concepts. It is closely connected with human emotions, psychological states, morality, and spirituality. Across cultures, the heart is perceived not only as an



anatomical organ but also as the center of feelings, love, compassion, courage, and wisdom.

From a linguocognitive perspective, literary discourse provides a unique environment for the representation of concepts because literary language actively employs figurative devices that reveal hidden conceptual structures. Consequently, the study of the concept of “heart” in literary texts allows researchers to identify cognitive models underlying artistic representations of human experience.

The Concept of “Heart” as a Cognitive Unit in Literary Discourse

Literary discourse reflects the conceptual worldview of both the author and the cultural community to which the author belongs. Within this discourse, the concept of “heart” functions as a significant cognitive unit associated with emotional and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Authors frequently use references to the heart to portray characters’ feelings, psychological conflicts, and moral choices. In literary texts, the heart often appears as the center of emotional life:

“Her heart was filled with hope.”

“His heart trembled with fear.”

In such examples, the heart does not refer to a physical organ but rather to a conceptual space where emotions and experiences are located.

The concept also functions as a means of character development. Through descriptions involving the heart, writers communicate personality traits, ethical values, and emotional depth without direct explanation. Consequently, the concept contributes to the construction of literary meaning and enhances readers’ emotional engagement with the text.



Symbolic Functions of the Concept of “Heart”

In addition to its metaphorical dimension, the concept of “heart” possesses significant symbolic value. Symbols differ from ordinary linguistic signs because they carry culturally and historically accumulated meanings that extend beyond their literal interpretation.

The symbolic nature of the heart can be observed across various literary traditions and historical periods. It frequently serves as a representation of human identity, moral integrity, spiritual purity, and emotional authenticity. As a literary symbol, the heart functions as a condensed expression of values that are central to human existence.

The symbolic significance of the concept is closely connected with collective cultural memory. Through repeated use in religious texts, folklore, myths, and literary works, the heart has become associated with fundamental human ideals. Consequently, literary discourse often employs the concept as a symbolic mediator between the individual and society, between personal experience and universal values.

From a linguocognitive perspective, the symbolic function of the heart demonstrates the interaction between conceptual knowledge and cultural cognition. The concept embodies both individual psychological experiences and culturally shared systems of meaning, thereby reflecting the dual nature of human cognition.

The Concept of “Heart” and Character Construction

Characterization represents one of the primary objectives of literary discourse. Authors employ various linguistic and conceptual mechanisms to reveal the personalities, motivations, and moral qualities of literary characters.



The concept of “heart” plays a significant role in this process because it provides access to the internal dimensions of character identity. Rather than describing psychological traits directly, literary discourse often presents them through conceptual references to the heart. This indirect mode of representation enhances artistic expressiveness and allows readers to infer deeper aspects of character psychology.

From a cognitive perspective, the concept serves as a framework through which readers evaluate characters and interpret their actions. The heart becomes a conceptual indicator of sincerity, morality, courage, empathy, and emotional depth. Consequently, it contributes to the formation of character images and influences readers’ emotional responses.

The use of the heart in characterization also reflects broader cultural expectations regarding human behavior and moral conduct. Literary representations of the heart frequently embody socially valued qualities, thereby reinforcing cultural norms and ethical ideals.

Cultural and Cognitive Dimensions of the Concept

Although the concept of “heart” possesses universal characteristics, its interpretation is also influenced by cultural traditions and collective values.

In many literary traditions, the heart is associated with compassion, morality, and emotional sincerity. These cultural associations shape the ways authors conceptualize human experiences and construct literary imagery.

From a linguocognitive perspective, the concept reflects both universal patterns of human cognition and culturally specific modes of conceptualization. Therefore,



the study of the concept of “heart” provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, thought, and culture.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that the concept of “heart” occupies a central position in literary discourse and serves as an important linguocognitive unit. It functions as a means of representing emotions, inner experiences, moral values, and spiritual qualities.

The concept is verbalized through various linguistic mechanisms, including metaphors, symbols, personification, and evaluative expressions. These devices enable authors to construct artistic images, reveal the psychological depth of characters, and communicate complex emotional meanings.

The findings confirm that the concept of “heart” possesses both universal and culturally specific dimensions. As a result, it represents a significant object of linguocognitive research and contributes to a deeper understanding of the cognitive foundations of literary discourse.

From a cultural perspective, the concept of “heart” reflects both universal human experiences and culture-specific values. While its core semantic features remain largely universal across languages and traditions, its peripheral meanings are shaped by particular cultural, ethical, and historical contexts. This dual nature highlights the interaction between universal cognitive processes and culturally conditioned conceptualization.

In conclusion, the concept of “heart” should be regarded as a fundamental element of literary discourse that reveals the interconnection between language, cognition, and culture. Its study contributes to a deeper understanding of how human beings conceptualize emotions and moral experiences through language and how these conceptualizations are artistically represented in literary texts.



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