



UNIVERSITY OF
SS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS
IN TRIPOLIS



LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday,
today, tomorrow

Volume XI.
Issue: 1/2026



Scopus

Lege Artis: language
yesterday, today, tomorrow



Contents

SEMANTIC MEMORY AND CONCEPT REPRESENTATION IN THE HUMAN BRAIN: A BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE.....	2
<i>Munavvar Asgarova, Narmina Aliyeva</i>	
MULTIMODAL PRAGMATICS AS A MEANING FRAMEWORK AND A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN A TRAVEL AGENCY'S SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEOS.....	19
<i>Dominika Čmehýlová-Rašová, Oľga Škvareninová</i>	
COGNITIVE MECHANISMS IN MULTIMODAL MISINFORMATION: THE CASE OF ANTI-VACCINE TWEETS.....	41
<i>Božena Duda, Paulina Mormol-Fura</i>	
CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES THROUGH VISUALS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF CARTOONISH ILLUSTRATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ROLE DURING WARS	62
<i>Ansa Hameed</i>	
THE ROLE OF FOOD AND COOKING IN DEPICTING EMOTIONS IN "LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE" BY LAURA ESQUIVEL.....	85
<i>Robert Kiełtyka</i>	
DETERMINING THE AMBIVALENCE OF EMOTION CONCEPTS RELYING ON VALENCE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL CONCEPTUAL PROXIMATES.....	106
<i>Kostiantyn Mizin, Oleksandr Petrov</i>	
DISPARATE COGNATES: POLISH <i>BRZOZA</i> VS. ENGLISH <i>BIRCH</i>	125
<i>Mikołaj Rychło</i>	
ON (C)OVERT DOMAIN BOUNDARIES IN METAPHOR AND HUMOUR AS EXEMPLIFIED IN SELECTED MULTIMODAL PRESS ADVERTISEMENTS IN ENGLISH.....	142
<i>Anna Stwora</i>	
CONSTRAINTS ON VERBS IN VIETNAMESE SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS: A COGNITIVE-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH.....	158
<i>Ly Ngoc Toan</i>	

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

SEMANTIC MEMORY AND CONCEPT REPRESENTATION IN THE HUMAN BRAIN: A BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE

*Munavvar Asgarova** 

Narmina Aliyeva 

Baku Engineering University

**Corresponding author*

Received: 10.02.2026 **Reviewed:** 23.02.2026 and 25.02.2026

Similarity Index: 0%

Bibliographic description: Asgarova, M. & Aliyeva, N. (2026). Semantic memory and concept representation in the human brain: A behavioural perspective. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 2-18. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.01>

Abstract: The paper examines semantic memory and concept representations at the behavioural level using semi-structured interview. It has been found that participants made sense of concrete and abstract concepts experientially, emotionally, and contextually. Therefore, abstract concepts are more subjective and context-sensitive, while concrete ones are more autonomous and sensory. The results have an implication that semantic knowledge is not a fixed but dynamic system and is continually re-constituted through experience, emotion, and language.

Keywords: semantic memory, concept representation, bilingualism, abstract concepts, behavioural cognition.

1. Introduction

Semantic memory occupies an important place in the information system of the human mind and is defined as the type of memory in which general information about words, concepts, objects, and phenomena is stored. In this respect, semantic memory forms the basis of human cognitive processes such as using language, problem solving, and abstract thinking. Concept representation, on the other hand, tries to explain how this information is organised and represented in the mind. Within the context of this paper, concept representation can be defined as the cognitive processes by which conceptual knowledge is formulated, encoded, and stored in the mind on linguistic, perceptual, and emotional levels. It has been found that the representation of concepts occurs not only in the form of



the symbols of a language but also in the form of visual, motor, and emotional elements (Yee et al. 2018). This reveals that conceptual knowledge has a multidimensional structure.

Behavioural research into semantic memory and concept representation is indispensable in analyzing the world of meaning of the human mind. The discoveries in this field have illuminated some of the basic questions of not only cognitive psychology but also neuroscience. How meanings are represented in the human brain and how conceptual knowledge is organised is one of the most fundamental and controversial questions of cognitive sciences. Semantic memory enables the individual to make sense of the world around him/her, to use language effectively, and to make inferences based on knowledge. Still, it is not completely understood how this system works, how information is represented in the brain, and how concepts form relations with one another.

Neuropsychological and neuroimaging studies conducted in the past have shown that semantic memory is associated with certain regions of the brain – especially the temporal and parietal lobes (Riessman 2008). But the purely biological explanations are not sufficient to give a complete account of the dynamic and context-sensitive character of conceptual representations. Thus, behavioural strategies are complementary in cognition and reveal how people process and package conceptual knowledge (Mar 2011).

Therefore, the main problem of this research is to reveal how semantic memory and concept representations function at the behavioural level, how individuals structure their meaning knowledge, and what the role of these structures in cognitive processes consists in. This issue is meant to address a severe gap in the comprehension of the intellectual operations of the human mind.

The main purpose of this research is to examine how semantic memory and concept representations function at the behavioural level in the human brain. In this regard, the study is supposed to discover that meaning is not only a structure of language, but also a multidimensional mental image that is underpinned by perceptual, motor, and emotional elements. Semantic memory as a complex cognitive system of conceptual organisation is the object-matter of the research. The subject-matter of the research is behavioural interplay between semantic memory and concept representations, with concrete and abstract concepts being differentiated. The content of the study is comprised of qualitative information gathered by means of semi-structured interviews of bilingual adult respondents. The data to be obtained by methods such as reaction times, word associations, and categorical classification tasks will be used to explain the way semantic information is structured. In general, this research aims to contribute to the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience by

revealing the functional role of semantic memory and concept representations in the human mind through behavioural data.

How do semantic memory and concept representations interact at the behavioural level and what is the difference between concrete and abstract concepts based on the multidimensionality of semantic knowledge?

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical foundations of semantic memory investigation

Semantic memory is one of the basic cognitive systems in which the individual stores general information about the world and uses this information in language, thinking, and problem-solving processes. The nature, structure, and functioning of this memory have long been one of the main areas of discussion in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Semantic memory is explained by different theoretical models and those feature-based, connective, and distributive approaches offer different assumptions about the organization of memory (Kumar 2021). It is emphasized that semantic memory is not only a passive structure in which information is stored, but also a dynamic system in which conceptual relations are constantly updated (Murphy 2004). Similarly, Yee & Thompson-Schill (2016) have shown in their current study that semantic memory has a multi-layered architecture both cognitively and neurally, and that information representations can be reorganised according to context. In particular, connectivity models suggest that conceptual information is stored in the form of a network and activated according to its associative power. On the other hand, this system cannot be reduced to a single brain region by focusing on the neurobiological foundations of semantic memory. Semantic information is represented in a distributed form in sensory and motor systems along with temporal and parietal regions (Binder & Desai 2011).

Episodic and semantic memory are closely related systems without clear-cut boundaries; the two systems interact in the processes of information acquisition and recall (Greenberg & Verfaellie 2010). Simultaneously, network-based and dispersive models might be used to explain this interaction and explain the dynamic and context-specific aspects of semantic structure (Kumar et al. 2022). Consequently, the existing theories are able to characterize semantic memory not as a fixed repository of information, but as a multidimensional, contextually reconstructed cognitive system distributed across the brain. Based on the interdisciplinary viewpoint, contemporary studies also define meaning construction as a process that is socially embedded and identity-focused, noting that conceptual systems are also developed in linguistic and cultural positioning (Islamli & Aliyeva 2025).

2.2 Conceptual representational models: a cognitive science perspective

Concept representation is one of the central issues of cognitive science, which tries to explain how people mentally construct objects, events, and abstract phenomena. Theoretical models in this field suggest different assumptions regarding the nature, form, and organization of representations in the brain. Conceptual representations are not only composed of symbolic structures independent of amodal, that is, sensory systems, but also organised in the form of multimodal networks distributed to visual, auditory, and motor systems (Kiefer & Pulvermüller 2012). The concept of amodal representation is interpreted in this study as being a symbolic and modality-free conceptual encoding that is not directly connected with sensory or motor experience. This strategy posits that meaning is not detachable from sensory experiences. In addition, the understanding of abstract concepts is explained by the combination of small units of meaning called meaning components (Khatin-Zadeh & Farsani 2022). People have varying representations of concepts in their brains, with the largest divergence observed in the regions that are linked with social knowledge (Visconti et al. 2025). This strategy contends that an ability to abstract meaning from sensory experiences is incompatible with embodied cognition hypotheses.

In neuroimaging, studies on the representation of abstract concepts showed that three basic dimensions are activated in the areas of the brain, associated with linguistic, social, and internal processes (Vargas & Just 2020). This finding supports that abstract meaning also has a distributed and multidimensional structure. On the other hand, the flexible representation model explains concept representations by suggesting that they are not static but flexibly restructured depending on context and task (Truman & Kutas 2024).

Finally, according to the comparison of distributed semantics with fMRI data, concept representations can be predicted by brain activation patterns (Kaiser et al. 2022). The method is known as computational approaches that integrate symbolic and connectionist models to explore the way conceptual representations are manifested in the activity of the brain. This method enables the state of cognitive representation to be analyzed at the computational level through the integration of symbolic and connective models. It assists researchers to employ computational models to connect the representations of theoretical concepts and the brain activity patterns. Overall, in the existing literature, concept representations are not taken as one, but as multi-layered constructs, which result from the interaction between sensory, amodal, contextual, and distributed processes.

2.3 Behavioural strategies in semantic memory

The study of semantic memory at the behavioural level is an important approach to understanding how individuals access, organise, and use conceptual knowledge. Behavioural approaches disclose not only the neurological basis of semantic memory, but also its functionality in cognitive processes. In this regard, behavioural strategies denote particular experimental activities and visible performance to examine semantic memory, including word association, semantic priming, and verbal fluency tasks. Badre and Wagner (2002) divided semantic access processes into two groups, i.e. automatic and controlled, and suggested that these processes are especially related to the anterior frontal cortex. In their opinion, the fast and independent access mediates processes in the word association or decision-making tasks of automatic memory; the slower and attention-oriented processes are those of controlled memory. Semantic memory is not only a passive store of information, but also a dynamic system that has a strong relationship with executive control (Joordens & Becker 1997). Additionally, the semantic priming tasks shorten the reaction time of meaning-related word pairs and are, therefore, sensitive to the relationship strength of memory (Perea & Rosa 2002). Moreover, Whiteside et al. (2016) showed that category-based (e.g. animal names) and letter-based fluency tasks reflect different cognitive components and that demographic variables such as age and education level in particular affect performance. Demographic variables (especially age and education level) significantly affect verbal fluency and category-based semantic fluency task performance (Hoffman 2018).

Finally, Shao et al. (2012) examined the interaction of semantic access and executive control during word production and revealed that semantic memory is closely related to attention processes with response time and accuracy rate measurements. These results indicate that semantic memory is not a rigid repository of knowledge, but rather a dynamic process that changes depending on the situation, task requirements, and personal variables.

2.4 Neurocognitive correlations in semantic processing

Semantic processing is also a complicated process in cognition that occurs via the combined effort of the language, memory, and perception systems of the brain. Neuroimaging and neuropsychological experiments have demonstrated that semantic memory cannot be localized in one part of the brain; it is rather upheld by a vast complex of brain parts. Based on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies, the anterior and lower regions of the temporal lobe and the inferior parietal cortex are said to be central to semantic representation (Binder & Desai 2011). The integration of linguistic and perceptual information is possible with the help of this network. Based on the neuroimaging findings, scientists discovered that semantic processing does not merely occur in the anterior temporal lobe but also in diffuse networks, which are located in the left hemisphere, such as the inferior frontal gyrus,

angular gyrus, and ventral temporal cortex (Kurada 2024). Patterson et al. (2007), on the other hand, stated that the anterior temporal lobe forms the amodal nucleus of conceptual knowledge and that information from different modalities is integrated inside. This perspective favours the strategy of the so-called hub-and-spoke paradigm, which implies the idea of the organization of conceptual knowledge integrated within and between modalities.

In his research of semantic control operations, Jefferies (2013) demonstrated that the inferior frontal gyrus and posterior temporal areas should be seen as extremely important in the flexible application of semantic information (such as in an ambiguous or out-of-context meaning). These control mechanisms ensure that information is selected in accordance with the task request. Semantic control processes according to lesion and imaging findings involve specifically the left inferior frontal gyrus and posterior middle temporal gyrus as an apparent means of meaningful selection-control (Ergin 2025). In addition, Ralph et al. (2017) combined neurocognitive modelling and neuroimaging data to show that semantic processing works in tandem with both an amodal core and modality-specific representation domains. For example, comprehension of a metaphor such as *time is a river* demands the executive control and integration of linguistic knowledge to select the context-appropriate meaning and creates the perceptual imagery of a flowing river. These results indicate that semantic processing is achieved with the aid of a dynamic neural network and motivated by the holistic connection of language, perception, and executive control systems.

2.5 Multidimensionality of conceptual knowledge

Barsalou (2008) suggested that, within the framework of embodied cognition theory, concepts are re-simulated with activities in sensory and motor systems, and meaning derives directly from perceptual experiences. Emotional valuation and sensory-motor simulation processes have been found to play an active role in the formation and access to conceptual knowledge (Saxbe et al. 2013). These views hold that the mental representation of meaning is based on experiential rather than abstract foundations. In addition, the recent philological theories state that conceptual meaning is indistinguishably coupled with identity making, and it makes sense to consider that linguistic structures are the result of not only mental processes but also identity-making (Asgarova 2025b).

Vigliocco et al. (2009) showed that linguistic, perceptual, and emotional knowledge contribute to concept representations at different levels. While perceptual discrimination capacity decreases with age, the level of conceptual knowledge has been shown to be increasingly decisive in making sense of concepts (Huang et al. 2025). In particular, it has been stated that emotional associations play a critical role in the understanding of abstract concepts and such concepts are often supported by

linguistic cues. Research on identity formation in language-different individuals also reveals that conceptual processing is closely intertwined with self-perception and emotional self-construction, which further supports the opinion that the relation of meaning is formed through experience in personal narrative (Asgarova 2025a).

According to Lynott and Connell (2013), the concept is manifested at varying intensities across the modalities of sensation (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.); this pattern forms the perception signature of each idea. Throughout the perceptual modalities (visual, auditory, tactile), the representation densities of the concepts were found to be measurable, and this finding provides new criteria for the multiple sensory structures of conceptual knowledge (Castro et al. 2015). In this way, conceptual knowledge is based on sensory knowledge and has become measurable in systematic ways. Kousta et al. (2011), on the other hand, showed that the dimensions of emotional valence and arousal affect semantic access speed; notably, words with positive emotional content can be processed faster. Based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above, a behavioural model of semantic memory and concept representation was developed to guide the present study (see Fig. 1).

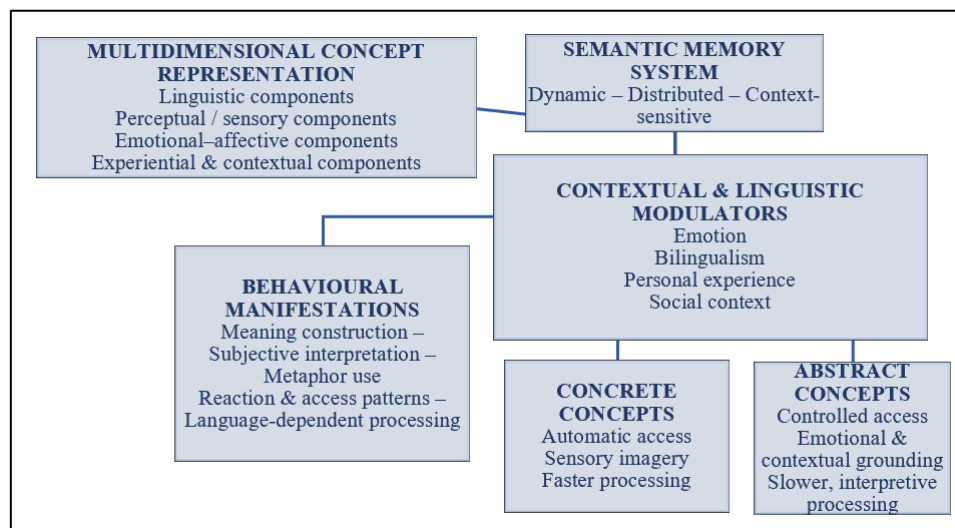


Figure 1. Behavioural model of semantic memory and concept representation. Source: Own processing

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study was designed as a qualitative study examining how semantic memory and concept representations are structured at the behavioural level. The research was conducted within the framework of the phenomenological approach to examining conceptual representation as it aims to reveal how individuals organise semantic knowledge and especially how they form concrete and

abstract concepts. Semi-structured interviews were applied for the data collection. This method facilitates the systematic collection of data concerned with conceptual themes, which are partially predetermined, and assists participants in expressing their subjective experiences on semantic representations in a detailed version. This qualitative research pattern aims to examine the multidimensional and context-sensitive structure of semantic memory in depth on the basis of participatory narratives.

3.2 Participants

A total of 12 adult individuals voluntarily participated in the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 40. The sample consisted of 6 female and 6 male participants. The native language of the participants is Azerbaijani, and their second language is English (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), their language proficiency levels were intermediate). The participants were selected from individuals living in the Azerbaijani cities of Baku, Khirdalan and Sumgayit. In the study, individuals with a cognitive or neurological disorder were excluded from the sample. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and the identity information of the participants was kept confidential in line with ethical principles. The data obtained were used only for scientific purposes.

3.3 Data collection

The study data were collected through semi-structured interviews. While this method allows systematic data collection within the framework of predetermined basic questions, it allows participants to express their opinions in detail. The interviews were conducted individually and each interview lasted about 20-30 minutes. No audio recordings were made during the interviews, and the answers given by the participants were noted by the researcher simultaneously. Verbal consent was obtained from the participants before starting the interviews. The interview questions prepared in advance focused on semantic memory and concept representations, aiming specifically to obtain data on how concrete and abstract concepts are perceived and structured.

3.4 Data analysis

The data obtained within the scope of the research were analyzed within the framework of a qualitative data analysis approach and in line with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) principles. This approach aims to examine in depth the experiences of the participants and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. The written notes taken during the interviews were edited and read many times before the analysis process. In the first stage, the participants' statements were subjected to open coding; thus, meaningful expressions were determined. Then, themes were

created by combining the similar codes. In the analysis process, the subjective perceptions of the participants about concrete and abstract concepts, how they make sense of these concepts, and how they structure the relations between the concepts were handled from an interpretive perspective. The themes obtained were evaluated in the context of semantic memory and concept representations and interpreted within the framework of the research question.

4. Results

The participants' statements showed that semantic knowledge is structured not only by verbal descriptions but largely by personal experiences. For instance, in the case of concrete concepts, the participants tended to define meaning through visual and sensory images. As an example, one of the participants responded, *'When I say "table", I imagine a table in the house first, the word itself comes later.'* These remarks show that semantic memory is dynamically formulated on experiential elements. When it comes to abstract concepts, it has been observed that the interpretation process is more personal and context-sensitive. One participant stated that abstract concepts were structured with emotional and experiential connotations by saying, *'When I think of the word "justice", there is no clear picture, but the injustices I experience come to mind.'* This fact suggests that semantic representation is created based on personal experiences, not based on a predetermined structure.

The interviews also demonstrated sharp disparities between the mental conceptions of concrete and abstract concepts. While most of the participants defined concrete concepts quickly and automatically, they made longer explanations for abstract concepts. As an example, one of the respondents gave the answer, *'When I talk about an apple, I unconsciously imagine something red, when I talk about freedom, I can only stutter and be afraid to imagine.'* It is noteworthy that metaphors are frequently used in the definition of abstract concepts. Another participant demonstrated that it is through concrete experience that one conceptualizes abstract meanings, and she added, *'Freedom is like breathing to me.'* This suggests that abstract concepts are represented in an indirect and multilayered way, not symbolically. The findings reveal that abstract concepts are structured by the interaction of linguistic, emotional, and social components.

According to the participants' responses, emotions have a decisive role in semantic representations. It has been observed that emotional associations facilitate access to meaning, especially in abstract concepts. Another participant insisted on the importance of emotion in semantic access and said, *'In this case, when I think of the word "happiness", my affective response supersedes the lexical item itself.'* Some respondents reported very long intervals in defining the concepts attributed to negative emotions. For example, a participant who said, *'the word "loss" is a little difficult because it is a*

personal thing,' stated that emotional load affects cognitive processing. These findings indicate that semantic memory is not only a cognitive system but also an emotional regulation process. It has become clear that meaning cannot be considered independent of emotional experiences.

The statements of the bilingual participants showed that semantic representations can vary depending on the language. The participants stated that they thought of some concepts more naturally and faster in their mother tongue. One participant added, *'Certain words happen to be more neutral in English, compared to my mother tongue.'* With regard to specifically abstract concepts, the statements that second language reduces emotional load have attracted attention. Language does produce semantic distance, for instance, one of the respondents noted, *'When I imagine "justice" in English, it does sound more academic.'*

This result shows that semantic memory is not closed to language context and that conceptual representations can be reorganised during bilingual interaction, demonstrating a linguistically context-sensitive and flexible structure. The responses of the participants clearly revealed that semantic representations can vary according to context. It has been stated that the same concept evokes different meanings in different situations. One of the interviewees declared, *'The word "family" seems different at work and at home.'* Semantic information is, therefore, reconstituted in contextual form and not stored in a predetermined repository. The participants stated that they often interpret concepts according to their emotional and social situation. Contextual flexibility was further exhibited by a participant who said, *'The word "stress" has a different meaning in the exam situation compared to the work situation.'* Contextual flexibility is the capacity of a concept meaning to vary depending on the social, emotional, or situational context. Therefore, the participants reported that *stress* feels different during exams than at work, and *family* carries distinct connotations at home versus in professional settings. These findings reveal that, in addition to its context-sensitive nature, semantic memory is a functional and dynamic system. Table 1 presents the main behavioural differences in participants' responses to concrete and abstract concepts, which emerged from the interview results.

Table 1. Distinction of concrete and abstract concepts. Source: Own processing

Aspect	Concrete concepts	Abstract concepts
Processing	Fast, automatic	Slow, reflective
Representation	Sensory, visual	Emotional, experiential
Context	More stable	Highly context-dependent

5. Discussion

The semi-structured interview findings of this study reveal that semantic knowledge is largely structured by the participants on the basis of personal experiences. The statements of the participants such as *'what I experienced before thinking about the word comes to my mind'*, *'some concepts are like memories for me'*, and *'meaning for me is more a memory than a definition'* show that semantic representation is an experience-based process rather than a dictionary-based structure. These findings coincide with the embodied cognition approach, which argues that conceptual knowledge is based on perceptual and experiential foundations (Barsalou 2008).

In the literature, it is emphasized that semantic memory is a distributed and multidimensional system (Binder & Desai 2011; Kiefer & Pulvermüller 2012). The narratives of the participants demonstrate the mechanisms how this multidimensionality works at a subjective level. Particularly, the fact that one of the respondents uses the statement *'the same word may evoke something entirely different in me than in someone else'* justifies the view by Murphy (2004) that semantic memory is a specific dynamic and personal system. However, while common representations come to the fore in the current literature, it is seen that individual life plays a more pivotal role in semantic structuring, according to this study. In this respect, the findings show that semantic memory is not only a cognitive but also a subjective structure.

The accounts of the participants indicated that mental images of concrete concepts developed faster and unconsciously, whereas abstract concepts were demanding in terms of cognitive effort and elaboration. The expressions such as *'I do not stop when I say table, but I have to make a sentence when I say freedom'* and *'I try to express myself in abstract words'* clearly reflect this difference. The findings are consistent with the models that distinguish between automated and controlled semantic access processes (Badre & Wagner 2002).

In the literature, it is suggested that abstract concepts are mostly represented through linguistic networks (Vargas & Just 2020). However, in this study, the participants' explanations of abstract concepts with metaphors (e.g., *'Freedom is like breathing for me'*; *'Justice is a sense of balance'*) and emotional descriptions are remarkable. This is aligned with the model of flexible representation that postulates that conceptual representations are restructured flexibly depending on context and experience (Truman & Kutas 2024). The results of the findings are that there are multi-layered representations of abstract concepts that are supported by not only symbolic representations, but also experience and emotional representations.

Other statements by the participants reveal that emotions are central and positive in the process of semantic representations. The answers such as *'It is difficult to even say some words'*, *'I get stuck on words with heavy emotions'*, and *'Meaning starts with feeling'* suggest that emotional components do not only accompany but also establish the meaning. This correlates with the previous research that emotional value and arousal influence semantic access (Kousta et al. 2011).

However, the findings of this study show that emotions determine not only the speed of processing, but also the content of meaning. The participants' hesitations, especially in concepts such as *loss*, *justice*, and *happiness*, support the executive control and semantic access interaction (emphasized by Shao et al. (2012)) at a qualitative level. One of the phrases of the participants, *'everyone understands this word, but it is different with me'*, gives the impression that emotions personalize semantic representation. In this context, the findings strongly suggest that semantic memory is not only a cognitive but also an emotional structure (Vigliocco et al. 2009).

These narratives of the bilingual participants showed that the representations of semantics were language context-dependent. The statements such as *'When I think in English, the word does not belong to me'*, *'I feel more in my mother tongue'*, and *'Words in the second language are colder'* show that the second language creates emotional distance. This observation can be linked to the literature arguing that language is able to establish emotional and semantic distances (Greenberg & Verfaellie 2010; Shokrkon & Nicoladis 2022).

In addition, the statements of the participants such as *'The same word sounds different in a different environment'* and *'The meaning changes according to the context'* show that semantic memory has a context-sensitive and flexible structure. Context in this work appeared not only as a cognitive but also as a social and emotional structure. Thus, it has been shown that semantic memory is constantly reconstructed with the individual's life and linguistic positioning. The statements of the participants such as *'one and the same word is not the same for everyone'*, *'when someone else hears a word, they may feel different things'*, and *'the meaning I understand may not suit someone else'* provide a critical perspective on the treatment of meaning as a universal and fixed structure.

These results indicate that semantic representation may vary depending on the experiences of individual background. In the literature, it is assumed that semantic memory may be widely organised as common conceptual networks (Murphy 2004; Kumar 2021). However, the qualitative findings of this study show that participants construct meaning on the basis of personal experiences, emotions, and contexts.

This implies that, at the inter-individual level, semantic representations can be more subjective and flexible. To a certain degree, this variability can be attributed to the context-sensitive semantic restructuring models (Yee & Thompson-Schill 2016). However, the individual differences revealed in this study indicate that context has not only a situational but also a biographical and experiential dimension. Therefore, the findings make an original contribution to cognitive science by revealing that semantic memory is a dynamic structure that is constantly reshaped by the individual's life experiences rather than a fixed and common system. Table 2 illustrates how the literature review correlates with the participants' answers.

Table 2. Dialogue between theoretical and participatory voice. Source: Own processing

Participant voice (illustrative)	Literature anchor	Interpretation
'When I say table, I imagine the object first.'	Barsalou (2008)	Concrete concepts are grounded in perceptual experience.
'Justice has no picture; it reminds me of what I lived through.'	Kousta et al. (2011)	Abstract concepts are emotionally and experientially grounded.
'The same word feels different in different situations.'	Yee & Thompson-Schill (2016)	Semantic representations are context-dependent.

5.1 Limitations and future research

This study is based on a qualitative design and was conducted with a limited number of participants. Even though the findings are quite insightful, it is limited in its generalisability. The fact that the data, which is based only on the self-reports, may have increased the subjective nature of the participant comments. Although the given examples demonstrate particular cases, a wider scope of contexts would be more insightful to investigate. In addition, the behavioural measures were not supported by the neuroimaging data. Future studies can be conducted with larger and culturally diverse samples. The presentation of quantitative results using experimental and neuroscientific techniques will help to fill in the gaps of the whole picture of semantic representation processes.

6. Conclusion

This research was intended to uncover the representative variations involving concrete and abstract concepts through analyzing how semantic memory and concept representations are organised at the behavioural level. The qualitative findings obtained in line with the research question showed that semantic knowledge is a multidimensional system that is not only constantly reconstructed experientially, emotionally, and contextually, but also supported by neurocognitive networks, rather than a fixed, universal, and exclusively language-based structure in the human mind. These interpretations rely on the narratives of the participants and thus should be interpreted in the framework of qualitative behavioural evidence.

The participants consider the use of semantic memory to be fast, automatic, and sensory-based, particularly in concrete concepts, but abstract concepts involve slower, controlled, and affective processing. This outcome justifies the difference between the automated semantic access and executive control processes developed at the behavioural level and addressed throughout neurocognitive literature. In this respect, the present findings are consistent with, rather than demonstrative of, the mechanisms proposed in neurocognitive models. In response to the research question, it can be said that the behavioural functioning of semantic memory differs depending on the type of concept, and this difference is based on the interaction between distributed semantic networks and control mechanisms.

Therefore, emotional components play a constructive role in semantic representation. The fact that the participants refer to their own emotional experiences, especially in their explanations of abstract concepts, suggests that semantic memory works in a holistic interaction between the processes and semantic networks associated with the limbic system. This implies that semantic memory is not merely a cognitive system but also a neurocognitive one that is integrated with emotional regulation processes.

The results retrieved within the framework of bilingualism show that language serves as a neurocognitive filter of semantic representations. The more neutral and distant perceptions of the concepts in a second language by the participants indicate that the reorganization of semantic representations depends on the linguistic context and can be facilitated by various patterns of neural activation. From a neurocognitive perspective, this result also confirms the flexible and context-sensitive structure of semantic memory. However, such neurocognitive interpretations remain theoretical extensions grounded in existing literature rather than direct empirical measurements within this study.

This study, consequently, indicates that concept representation in semantic memory is a dynamic system at the behavioural level, and this interaction phenomenon between experience, emotion, and language is supported by distributed neurocognitive networks. The results offer a peculiar and comprehensive contribution to cognitive science, which demonstrates that semantic knowledge is the system that is continuously reorganised under the impact of personal experience as well as neurocognitive regulation operations, but not an authoritative structure of representations.

Abbreviations

fMRI – Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging

IPA – Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

References


1. Asgarova, M. (2025a). Constructing identity letter by letter: Self-perception and identity development in young adults living with dyslexia. In *The scientific heritage*, 161, p. 45-49, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15524058>
2. Asgarova, M. (2025b). The silent dialogue: Exploring the role of inner speech and the prefrontal cortex in cognitive and emotional regulation. In *Euroglobal journal of linguistics and language education*, 2 (5), p. 89-96, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69760/egjlle.2500201>
3. Badre, D. & Wagner, A.D. (2002). Semantic retrieval, mnemonic control, and prefrontal cortex. In *Behavioral and cognitive neuroscience reviews*, 1 (3), p. 206-218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534582302001003002>
4. Barsalou, L.W. (2008). Grounded cognition. In *Annual review of psychology*, 59, p. 617-645. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093639>
5. Binder, J.R. & Desai, R.H. (2011). The neurobiology of semantic memory. In *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 15 (11), p. 527-536. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2011.10.001>
6. Castro, V.L., Cheng, Y., Halberstadt, A.G. & Grühn, D. (2015). EUREKA! A conceptual model of emotion understanding. In *Emotion review*, 8 (3), p. 258-268. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073915580601>
7. Ergin, D.D. (2025). The cortical representation of phonological, semantic, and syntactic processing of words: A comparative analysis of neuroimaging findings. In *Ankara university journal of social sciences*, 16 (2), p. 261-271. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/4986572>
8. Greenberg, D.L. & Verfaellie, M. (2010). Interdependence of episodic and semantic memory: Evidence from neuropsychology. In *Journal of the international neuropsychological society*, 16 (5), p. 748-753. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355617710000676>
9. Hoffman, P. (2018). An individual differences approach to semantic cognition: Divergent effects of age on representation, retrieval and selection. In *Scientific reports*, 8, 8145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-26569-0>
10. Huang, S., Pollak, S.D. & Xie, W. (2025). Conceptual knowledge increasingly supports emotion understanding as perceptual contribution declines with age. In *Nature communications*, 16, 6838. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-62210-1>
11. Islamli, L. & Aliyeva, N. (2025). The impact of culture on language use and development. In *International research journal of multidisciplinary scope (IRJMS)*, 6 (4), p. 70-91. <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2025.v06i04.04604>
12. Jefferies, E. (2013). The neural basis of semantic cognition: converging evidence from neuropsychology, neuroimaging and TMS. In *Cortex*, 49 (3), p. 611-625. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2012.10.008>
13. Joordens, S. & Becker, S. (1997). The long and short of semantic priming effects in lexical decision. In *Journal of experimental psychology: Learning, memory, and cognition*, 23 (5), p. 1083-1105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.23.5.1083>
14. Kaiser, D., Jacobs, A.M. & Cichy, R.M. (2022). Modelling brain representations of abstract concepts. In *PLOS computational biology*, 18 (2), e1009837. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1009837>

15. Khatin-Zadeh, O. & Farsani, D. (2022). The understanding of abstract concepts: a perspective from distributed models of conceptual representation. In *Discover psychology*, 2 (34). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-022-00048-0>
16. Kiefer, M. & Pulvermüller, F. (2012). Conceptual representations in mind and brain: theoretical developments, current evidence and future directions. In *Cortex*, 48 (7), p. 805-825. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2011.04.006>
17. Kousta, S.T., Vigliocco, G., Vinson, D.P., Andrews, M. & Del Campo, E. (2011). The representation of abstract words: Why emotion matters. In *Journal of experimental psychology: General*, 140 (1), p. 14-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021446>
18. Kumar, A.A. (2021). Semantic memory: A review of methods, models, and current challenges. In *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 28 (1), p. 40-80. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-020-01792-x>
19. Kumar, A.A., Steyvers, M. & Balota, D.A. (2022). A critical review of network-based and distributional approaches to semantic memory structure and processes. In *Topics in cognitive science*, 14 (1), p. 54-77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12548>
20. Kurada, H.Z. (2024). Neuromodulation in semantic research: A new perspective [in Turkish]. In *Dil dergisi*, 175 (2), p. 71-91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33690/dilder.1523450>
21. Lynott, D. & Connell, L. (2013). Modality exclusivity norms for 400 nouns: The relationship between perceptual experience and surface word form. In *Behavior research methods*, 45, p. 516-526. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-012-0267-0>
22. Mar, R.A. (2011). The neural bases of social cognition and story comprehension. In *Annual review of psychology*, 62, p. 103-134. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120709-145406>
23. Murphy, G.L. (2004). *The big book of concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
24. Patterson, K., Nestor, P.J. & Rogers, T.T. (2007). Where do you know what you know? The representation of semantic knowledge in the human brain. In *Nature reviews neuroscience*, 8, p. 976-987. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn2277>
25. Perea, M. & Rosa, E. (2002). The effects of associative and semantic priming in the lexical decision task. In *Psychological research*, 66, p. 180-194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-002-0086-5>
26. Ralph, M.A.L., Jefferies, E., Patterson, K. & Rogers, T.T. (2017). The neural and computational bases of semantic cognition. In *Nature reviews neuroscience*, 18, p. 42-55. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn.2016.150>
27. Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand oaks, CA: Sage.
28. Saxbe, D.E., Yang, X., Borofsky, L.A. & Immordino-Yang, M.H. (2013). The embodiment of emotion: language use during the feeling of social emotions predicts cortical somatosensory activity. In *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 8 (7), p. 806-812. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nss075>
29. Shao, Z., Roelofs, A. & Meyer, A.S. (2012). Sources of individual differences in the speed of naming objects and actions: the contribution of executive control. In *Quarterly journal of experimental psychology*, 65 (10), p. 1927-1944. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2012.670252>
30. Shokrkon, A. & Nicoladis, E. (2022). The directionality of the relationship between executive functions and language skills: a literature review. In *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 848696. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.848696>
31. Truman, A. & Kutas, M. (2024). Flexible conceptual representations. In *Cognitive science*, 48 (6), e13475. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.13475>


32. Vargas, R. & Just, M.A. (2020). Neural representations of abstract concepts: Identifying underlying neurosemantic dimensions. In *Cerebral cortex*, 30 (4), p. 21572166. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhz229>
33. Vigliocco, G., Meteyard, L., Andrews, M. & Kousta, S.T. (2009). Toward a theory of semantic representation. In *Language and cognition*, 1 (2), p. 219-247. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/LANGCOG.2009.011>
34. Visconti di Oleggio Castello, M., Dupré la Tour, T. & Gallant, J.L. (2025). Individual differences shape conceptual representation in the brain. In *bioRxiv*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2025.08.22.671848>
35. Whiteside, D.M., Kealey, T., Semla, M., Luu, H., Rice, L., Basso, M.R. & Roper, B. (2016). Verbal fluency: Language or executive function measure? In *Applied neuropsychology: Adult*, 23, p. 29-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23279095.2015.1004574>
36. Yee, E. & Thompson-Schill, S. L. (2016). Putting concepts into context. In *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 23 (4), p. 1015-1027. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-015-0948-7>
37. Yee, E., Jones, M.N. & McRae, K. (2018). Semantic memory. In *Stevens' handbook of experimental psychology and cognitive neuroscience*, 4th ed. New York: Wiley, p. 319-356. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119170174.epcn309>

Contact data

Author # 1

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Munavvar Asgarova MA in Linguistics Lecturer Department of Foreign Languages Baku Engineering University Hasan Aliyev str., 120, Khirdalan, AZ0102, Azerbaijan muasgarova@beu.edu.az Cognitive linguistics, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics.</p>
--	---	---

Author # 2

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Narmina Aliyeva PhD. in Linguistics Associate Professor / Head of Department Department of Foreign Languages Baku Engineering University Hasan Aliyev str., 120, Khirdalan, AZ0102, Azerbaijan neliyeva@beu.edu.az Discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, semantics.</p>
---	---	--

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

MULTIMODAL PRAGMATICS AS A MEANING FRAMEWORK AND A GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN A TRAVEL AGENCY'S SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEOS

*Dominika Čmehýlová-Rašová** 

Oľga Škvareninová 

University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

**Corresponding author*

Received: 2.02.2026 **Reviewed:** 14.02.2026 and 26.02.2026

Similarity Index: 0%

Bibliographic description: Čmehýlová-Rašová, D. & Škvareninová, O. (2026). Multimodal pragmatics as a meaning framework and a guiding principle in a travel agency's social media videos. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 19-40. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.02>

Abstract: Travel agency video presentations on social media function as multimodal media products that combine structural elements to ensure the understanding of pragmatic meaning and achieve communicative effect. Drawing on media linguistics and pragmatic theories, the study employs multimodal discourse analysis to examine structural elements of such presentations and to show how multimodal pragmatics shapes a cultivated, semantically synergistic, and targeted media product.

Keywords: multimodality, pragmatic meaning, synergy of modalities, cultural aspect, video presentation, social media, multimodal discourse analysis, model of multimodal pragmatics of video presentation.

1. Introduction

The pragmatic-communicative approach, which has been employed in mass media communication research since the 1970s, was primarily grounded in the view of language use as a socio-communicative and functionally differentiated system. This framework is characterized by functional complementarity and provides a more objective reflection of real speech situations, leading to the blurring and dissolution of rigid boundaries between individual subsystems, varieties, or functional styles (Bosák 1995). The recognition of pragmatic meanings was based on the gradual identification of the communication situation, intention, the relationship between users and linguistic signs, the



ambivalence of statements in context, and the relationships and interactions among communicants (Rašová 2013).

Methodologically, the identification of meanings drew on speech act theory (Austin 1962), conversational implicature theory (Grice 1975), the principle of relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1986), methods of conversational analysis and interactional approaches (Labov & Fanshel 1977; Sacks et al. 1974), as well as discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1972). Traditional research units included mainly news articles, television programmes, and political discussions as primary verbal texts, while their other structural components were not systematically examined, although their constitutive role in meaning-making had already been indicated in Barthes' semiotic analyses in the 1960s – namely anchorage and relay as functions of the linguistic message with regard to the (twofold) iconic message (see more in Barthes 1977) and in the concept of contextualization cues developed within Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics (see more in Levinson 1997).

The need for "multisensory" (Vužňáková et al. 2022: 238) research has been promoted since the early 1920s, including in psychological contexts, where the participation of various sensory modalities in overall perception has been emphasized (Kaderka 2017). Following earlier semiotic approaches, this need was also reflected in Halliday's school of social semiotics (1979), later in Kress and Van Leeuwen's concept of visual grammar (1996), and in multimodal research focusing on modes, such as image, moving image, writing, layout, gesture, 3D objects, and soundtrack (2006). At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, multimodal analysis became established mainly with the development of audiovisual and digital media products; for example, over the past ten years, multimodal research has grown by an average of 38% annually (Lu 2025). The meaning of such media products is constructed through the interaction of multiple modalities and therefore constitutes an object of interest in media linguistics (cf. Cingerová & Dulebová 2023; Luginbühl 2015; Perrin 2011; Škvareninová & Čmehýlová-Rašová 2025). From the pragmatic perspective on the perception of this interaction, meaning is constructed according to the principle of multimodal pragmatics (MP), which organizes the synergistic combination of media product modalities into an interactive and intentionally oriented communicative act (see more in Rašová 2013). In the processes of production and interpretation based on the MP principle, the relationships and interconnections among modalities become more readily apparent, thereby increasing the precision and effectiveness of the media product.

Multimodal pragmatics changes the conventional understanding of pragmatics (the relationship of the user of a linguistic sign to the linguistic sign as the dominant component; cf. Levinson 2000; Meibauer

2008) into a synergy of multiple modalities (modes) in a media product. In contemporary contexts, such an approach is also appropriate for marketing video formats, which shape attitudes, evoke emotions, and promote the identification of recipients with the presented values. In this respect, we refer to video presentations whose focus on working-age audiences entails higher demands on aesthetic qualities, cultural functions, and semantic precision. Multimodality here becomes a direct and targeted feature of a cultivated media product that conveys a brand and service as a lifestyle, value, and cultural experience. Within this conceptual framework, the multimodal style-forming process is understood as both a deliberate and a spontaneous composition of a conglomerate of meanings represented by a preferred combination of materialized expressions. Moreover, the set of meaning-making decisions is complemented by symptomatic meanings, which arise as a consequence of situational conditions, inclusive of the structure of the media through which meanings are materialized (Zoller 2024).

At present, multimodality represents not only a range of theoretical concepts developed by different schools of thought and research traditions, but also a set of diverse methodological tools (Jewitt et al. 2025). Although the focus remains on the linguistic, auditory, and visual aspects of meaning-making, research is expanding to include other modalities, such as digital touch (Jewitt et al. 2019), olfactory (Esteban-Romero et al. 2025), taste and smell (Mondada 2020; 2023), and the use of multimodality in teaching and learning (Lv et al. 2024). Less attention (if any) has been paid to the perception of multimodality, the recipient and their inter-individual differences and affective responses, the impact of modal interaction on individuals and their subsequent reactions (Holsanova 2012), cross-cultural differences, and the development of educational applications (Lu 2025). Within the groundwork of MP, current empirical research focuses, for example, on the interaction of modes; the creation, interpretation, and transfer of pragmatic meaning in the process of translating multimodal texts (Dicerto 2018); cross-cultural pragmatic contexts, including cultural sensitivity (Indarti 2024); nonverbal communication (Madella & Wharton 2023); along with digital communication, where visual and audiovisual elements function as pragmatic multimodal markers of online humour (Dynel 2020). This area is methodologically moving towards multimodal corpus-based approaches (Huang 2021) and the study of modal and intermodal compatibility in human–machine communication (Ji 2025), but it remains a developing research perspective rather than a fully established theory.

2. Research framework

The aim of the study is to demonstrate, on the basis of empirical digital video material produced by a travel agency on selected social media platforms (Facebook and YouTube), that MP functions not only as a constructive framework, but also as a meaning principle through which the integration and

combination of applied modalities contribute to the creation of a cultivated, coherent, and intentionally oriented communicative act, and to outline potential implications for marketing communication practice. Within the research methodology, we pose the following research question: *How does the interaction of multimodal components shape the pragmatic effects of a cultivated media product?* In order to provide an adequate answer, it is necessary to clarify the choice of research units, justify the methodological apparatus, and exemplify the integration of pragmatic modalities. Part of the analytical goal is to propose a model for coding modalities.

The focus of our research is the travel agency CK TUI ReiseCenter Slovensko, s. r. o., which is one of the largest travel groups in the world. On its website, the company presents itself through an offer of reliable and high-quality travel packages, with the emphasis on verified service and customer satisfaction (<https://www.tui-reisecenter.sk/>). The agency has been operating on the Slovak market since 2004 and cooperates with several German tour operators. In addition to the website, it is active on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

The reception of media products on the Facebook and YouTube platforms takes place at a contemplative level (i.e., at the level of cognitive and reflexive-oriented reception). These products are easily accessible and representative in terms of multimodal formats and their comparability in terms of length and style. Although Instagram has video content, its typical fragmentary nature, trendiness, and accelerated, even scrolling reception do not sufficiently represent the idea of MP. In contrast to the YouTube channel, the number of Reels on Facebook, which function as a continuously growing format, can be identified only through Meta's metadata and approximately dated through user comments on this medium. Given this fact and the synchronous nature of the research, such quantification is not methodologically necessary.

A representative sample of advertising videos was selected on the basis of the following criteria: short videos from the period from January 2023 to January 2026, with a duration of up to 60 seconds, that contain verbal component, as not all videos met this requirement – on YouTube channel, only 6 videos did so. The research material consists of ten short advertising videos: 5 Reels with working titles from the TUI ReiseCenter Slovensko Facebook page (Reel Black Friday, *s.a.*; Reel Christmas, *s.a.*; Reel Tokyo, *s.a.*; Reel Vision, *s.a.*; Reel Warmth, *s.a.*) and 5 advertising spots from the TUI Slovakia YouTube channel (Letná dovolenka 2026 s TUI, *s.a.* [Summer holiday 2026 with TUI]; Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!, *s.a.* [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!]; TUI spot 2024, *s.a.* [TUI spot 2024]; Zažite s TUI najkrajšie destinácie, *s.a.* [Experience the most beautiful destinations with TUI]; Zima s TUI, *s.a.* [Winter with TUI]), which capture multimodal

interaction and pragmatic meaning given by text, theme, image, body language, sound, atmosphere, event context, etc. The selected videos meet the following parameters:

- a) maximum multimodality – because more modalities bring a clearer pragmatic meaning;
- b) thematic diversity – since MP is not limited to one type of content;
- c) qualitative properties – as technical processing influences pragmatic meaning;
- d) representativeness – as long as MP reflects the typical style of the brand;
- e) user interaction – because when users interact with videos through subscriptions, comments, emoticons, and likes, a broader multimodal framework is created.





Methodologically, we draw on multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) (cf. Cingerová & Motyková 2017; O'Halloran 2008), which "emphasizes the coordination between dynamic and static semiotic resources" (Chen et al. 2025: 99). Within the outlined framework of media linguistics, we employ the concept of the media product as discourse. Following the modes defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), we observe multimodal coding at the *verbal, visual, auditory, and intermodal levels*. The verbal component (verbalisation) is reflected, for example, in the presence of spoken language through voice-over, written text (subtitles, slogans, inscriptions), and expressive linguistic devices, whereby it is linked to the visual modality. The visual component (visualisation) represents image content, colour and light, composition, space, and the body language of participants (proxemics, posture, kinesics, gesture, facial expression, eye behaviour), in conjunction with visible text connected to the verbal level. The auditory component (sonorization) includes music, sound effects, and paralinguistic features accompanying verbal expressions through voice-over. The intermodal component is represented by the semiotic interrelationship and interweaving of the individual levels.

All verbal examples given in the text are in Slovak; their English translations, prepared by the authors, are provided in square brackets. Due to the quantity of data and in order to maintain the flow of the text, we do not specify the original language and the translation for each example.

3. Analysis and results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe, on the basis of the defined levels of multimodal coding, how individual components are combined into a cultivated video format and how they influence pragmatic meaning. To illustrate the analytical procedure, we first present a detailed multimodal pragmatic analysis of one representative Reel from Facebook (Table 1) and one video from YouTube (Table 2), while the detailed analytical procedure was applied to all Reels and videos in the corpus. The next step consists of a platform-specific synthesis of the findings, followed by a corpus-level integration.

Table 1. Multimodal coding of the Reel Vision, *s.a.*, on Facebook with an emphasis on the interaction of modalities and the identification of pragmatic meaning. Source: Own processing

Verbal level	Visual level	Auditory level
<p>Slogan: <i>Ak je toto váš plán na rok 2026... tak ste tu správne!</i> [If this is your plan for 2026... then you're in the right place!] <i>ak-tak</i> [if-then] – selects the target audience <i>toto</i> [this] – deictically refers to the visual content of the video, <i>váš plán</i> [your plan] – (vy) <i>patríte</i> [(you) belong] – inclusive strategy.</p> <p>Accompanying text: <i>Miesto pri okne. Letenka do vysnívanej destinácie. 🎫 predstava na rok 2026</i> [A window seat. A ticket to a dream destination. A vision for 2026]: visual strength, nominalisation, sequencing of dreams.</p> <p>Tu ste správne ❤️ [You're in the right place]: confirms the relationship and enables the user to identify with the scene.</p> <p>Ak je toto aj vaša vízia na rok 2026, napíšte nám ✈️ do komentára a pod'me spolu niečo vymyslieť' 📝... [If this is also your vision for 2026, write in the comments and let's come up with something together]: a directive speech act mitigated by emojis, motivating and reinforcing an inclusive strategy.</p> <p>Teda pardon, niekam spolu odletieť' 😊 [So sorry, let's fly somewhere together]: humour and informality.</p> <p>Flexibilné odlety a prílety, široká ponuka destinácií a tie najlepšie letecké spoločnosti 🤝 [Flexible departures and arrivals, a wide range of destinations, and the best airlines]: a marketing text that outlines advantages without offering anything concrete.</p> <p>The data 2026, year, vision: frame the context. </p> <p>Viewer interaction: passive reception of the video, related to the content of the video and its interactional format; the aim is to maintain and construct the brand's style and mood. </p>	<p>Subjective camera shot: the viewer is positioned as the sole actor; identification takes place, emotions are evoked, and personal experience is recalled. If a face were visible, the meaning would be closed; the absence of a face opens up meaning, aiming at a universal recipient.</p> <p>Image: iconically represents a dream-like experience; the image mentally projects the text and enables the projection of experience; the focus is not on a specific destination.</p> <p>Composition: the user's perspective from an airplane looking at seaside destinations signifies perspective, the new year 2026, and dreams.</p> <p>Editing: rapid cuts alternating between night and day shots maintain attention, increase emotional tensivity, and evoke the speed of flight.</p> <p>Colour contrast: day/night – light/dark colours – linked to the editing; evokes a sense of temporal flow, while the selected colour scheme sustains attention.</p> <p>Emojis:  bridge the textual and visual components of the video, soften the verbal message, and guide the recipient.</p> <p>Logo at the end of the video:  its placement is intentional, functioning as a cultivated visual full stop of the brand; it does not "shout" at the viewer.</p>	<p>Piano music track: creates a travel-related atmosphere evokes calmness, purity, and a positive emotional response.</p> <p>Regular rhythm and moderate tempo: sustain attention, smoothly accompany the visual vision, and enhance its emotional perception.</p> <p>Balanced sound intensity: intended to ensure stable auditory perception both through computer speakers and headphones.</p> <p>Duration of the music track: generates a sense of temporal flow or movement through time.</p>
Intermodal level		
<p>Verbalisation of the Reel Vision The verbal level constitutes an informational and affective framework that supports the visual and auditory levels. Expressions such as <i>this</i>, <i>you're in the right place</i> and <i>your vision</i> are pragmatically complete only when combined with the visual component. The verbal component guides the interpretation of the image and provides the viewer with instructions on how to perceive it.</p>	<p>Visualisation of the Reel Vision The visual level projects emotions and experience by concretising the words and emotions created by the verbal and auditory components. It renders the vision of the future tangible through images, stabilises the emotions evoked by the music, and bridges meaning between the verbal and auditory components of the video.</p>	<p>Sonorization of the Reel Vision Sound complements the meaning of both the visual and verbal levels. The auditory component fulfils a stabilising function: the smooth musical track balances the rapid editing, ensures clear transitions between images, and creates an emotional background for the notion of vision.</p>

The MP of all analysed Reels on Facebook is briefly summarized in the following overview:

- 1) The Reel Black Friday, *s.a.*, uses a verbal appeal, a colourful visual contrast, and realistic sound effects to decode the selling offer.
- 2) The Reel Christmas, *s.a.*, combines an informative text, Christmas visuals, and typical music to create an easy-to-read catalogue of Christmas markets.
- 3) The Reel Tokyo, *s.a.*, encourages the viewer to buy air tickets with a female voice-over, while applying a rational verbal and visual contrast between travelling by car and by plane.

4) The Reel Vision, *s.a.*, uses a subtle verbal prompt, a subjective visual perspective, and a calm audio track that enhances, in terms of values, a personal idea of relaxation and the possibility of its implementation through the travel agency.

5) The Reel Warmth, *s.a.*, puts into contrast a verbally captured unpleasant home environment with a visually and auditorily appealing image of warmth, offering a solution of escape into warmth.

The analysis of five Reels on Facebook shows that these are multimodal video formats whose meanings are reconstructed based on the cooperation of all modalities present, although the verbal component clearly dominates quantitatively. The pragmatic focus on the recipient is reflected in the comprehensible contents of the videos (well-deserved rest, travel ideas, pleasant atmosphere, preciousness of time, discounts), which is manifested both in the linguistic stylisation (questions, imperatives, informality, colloquialism, humour) and in the visual and emotional levels (familiar images, events, compatible background music). The Reels strategically but in a cultivated way encourage, invite, accompany, and offer solutions, consciously evoking a sense of closeness, inclusiveness, understanding, and availability.

From the pragmatic perspective, this type of a media product has an appellative-effective function (cf. Prokopčáková 2009), which aims to influence the recipient, but also to evoke an impression of well-being, desire, and importance. Through multimodal components, this function subtly and gently guides the recipient towards the interpretation and activity without explicit pressure. The trigger for such targeting is **verbal modality** in slogans, accompanying texts, and captions that take the form of suggestions, invitations, and calls to action, such as *Čo tak sadnúť do lietadla...?* [What about getting on a plane...?], *Vedeli ste, že...?* [Did you know that ...?], *Ak milujete Vianoce, tak toto video si uložte!* [If you love Christmas, save this video!] or in the form of point of view (POV), e.g., *POV: Je december, vy ste si rezervovali...teraz je vašou jedinou starosťou...* [POV: It's December, you've booked...now your only concern is...] (Point-of-view video modelling, Mason et al. 2013). A softening moment is brought by phrases, such as *ruku na srdce* [hand on heart], *pohodlie* [comfort], *starostlivosť* [care], *dobré jedlo* [good food], *teda pardon* [so sorry], *už sme tam?* [are we there yet?] (asks the bored donkey), which contrast with quantitative data *menej ako 20 hodín* [less than 20 hours], *viac než 300 destinácií* [more than 300 destinations], *až 400 €* [up to €400]. At the same time, it has turned clear that the pragmatic significance of Reels resides in the value-oriented and cultural frameworks of contemporary society, which transcend advertising offer. Set phrases, including *vízia na rok 2026* [vision for 2026], *čas je tá najvzácnejšia komodita* [time is the most precious commodity], *Black Friday sale, užiť si dovolenku* [to enjoy your vacation], *zažiť aspoň raz v živote* [to experience at least once in your lifetime] connect to everyday reality and the proposed services


can be interpreted as reasonable, comfortable, and advantageous solutions. It is also the inclusive language that helps to come closer to the recipient, which is achieved in calls to action by means of forthright vocabulary – the first-person plural or pronouns – *pod'me spolu niečo vymysliet'* [let's come up with something together]; *tak kto ide s nami?* [so, who goes with us?]. Thus, the verbal level serves the function of a pragmatic anchor that guides the reading of visual and auditory elements. For instance, expressions like *toto* [this], *ste tu správne* [you are in the right place] are only pragmatically complete when combined with the visual element, or the statement *je december* [it's December] frames, in terms of time, the visual scenery of the body and creates a contrast between the ongoing cold winter and the visually presented warmth. Even to functionally distinctive texts in the video – emotional – *Vianočné trhy v Európe, ktorých atmosféru by ste mali aspoň raz zažiť'* [Christmas markets in Europe, whose atmosphere you should experience at least once], and informational – *Štrasburg – 27. 11. – 24. 12.* [Strasbourg, November 27 – December 24] – can coexist because they are linked into a single meaningful whole by visual and auditory components (light effects, Christmas music).




From an intermodal perspective, it is **the visual modality** that brings verbal and auditory meanings to life. Although images in most videos are subordinate to the verbal framework, they stimulate sensory experience and enhance emotional impact, e.g., through subjective camera shots (Szomolányi 2019), shots of spaces and people, animations on a map, but also calm and clear movements and gestures of the actors (for example, images of illuminated squares, infographics). The verbal component with abstract nouns, including *plán, vizio, budúcnosť* [plan, vision, future] – is accompanied by takes of the sky, the horizon, or airplane windows, projecting an image of a positive escape or expectation. An important intermodal element is the aforementioned POV-perspective, following on the inclusive language. e.g., *pod'me spolu* [let's go together], *ak je toto váš plán* [if this is your plan], symbolically placing and drawing the viewer into the visual. In information-oriented passages, the visual component takes on an orientational role, supporting the graphic segmentation of the text or cut-ins. On the other hand, numerical graphics or destination names visually complement the voice-over, simplifying the understanding of the pragmatic meaning. The typical atmosphere in the videos is also visually projected through colourfulness and optics. Warm colour tones and contrasts of darkness and brightness correspond to the verbalization of a festive atmosphere, relaxation, or importance. In terms of dynamics, the visual level of the videos is characterized by editing that copies the rhythm of the text. In videos with a contemplative touch, for example, a single longer shot is used, but when listing facts, the image naturally speeds up. The visual "full stop" of the Reels are logos (TUI, Turkish Airlines), which appear only when the recipient is

familiar with the message of the video and emotionally attuned, thus concluding the meaning without interrupting the previous reception.

The fluidity of reception and emotional coherence of the multimodal product is ensured by **the auditive modality**. This phenomenon is evident through the use of a calm female voice-over, smooth, electronically generated instrumental music of medium pace, and real sounds, such as birdsong, or sound effects of cutting and tearing. Although the appellative-affective function is realized through verbal appeal and visual imagery, its pragmatic meaning is projected only in cooperation with the sound level. Formulations, including *predstavte si to* [imagine it], *pokoj v duši* [peace of mind] activate the imagination, but it is only with calm music complemented by the sounds of nature that the meaning of the video becomes emotional. It follows from the aforementioned that although the appellative-affective function is realized as a verbal appeal and the visual and auditory functions produce emotion, their pragmatic meaning is the result of intermodal interaction. In the video with the verbal component *Black Friday*, the meaning is reinforced precisely at the auditory level. The expressive phrase *Odrezali sme z cien... poriadne!* [We've cut the prices... dramatically!] is supported by colour contrast and accompanying text on the mobile phone display, but especially by the iconic sounds of cutting, which mimic the act of discounting. Verbalization, visualization, and sound design of the meaning thus enable a fast pragmatic effect. In information-saturated videos, the auditory component in the form of voice-over or music track is mainly regulatory, as it reduces the cognitive load (Pittman & Haley 2023) caused by text or faster image editing. We consider the intensity of the auditory component of videos to be controlled and balanced, without sudden amplifications or pronounced accents; the music is thus set so that it does not overwhelm the visuals or distract attention from other elements. The sophistication of the auditory elements lies precisely in their ability to support meaning without excessive self-emphasis and to create an emotionally coherent framework that allows for smooth and acceptable reception of multimodal content.

Table 2. Multimodal coding of the YouTube video *Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!, s.a.* [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!], with an emphasis on the interaction of modalities and the identification of pragmatic meaning. Source: Own processing

Verbal level	Visual level	Auditory level
<p>Video title: <i>Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!</i> [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!]: <i>pripravte sa</i> [get ready] – appeals to recipients to take action, <i>leto</i> [summer] – a positive time frame associated with relaxation, <i>s TUI</i> [with TUI] – a specific provider of summer preparations, <i>skoré rezervácie</i> [early bookings] – an economic strategy of acting early, <i>vyplatia sa</i> [pay off] – economic benefit without specification.</p> <p>Accompanying text: <i>Pripravení na leto?</i> [Ready for summer?]: activation tool, mental</p>	<p>Camera shot: wide shot showing the whole situation plus details, e.g., the body language of the actors.</p> <p>Image: evokes peace, relaxation, experiences.</p> <p>Shots of the sun, sea, and beach: iconic symbols of vacation, shortening the interpretation process of the advertisement.</p> 	<p>Music: evokes the need to move, explore, travel, sets the mood, conveys no information.</p> <p>Regular, moderately dynamic rhythm and tempo: maintains attention, sets positive emotions, encourages activity.</p> <p>Female voice-over: gently energetic but not authoritative, creates an impression of activity, care, and credibility.</p>

<p>preparation for holiday, establishing contact with the recipient.</p> <p>Predstavte si slnečné lúče na vašej pokožke, letné večery plné pohody a nezabudnuteľné zážitky [Imagine the sun's rays on your skin, summer evenings full of peace and unforgettable experiences]: further activation of imagination and mental attitude, sensory stimulation, intensification of effect by enumerating three positive images.</p> <p>To všetko vás čaká s TUI. [All this awaits you with TUI]: assertive character, promise, <i>to všetko</i> [all this] – reference to previous images + package of benefits associated with TUI.</p> <p>Objavte už teraz našu ponuku a ušetríte až 40 % [Discover our offer now and save up to 40%]: call to action, <i>už teraz</i> [now] – time pressure, <i>ušetríte až 40 %</i> [save up to 40%] – activation of the recipient's economic rationality, specific numerical data increases the effectiveness of advertising, particles weaken it.</p> <p>Rezervujte flexibilne vo vašej cestovnej kancelárii alebo na tui.sk [Book flexibly at your travel agency or at tui.sk]: directive act mitigated by the adverb flexibly, offering two options creates a sense of choice, reduces resistance to purchase, conclusion that transforms emotion into concrete action.</p> <p>Viewer interaction: the medium-level of video reception, related to the frequent presentation of the video in television commercials</p>	<p>Shot of mountains: expands the concept a of holiday – a wider range of possibilities, year-round relaxation. </p> <p>Composition: paratactic sequence of visual images of summer vacation without hierarchy.</p> <p>Editing: quick cuts alternating holiday shots, in the second half of the video brief information about booking.</p> <p>Actors: families with children, couples, and friends expand the potential of the advertisement (intended for a wider group of people).</p> <p>Nonverbal communication: touch, facial expressions, eye contacts – only positive expressions.</p> <p>Predominant colours: yellow – sun, light, optimism; blue – seriousness, calm; golden hour lighting – peace, intimacy, romance, memories.</p> <p>In the second part of the video, dark blue – trustworthiness, professionalism; white – transparency of the offer; their contrast ensures excellent readability; light blue – primarily symbolizes TUI, softens the overall impression. </p> <p>Logo at the end of the video (TUI Smile): strong visual identity of TUI, winking smiley personalizes the brand and evokes informal contact with the viewer. </p>	<p>Emphasis: indicates key information, increases persuasiveness, activates interest, and supports decision-making.</p> <p>Intonation: conclusive cadence prevails – concludes the message, reinforces credibility, fixes meaning and emotion.</p> <p>Harmony between music and female voice-over: the voice is not drowned out by the music, it remains in the foreground signalling that the verbal message is important, the music provides an emotional framework – complementary interaction between music and voice</p> <p>Coincidence of music and female voice-over: strong connection between activity and anticipation of experience (no competition between sounds), linking the TUI brand with positive emotions.</p>
Intermodal level		
<p>Verbalisation of the video Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia! The verbal level creates an informational and motivational framework that is semantically linked to the visual and auditory components. The verbal modality also guides an interpretation of the visuals, which is aided by the dynamism of the auditory component.</p>	<p>Visualisation of the video Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia! The visual level, together with the verbal component, constitutes the main carrier of meaning and, together with the auditory component, also the main emotional framework of the advertisement.</p>	<p>Sonorization of the video Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia! The auditory component does not provide new information, but it completes the picture of verbal minimalism and visual stimuli, helping to activate the viewer's interest and at the same time providing an emotional framework for the commercial.</p>

The MP of all analysed YouTube advertising videos is briefly summarized in the following overview:

- 1) The video Letná dovolenka 2026 s TUI, *s.a.* [Summer holiday 2026 with TUI] builds trust in the brand through a combination of spoken prompts, images of water (sea, lake), positive body language, and graphically highlighted texts on savings and flexibility.
- 2) The video Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!, *s.a.* [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!] combines positive emotions in language, sunny visuals, and a gently energetic female voice-over to evoke a desire for a summer vacation by the sea or in the mountains and associate the TUI brand with happiness, carefreeness, flexibility, and affordability.
- 3) The video TUI spot 2024, *s.a.* [TUI spot 2024] frames travel as an active process through a dynamic, imperative verbal sequence, a motivational tone, and images of discovery.
- 4) The video Zažite s TUI najkrajšie destinácie, *s.a.* [Experience the most beautiful destinations with TUI] uses personalized language ("my"), an anaphoric structure, and images of culturally diverse destinations to interpret holiday as part of personal identity and life memories.

5) The video *Zima s TUI, s.a.* [Winter with TUI], contrasts the winter theme with predominantly summer visuals and extends the concept of holidays with the global TUI brand to a year-round experience that is not tied to a specific season.

The analysed TUI videos show a high degree of multimodal consistency supported by syntactic personalization (cf. Fairclough 1989; cf. Firdausi et al. 2023). They all pursue a common pragmatic goal: to emotionally activate the recipient and direct them to book a vacation through TUI. The differences between the individual advertisements lie primarily in the degree of subjectivization, the dynamics of the statement, and the way in which the recipient is involved in the construction of meaning.

On a **verbal level**, the text is structured as a sequence of short, predominantly imperative and appealing statements that create a gradual pragmatic arc from evocation through personalization and the establishment of a friendly relationship with the client, to the identification of the TUI brand and, finally, to a call to action. The introductory rhetorical questions *Pripravení na leto?* [Ready for summer?], *Túžite cestovať?* [Do you want to travel?] serve as direct contact with the recipient, introducing the thematic framework and activating their vacation mindset. The beginnings of advertisements in the form of a short question and answer, e.g., *Letná dovolenka? S TUI!* [Summer holiday? With TUI!], *Dovolenka? S TUI!* [Holiday? With TUI!] add a persuasive function to the contact function – after introducing the topic of vacation, they offer an answer and an immediate solution. Verb sequences in the imperative such as *Predstavte si slnečné lúče na vašej pokožke, letné večery plné pohody a nezabudnuteľné zážitky* [Imagine the sun's rays on your skin, summer evenings full of peace and unforgettable experiences], *Pod'te na to* [Go for it], *Objavujte* [Discover], *Precíťte* [Feel], *Zbierajte zážitky* [Collect experiences], *Zažite zimu plnú filmových momentov, pocitov šťastia a nezabudnuteľných dobrodružstiev* [Experience a winter full of cinematic moments, feelings of happiness, and unforgettable adventures] are not authoritative, but rather have the character of an appeal or invitation. They position the recipient as an active agent, stimulate their imagination, work with sensory associations (warmth, comfort, experiences, feelings of happiness), activate emotions, the desire for intense experiences and for a vacation that is exceptional (cinematic moments, adventures). The anaphoric structure with the possessive pronoun "my" *Moja dovolenka. Moje zážitky. Moje momenty. Moje spomienky* [My holiday. My experiences. My moments. My memories.] has a strong pragmatic function – it individualizes the content of the advertisement, shifts the emphasis from the brand itself to the recipient, and transforms the advertising text into a kind of internal monologue. All spots contain lexemes with high connotative potential that refer to universally pleasant experiences.

The second half of each video implicitly promises a future positive state without explicit responsibility, e.g., *To všetko vás čaká s TUI* [All this awaits you with TUI], *S TUI si zabezpečíte tie najlepšie miesta na leto* [With TUI, you can secure the best places for the summer]. Imperative statements such as *Navštív s TUI najkrajšie cestovateľské destinácie* [Visit the most beautiful travel destinations with TUI], *Objednaj teraz v tvojej cestovnej kancelárii a na tui.sk* [Order now at your travel agency and at tui.sk] have a clear conative function and pragmatically direct the recipient towards the desired action – buying a holiday with TUI. Statements with quantification *Ušetríte až 40 %* [Save up to 40%] are intended to give the impression of objectivity and a rational reason to act.

On a **visual level**, all spots are characterized by rapid editing and short, aesthetically pleasing image fragments. They do not represent a linear story, but rather a paratactic sequence of visual moments without hierarchy. This fragmentary visual style corresponds to the verbal sentences and creates the impression of a personal album of memories. The visual coding includes holiday images (natural scenery, sun, sea, beach, sand, mountains, food, relaxation, TUI aircraft, trains, happy people – couples, friends, families). Images of mountains in summer vacation ads and summer visuals in winter vacation ads symbolically represent a departure from the everyday environment and pragmatically expand the concept of vacation to a year-round experience with a wide range of possibilities. The colours are rich and warm, which reinforces positive emotions and associations with joy, freedom, and relaxation, while blue represents the TUI brand. Warm tones are sometimes enhanced by the use of golden hour lighting, i.e., soft, golden light that appears shortly after sunrise or just before sunset. It is a pragmatic visual shorthand for expressing the meaning "This is the moment you will remember". Although individual shots show the overall scene, when depicting people, the camera also focuses on details (movement, smiles, closeness, touch, gaze, playfulness, silhouettes in space), which supports the impression of comfort, joy, intimacy, and authenticity. The visually emotional behaviour depicted in the actors' body language represents "partial iconic representations of reallife behaviors" (Feng & O'Halloran 2012: 2067). Such nonverbal communication emphasizes the meaning of the verbal message and suggests that a holiday with TUI is not just about the destination, but above all about shared positive emotions and relationships.

Two spots place holidays in the context of everyday situations – a young man and woman are sitting on a couch watching television, and when asked *Dovolenka?* [Holiday?], they look at each other and, upon hearing the words *S TUI!* [With TUI!], smile slightly and nod their heads. The sun, sea, and beach also dominate the winter holidays commercial. This contrast has a pragmatic function: winter is redefined as an opportunity to escape to warmth and comfort. Two short winter images (a mother

with children in the snow, skiers on a slope) expand the meaning of vacation to include active winter experiences.

An important visual element in the second part of all spots is graphic text and its colour scheme. The dominant dark blue background colour evokes stability, credibility, and professionalism; the white font ensures readability and signals the purity and transparency of the offer. The light blue border softens the overall impression and, through associations with the colour of water and sky – typical of a vacation atmosphere (Škvareninová & Janáčková 2024) – also refers to the identity of the TUI company. This colour contrast ensures good readability and is easy on the eyes (Mistrík 1982). Highlighted text blocks *Teraz ušetrite až 40 %* [Save up to 40% now] and *FLEX TARIFA* [FLEX TARIFF] visually organize the information and draw the recipient's attention to key benefits. The use of capital letters in *FLEX TARIFA* [FLEX TARIFF] has an iconic and pragmatic function – the text appears official, offering a stable product, which distinguishes it from the rest of the informational content. Across all spots, TUI's strong visual identity is repeated in the form of a red logo – a smiley face (also known as TUI Smile) that winks in some videos, which acts as an element that personalizes the brand and creates the impression of an informal relationship with the customer. The slogan *Live Happy* at the end of some commercials signals the global nature of TUI and the universality of values (happiness, well-being, lifestyle) that should be understandable across languages and cultures. Its content does not compete with the informational part of the advertisement, but summarizes its emotional message – TUI does not just sell holidays, but also offers the promise of happiness and a contented life. Pragmatically, the slogan concludes the advertisement with a positive emotional frame that is intended to linger even after it ends.

On an auditory level, there is a clear unified sound strategy for the brand, ensured by the repeated use of the same music and female voice-over, which is perceived as more trustworthy in advertisements (Grattan 2016). The music creates emotional continuity between individual images, helps to memorize the brand, and can influence the recipient's intention to buy the product (Anglada-Tort et al. 2022; Dogaru et al. 2024). It is more dynamic, with a more pronounced rhythm that corresponds to the pace of the editing and the dynamics of the verbal mode, but it is not aggressive. The background music creates a sense of movement, discovery, determination, and happiness. The female voice-over is gently energetic, but maintains a friendly and non-authoritative tone. The tempo of the speech corresponds to the rhythm of the editing and supports the appealing nature of the text. In two commercials, the female voice acts as an impulse for the characters and the recipient to react: *S TUI!* [With TUI!]. Although the auditory modality does not provide new information, it completes

verbal minimalism and visual stimuli, while also emotionally framing the commercial and influencing brand recognition.

At **the intermodal level**, there is significant synchronization of language, image, and sound. Short verbal imperatives and appellatives are reflected in short image sequences and rhythmic music, thereby mutually reinforcing their meaning. What is named in words is immediately visualized by images or written text and emotionally underscored by music. The recipient is thus not limited to a single mode, but is simultaneously guided by images, text with keywords, and voice-over, which increases the memorability of the information and the persuasive effect of the video while reducing cognitive load (cf. Kalyuga 2012). Through multimodal coding, the recipient is led to interpret the vacation not as a product, but as a personal experience, a source of happiness, self-fulfillment, and unforgettable moments. Rational information about flexibility, savings, and booking methods is embedded in an already established positive and active framework, which increases the likelihood of a persuasive effect. All modes work together coherently and tend towards one pragmatic goal – to convince the recipient that the answer to the question *Holiday?* is naturally and obviously *With TUI!*

The multimodal pragmatics of the analysed videos corresponds to **the AIDA marketing model** (Attention – Interest – Desire – Action), which "describes the stages a consumer goes through in the purchasing process" (Fernandez 2024: 1). The initial coordination of modes through interrogative verbal structures, sentence fragments, destination shots, warm or contrast colours, gently dynamic music, and voice intonation activates the Attention phase, whereby the use of actors' movements at the beginning of the video immediately fixes the viewer's gaze. The Interest phase is built by inclusive language, short sentence structures, emotionally charged holiday motifs including images of happy families and couples, slightly dynamic music, and the conclusive cadence of the female voice. In terms of marketing, a modular approach (the so-called smartly approach) is used at this phase, in which the content is adapted to the interests of specific audiences (families, couples, friends, rarely seniors). The goal of the Desire phase is to make the recipient feel that they want to be in the places they see in the video. This emotion is supported multimodally by authentic moments of well-being, joy, happiness, warm colours including golden hour lighting, a female voice, and background music. The final part presents Action, where multimodal elements such as key lexemes, explicit verbal calls, strong visual identity of TUI (TUI-colours, TUI Smile), conclusive cadence and clear articulation create a sense of decision certainty. The repetitiveness of verbal formulations, visual motifs, and auditory elements creates cognitive predictability, which facilitates the recipient's orientation in the videos and functions as attention anchoring. From the perspective of multimodal pragmatics, this

recurrence represents intermodal redundancy, which ensures that the individual phases of the AIDA model are not linear and one-off, but reinforce each other cyclically.

4. Discussion

The analysed TUI media products show several strengths that result from their consistent multimodal strategy. One of the main advantages is clear brand recognition, which is built by repeating the same verbal, visual, and auditory elements, allowing the recipient to identify the brand within a few seconds. In terms of reception, this effect is evident in all video formats. This finding can be further illustrated by Eyal's Hooked Model (2014), which is used in this study in a supporting interpretative function of the analysis, not as a primary analytical framework. The model uses four steps – Trigger, Action, Variable Reward, Investment – to explain cyclically the maintenance of media users' attention, their habits, and their engagement in the reception of media products. The Trigger in the selected advertisements is verbal formulations, e.g., *Vedeli ste, že...?* [Did you know that...?], *Predstavte si...* [Imagine...], *Pripravení na leto?* [Ready for summer?], *Letná dovolenka?* [Summer holiday?], *S TUI!* [With TUI!], as well as visual contrasts (warm/cold, white/black, sea/mountains) and seasonal motifs (lights, beach, snow), which correspond to the affective-appealing function. The Action phase is demonstrated based on the number of views or clicks, scrolling mechanisms of video formats, which, however, we cannot describe in more detail due to the methodological limitations of this study. The Variable reward step of the videos is ensured through an aesthetic experience (a feeling of well-being and peace, security, inspiration, happiness) and the Investment step through interactions using likes and comments. The application of videos to the model ultimately indicates that the evaluated advertisements may not be addictive in nature, but they confirm a refined strategy of the travel agency that prefers emotional and appealingly tuned communication.

Cultivation on a verbal level is demonstrated by inclusive and humorous language; on a visual level it is manifested through consistent visual composition and colour coordination (e.g., placement, colour scheme, logo movements), controlled editing and perspective work; and at the auditory level, through natural regulation of tempo, soundtracks, and ambient sounds (Chattopadhyay 2017), thus respecting the recipient through emotionally and informationally rich communication. The strongest evidence of a cultivated MP is the existence of an intermodal level, where an interplay exists between the structural and semantic components of the video and harmony between its content and form, even without visible coercion or manipulation. However, this depends on the communicative goal of the media product, which influences the type of cooperation and distribution of modalities used to achieve sophistication. In emotionally charged products focused on what TUI refers to as "holiday visions", as well as travel ideas and holiday dreams, sophistication is reflected in a balanced

coherence of modalities, while in information-rich communications about discounts and travel opportunities, the dominant verbal component is sophisticatedly supported by visual and auditory components. Another strength is the emotional coherence of the visuals and the holiday theme. People are depicted as smiling, happy, touching, eating, playing, relaxing by the sea, which supports the meanings of well-being, closeness, joy, and happiness. The visuals function as a series of memories and moments, while the verbal text is minimalist, with the image taking on the main narrative function framed primarily by language and audio. In this case, the visual level guarantees emotion and creates atmosphere, as it complements what the text does not say. On an auditory level, the consistent female voice-over is an advantage, as it comes across as calm and pleasant, and also works subtly with emphasis and the gradation of statements.

From a pragmatic point of view, the clear and repeatedly communicated call to action at the end of the ads is a positive feature, but at the same time, its predictability is a weakness. The closing phrases about booking on tui.sk or at a travel agency appear almost identically in all ads, making them a routine conclusion without a strong persuasive effect. The analysis also points to incompatibilities, such as the occurrence of spelling and grammatical inaccuracies in Reels (commas, verbs with reflexive pronouns) and a tendency toward textual hypertrophy leading to repetitive information at the verbal level. The analysed corpus also reveals a conflict between viewing images and reading text, which can burden perception intellectually, increase cognitive load, and weaken the pragmatic effect. The visual component is often based on idealized representations of bodies and relatively uniform gender identification (e.g., a female body on the beach). Although this is common marketing practice, it may represent a potential limitation in terms of sophistication and gender inclusivity.

Excessive repetitiveness manifests itself in the recurrence of very similar text formulations in individual advertisements or accompanying video texts. For example, the spots *Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!*, *s.a.* [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!] and *Letná dovolenka 2026 s TUI*, *s.a.* [Summer holiday 2026 with TUI] are almost identical in terms of both verbal and visual aspects, which makes it difficult to recognize which advertisement is actually about. The video *Zima s TUI*, *s.a.* [Winter with TUI] uses almost identical emotional vocabulary as the video *Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!*, *s.a.* [Get ready for summer with TUI, early bookings pay off!], which blurs the seasonal specificity and weakens the thematic accuracy. Another negative aspect is the use of lexicalized advertising clichés, e.g., *slnečné lúče* [sun's rays], *nezabudnuteľné zážitky* [unforgettable experiences], *pohoda* [relaxation], *najlepšie miesta* [the best places], *najkrajšie cestovateľské destinácie* [the most beautiful travel destinations] or the repetition of lexemes such as *vízia* [vision], *dovolenka* [holiday], *oddych* [rest] in several places in

the verbal component, which reduces the originality of the text. The use of pronouns such as *môj* [my] *vás* [you], *vašej* [your] creates synthetic personalisation (Fairclough 1989), which simulates a personal relationship but does not offer adaptation to the real needs of different persons. The lack of time or conditional restrictions, unspecified discounts, e.g., *až 40 %* [up to 40%], *až do výšky 400 €* [up to €400], and the use of particles *takmer* [almost], *možno* [maybe], *až* [up to] show a higher degree of semantic uncertainty.

Overall, the ads stand out for their consistency, recognizability, and emotional comprehensibility, which is appropriate for brand recall and brand recognition (cf. Vysekalová & Mikeš, 2018). At the same time, however, they suffer from excessive stability in form, text, and visuals. What functions as a strong brand can, when cumulative in effect, turn into a predictable discourse that gradually weakens the recipient's attention and engagement. We therefore consider investigating the pragmatic effect of MP on viewers to be an important area towards which our future research ambitions are directed.

5. Conclusion

In a study focusing on MP as a semantic framework and structural principle of video presentations by the travel agency TUI, we analysed a selected corpus of material on Facebook and YouTube and focused on the use and interaction of modalities in a cultivated, coherent, and deliberately oriented media product. The analysis showed that the videos systematically combine verbal, visual, and auditory components, the meaning of which is distributed at the intermodal level. Although each modality "works" in a different way, they tend to have the same effect. It follows that the travel agency is able to purposefully combine quantitative and qualitative components in such a way that it is obvious that one cannot exist or make sense without the other. The basic principle of such functioning is illustrated by the following model of modality coding:

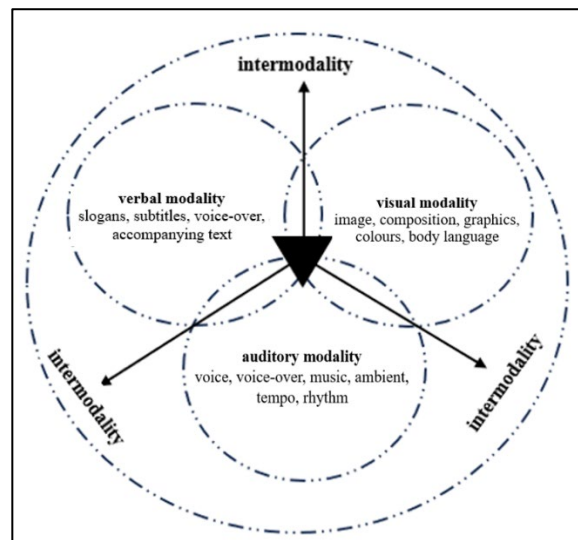


Figure 1. Modality coding model. Source: Own processing

The basic principle of modality coding is that meaning does not arise in a single modality, but in logical complementarity and correct timing, which can also reveal the natural degree of coding redundancy. The affective and persuasive effect of video is therefore intermodally distributed and cannot be reduced to a single semiotic channel. This approach corresponds to marketing theory, according to which affective responses have a "significant impact on brand attitudes" (Batra & Ray 1986: 234). The emotional dimension of communication is also an important factor in building brand associations, trust, and subsequent loyalty (Kotler & Keller 2016). These findings can also be interpreted using the AIDA marketing model, which provides an analytical framework for describing the persuasive dynamics of individual multimodal social media videos and allows us to observe how the phases of Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action are gradually constructed through the coordinated interplay of semiotic modes.

In the context of sophisticated video presentations aimed at customers, we recommend maintaining a natural balance between modalities, regulating text load, subtly exposing the music track, and thoughtfully incorporating inclusive language. These recommendations are based on empirical findings from multimodal analysis and can be perceived as practical suggestions for marketing practice. In connection with these proposals and the detailed functioning of individual components, the study can encourage cooperation with the fields of music theory, marketing, and psychology, thus contributing to a broader professional discussion on the impact of digital advertising. The findings also suggest that intermodal integration provides a productive framework for research into multimodal pragmatics and audiovisual discourse, opening up space for systematic comparative analyses across different video presentation formats.

List of abbreviations

MP – Multimodal pragmatics

MDA – Multimodal discourse analysis

POV – Point of view

References

1. Anglada-Tort, M., Schofield, K., Trahan, T. & Müllensiefen, D. (2022). I've heard that brand before: The role of music recognition on consumer choice. In *International journal of advertising*, 41, p. 1567-1587.
2. Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
3. Austin, J.L. (2000). *Jak udělat něco slovy*. Praha: FILOSOFIA.
4. Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. London: Fontana Press. Available at: https://monoskop.org/images/0/0a/Barthes_Roland_Image-Music-Text.pdf
5. Batra, R. & Ray, M.L. (1986). Affective responses mediating acceptance of advertising. In *Journal of consumer research*, 13 (2), p. 234-249. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/209063>
6. Bosák, J. (1995). Sociolingvistická stratégia výskumu slovenčiny. In *Sociolingvistické aspekty výskumu súčasnej slovenčiny*. Ondrejovič, S. & Šimková, M. (eds.). Bratislava: VEDA, p. 17-42. Available at: https://www.juls.savba.sk/ediela/sociolinguistica_slovaca/1995/1/sls1.pdf
7. Chattopadhyay, B. (2017). Reconstructing atmospheres: Ambient sound in film and media production. In *Communication and the public*, 2 (4), p. 352-364. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047317742171>
8. Chen, L., Abdullah, M.A., Abdullah, S.N., Hussin, S. & Rahman, R.A. (2025). A bibliometric survey on multimodal discourse analysis (2015–2024): Looking behind to look ahead. In *English language and literature studies*, 15 (3), p. 99-113. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412912446558>
9. Cingerová, N. & Dulebová, I. (2023). *Mediálna lingvistika. Východiská kritickej analýzy mediálnych textov*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/111399214/Medi%C3%A1lna_lingvistika_V%C3%BDchodisk%C3%A1_kritickej_anal%C3%BDzy_medi%C3%A1lnych_textov
10. Cingerová, N. & Motyková, K. (2017). *Úvod do diskurzívnej analýzy*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.
11. Dicerto, S. (2018). *Multimodal pragmatics and translation*. 1st ed. Cham: Springer.
12. Dogaru, I., Furnham, A. & McClelland, A. (2024). Understanding how the presence of music in advertisements influences consumer behaviour. In *Acta psychologica*, 248, 104333. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104333>
13. Dynel, M. (2020). COVID-19 memes going viral: On the multiple multimodal voices behind face masks. In *Discourse & society*, 32, p. 175-195. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926520970385>
14. Esteban-Romero, S., Martín-Fernández, I., Gil-Martín, M. & Fernández-Martínez, F. (2025). Synthesizing olfactory understanding: multimodal language models for image–text smell matching. In *Symmetry*, 17 (8), 1349. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/sym17081349>
15. Eyal, N. (2014) *Hooked: How to build habit-forming products*. London: Penguin Books.
16. Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. 1st ed. London: Longman.
17. Feng, D. & O'Halloran, K.L. (2012). Representing emotive meaning in visual images: A social semiotic approach. In *Journal of pragmatics*, 44 (14), p. 2067-2084. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.10.003>


18. Fernandez, J.M. (2024). *A comprehensive approach to building brand engagement and loyalty*. September 27, 2024. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389678231_A_Comprehensive_Approach_to_Building_Brand_Engagement_and_Loyalty
19. Firdausi, A.N., Andriyanti, E. & Ashadi, A. (2023). How to influence others? Synthetic personalization and social semiotic analysis of genders. In *Humanus: Jurnal ilmu-ilmu humaniora*, 22 (2), p. 183-199. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24036/humanus.v22i2.121129>
20. Grattan, D. (2016). *6 reasons people trust a female voice over male voices*. September 22, 2016. Available at: <https://www.debbiegrattan.com/blog/why-trust-female-voice-over-male-voice/>
21. Grice, H.P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In *Syntax and semantics*, 3, p. 41-58. Available at: <https://lawandlogic.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/grice1975logic-and-conversation.pdf>
22. Halliday, A.K. (1979). *Language as social semiotic. The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.
23. Holsanova, J. (2012). New methods for studying visual communication and multimodal integration. In *Visual communication*, 11 (3), p. 251-257. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412912446558>
24. Huang, L. (2021). Toward multimodal corpus pragmatics. In *Digital scholarship in the humanities*, 36 (1), p. 101-118. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqz080>
25. Indarti, D. (2024). Multimodalities and conversational implicature in cross-cultural pragmatic context: a systematic review. In *International journal of social science and human research*, 7 (12), p. 9271-9280. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v7-i12-59>
26. Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J. & O'Halloran, K. (2025). *Introducing multimodality*. 2nd ed. London – New York: Routledge.
27. Jewitt, C., Mackley, K.L. & Price, S. (2019). Digital touch for remote personal communication: An emergent sociotechnical imaginary. In *New media & society*, 23 (1), p. 99-120. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819894304>
28. Ji, E.Y. (2025). A metasemantic-metapragmatic framework for taxonomizing multimodal communicative alignment. In *arXiv*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2501.01535>
29. Kaderka, P. (2017): Multimodální komunikace. In *Czechency – Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny*. Karlík, P., Nekula, M. & Pleskalová, J. (eds.). Available at: <https://www.czechency.org/slovník/MULTIMOD%C3%81LN%C3%8D%20KOMUNIKACE>
30. Kalyuga, S. (2012). Instructional benefits of spoken words: A review of cognitive load factors. In *Educational research review*, 7 (2), p. 145-159. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.12.002>
31. Kotler, P. & Keller, K.L. (2021). *Marketing management*. 16th ed. London: Pearson.
32. Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
33. Labov, W. & Fanshel, D. (1977). *Therapeutic discourse. Psychotherapy as conversation*. New York: Academic Press. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/therapeuticdisco0000labo/page/n9/mode/2up>
34. *Letná dovolenka 2026 s TUI (video)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9Yoo_tvR5s
35. Levinson, S.C. (1977). Contextualizing 'contextualization cues'. In *Discussing communication analysis I: John J. Gumperz*. S. Eerdmans, S., Prevignano, C. & Thibault, P. (eds.). Lausanne: Beta Press, p. 24-30. Available at: https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_60647_2/component/file_60648/content
36. Levinson, S.C. (2000). *Pragmatik*. Tübingen: Niemayer.
37. Lu, Y. (2025). Mapping multimodal linguistics research: A CiteSpace bibliometric analysis. In *Forum for linguistic studies*, 7 (8), p. 88-106. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i8.10243>

38. Luginbühl, M. (2015). Media linguistics: On mediality and culturality. In *10plus1: Living linguistics*, 1, p. 9-26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-118869>
39. Lv, Y., Ni, W. & Tan, Y. (2024). An overview of research on multimodal teaching and learning. In *Journal of education and educational research*, 8 (3), p. 492-495. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54097/qp4jg551>
40. Madella, P. & Wharton, T. (2023). Nonverbal communication and context: Multimodality in interaction. In *The Cambridge handbook of language in context*. Romero-Trillo, J. (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 419-435.
41. Mason, R.A., Davis, S.H., Boles M.B. & Goodwyn, F. (2013). Efficacy of point-of-view video modeling: A meta-analysis. In *Remedial and special education*, 34 (6), p. 333-345. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513486298>
42. Meibauer, J. (2008). *Pragmatik*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag.
43. Mistrík, J. (1982). *Rýchle čítanie*. 2nd ed. Bratislava: SPN.
44. Mondada, L. (2020). Audible sniffs: Smelling-in-interaction. In *Research on language and social interaction*, 53 (1), p. 140-163. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2020.1716592>
45. Mondada, L. (2023). Demonstrating and guiding how to smell in tasting sessions: .nhHHHhh and the audible-visible production of sensorial intersubjectivity. In *Language & communication*, 88, p. 111-128. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2022.11.006>
46. O'Halloran, K.L. (2008). Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): Constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery. In *Visual communication*, 7 (4), p. 443-475. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208096210>
47. Perrin, D. (2011). *Medienlinguistik*. 2nd ed. Konstanz: UVK.
48. Pittman, M. & Haley, E. (2023). Cognitive load and social media advertising. In *Journal of interactive advertising*, 23 (1), p. 33-54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2144780>
49. *Pripravte sa na leto s TUI, skoré rezervácie sa vyplatia!* (video). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DT_DymYL2J4
50. Prokopčáková, A. (2009). Kontrafaktové myslenie a emočné charakteristiky. In *Kontrafaktové myslenie a osobnosť*. Ruiselová, Z. (ed.). Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, p. 63-87. Available at: https://psychologia.sav.sk/upload/ZR_Kontrafaktove-myslenie_2009.pdf
51. Rašová, D. (2013). *Pragmatika jazykový javov v masmediálnej komunikácii (kontrastívna štúdia na materiáli v slovenčine a v nemčine)*. Krakov: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku.
52. *Reel Black Friday* (video). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1618968305787326>
53. *Reel Christmas* (video). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1975349559678214>
54. *Reel Tokyo* (video). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/677909455291365>
55. *Reel Vision* (video). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1428268928918283>
56. *Reel Warmth* (video). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/765231569555681>
57. Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking in conversation. In *Language*, 50, p. 696-735. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/412243>
58. Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance. Communication and cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Available at: <https://danielwharris.com/teaching/spring16/readings/SperberWilsonRelevance.pdf>
59. Szomolányi, A. (2019). *Kamerová tvorba I*. Opava: Slezská univerzita v Opavě. Available at: https://repozitar.cz/repo/39454/Szomolanyi_K_T_1.pdf

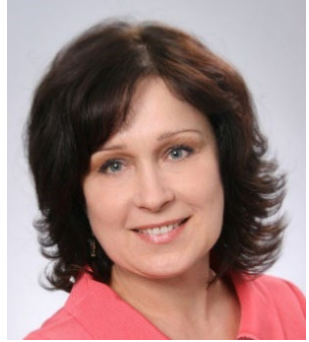
60. Škvareninová, O. & Čmehýlová-Rašová, D. (2025). Media linguistics as an interactional and transdisciplinary science: Theoretical backgrounds, methodological frameworks, and research perspectives. In *Communication today*, 16 (2), p. 22-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/communicationtoday.2025.Vol.16.No.2.2>
61. Škvareninová, O. & Janáčková, E. (2024). Colour in student magazine design. In *European journal of media, art and photography*, 12 (1), p. 86-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/ejmap-24-01-04>
62. *TUI ReiseCenter Slovensko*. Available at: <https://www.tui-reisecenter.sk/o-nas>
63. *TUI spot 2024 (video)*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6ZJSfbIwPA>
64. Van Dijk, T.A. (1972). *Some aspects of text grammars*. The Hague: Mouton.
65. Van Leeuwen, T. & Kress, G. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. New York: Routledge.
66. Vužňáková, K, Gogová, E. & Liptáková, N. (2022): Multimodálny štýl a porozumenie textu. In *Jazyk a kultúra*, 51, p. 237-259. Available at: https://www.ff.unipo.sk/jak/51_2022/
67. Vysekalová, J. & Mikeš, J. (2018). *Reklama. Jak dělat reklamu*. 4th ed. Praha: Grada Publishing.
68. *Zažite s TUI najkrajšie destinácie (video)*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR9rYuBLRfs>
69. *Zima s TUI (video)*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB2U32uCVOQ>
70. Zoller, M. (2024). K štylistike multimodálnej virtuálnej komunikácie. In *Jazykovedný časopis*, 75 (1), p. 111-126. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/jazcas-2024-0031>

Contact data

Author # 1

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Dominika Čmehýlová-Rašová PhD. in General linguistics Assistant Professor Department of Language Communication University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava Nám. J. Herdu, 2 Trnava 917 01 Slovakia dominika.cmehylova.rasova@ucm.sk Media studies, linguistics, pragmatics, creative writing.</p>
---	---	--

Author # 2

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Olga Škvareninová PhD. in Linguistics Assistant Professor Department of Language Communication University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava Nám. J. Herdu, 2 Trnava 917 01 Slovakia olga.skvareninova@ucm.sk Media linguistics, non-verbal communication, rhetoric.</p>
---	---	---

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

COGNITIVE MECHANISMS IN MULTIMODAL MISINFORMATION: THE CASE OF ANTI-VACCINE TWEETS

*Bożena Duda** 

Paulina Mormol-Fura 

University of Rzeszów, Rzeszów, Poland

**Corresponding author*

Received: 7.08.2025 **Reviewed:** 30.01.2026 and 30.03.2026

Similarity Index: 1%

Bibliographic description: Duda, B. & Mormol-Fura, P. (2026). Cognitive mechanisms in multimodal misinformation: The case of anti-vaccine tweets. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 41-61. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.03>

Abstract: This study investigates the cognitive mechanisms underpinning multimodal misinformation in anti-vaccine tweets. Multimodal misinformation is understood as misleading content communicated through the interaction of verbal and visual modes in social media messages. The study focuses on metaphor and metonymy as key resources in the construction of verbo-pictorial meaning in online communication. The findings indicate that metonymy plays a central role in shaping multimodal representations of vaccination, while metaphor is of secondary importance.

Keywords: multimodal misinformation, metonymy, metaphor, anti-vaccine tweets, discourse framing.

1. Introduction

The topic of misinformation, though by no means new, has received considerable scholarly attention over the past decade (see, for example, Allcott & Gentzkow 2017; Di Domenico et al. 2021; Fulgoni & Lipsman 2017; Grieve & Woodfield 2023; Tandoc et al. 2018). Much of this research has been conducted within the fields of media studies, sociology and political communication and has primarily focused on the societal, political and economic consequences of misinformation. However, comparatively fewer studies address the linguistic and multimodal mechanisms through which misleading content is constructed and communicated in social media environments (e.g., Cheng et al. 2021; Di Domenico et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2023). In particular, the role of cognitive mechanisms, such as metaphor and metonymy, in shaping multimodal misinformation on social media remains relatively underexplored (e.g., Abdel-Raheem 2023; Sperandio 2020). Consequently, further research



into the cognitive and semiotic processes underlying the construction of multimodal misinformation is warranted. The aim of the present study is to examine how metaphor and metonymy operate in verbo-pictorial anti-vaccine tweets. The analysis draws on insights from cognitive linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis.

Attention is therefore devoted to the multimodal nature of misinformation circulating on social media in relation to vaccination debates. Within the cognitive linguistic framework, this analysis focuses on metaphor and metonymy as mechanisms shaping meaning in verbo-pictorial communication, while insights from Critical Discourse Analysis are used as a supporting perspective to contextualise the discursive positioning of social actors and viewpoints (Hart 2008; 2010; 2011). For the purpose of the present study, *multimodal misinformation* is understood as misleading or factually inaccurate content conveyed through the interaction of more than one semiotic mode, most commonly verbal and visual elements. The term *anti-vaccine tweets* is used to refer to social media messages published on Twitter (now X) that express scepticism toward vaccination or discourage vaccine uptake. Against this background, the study addresses the following research question: how do metaphor and metonymy function as cognitive mechanisms structuring multimodal misinformation in anti-vaccine tweets?

2. Misinformation – a terminological challenge

In order to understand the complex nature of misinformation it is crucial to note that the first occurrence of intentional falsification of news items goes back to the 16th-century political newsletters *avvisi*, which appeared in Italy and spread all across Europe, and which were soon accused of circulating false information, for example to mislead an enemy during a war. In more recent history, as reported by Grieve and Woodfield (2023: 2-3), fabricated news was used in order to manipulate the public during World War I (to help American President Wilson refrain from involvement in the war), during the Cold War (to undermine the USA and other foreign countries by the use of the so-called *dezinformatziya* in the USSR), or during the Iraq war (to justify the joining of the UK in the coalition with the USA). It seems that political issues, such as international conflicts and elections, are most likely the source and the topic of false information. The COVID-19 pandemic, though not a war in a literal sense, was often conceptualised as one (see Musolff 2022), and became a topic around which misinformation multiplied. As Tandoc et al. (2018: 13) elucidate, "[...] fake news needs the nourishment of troubled times in order to take root. Social tumult and divisions facilitate our willingness to believe news that confirms our enmity toward another group". Although the authors

specifically refer to fake news, this observation may be extended more generally to misinformation, which likewise thrives in the contexts of social division and uncertainty.

Even though the fabricating of news and information has been with us since the 16th century, what definitely changed about it during the second decade of the 21st century is the new channel through which misinformation spreads more easily and far more quickly, namely social media, and digital communication in general. These new means of communication and news dissemination have led to people being virtually bombarded with information non-stop, and have resulted in a state recognised as *infodemic*, characterised by an overwhelming excess of information that is often false or misleading (van der Linden 2022: 460). What is more, people can now choose which news providers they want to follow and, hence, they can only focus on the information which aligns with their views and beliefs. This phenomenon has become known as *echo chambers* and is believed to reinforce people's existing beliefs and to decrease the likelihood of encountering diverse or opposing viewpoints (cf. Grieve & Woodfield 2023: 4). Regrettably, despite the fact that the information shared on social media is rarely fact-checked, people tend to perceive it as just as reliable as news shared through traditional outlets, with the exception of the press (Wang et al. 2019: 2). To complicate this matter further, the systematic literature review performed by the authors (2019: 7) reveals that false information is prevalent online and frequently enjoys greater popularity than legitimate news, with social media sites such as Twitter (now X) causing considerable concern in view of their exceptional ability to spread misinformation (Jussila et al. 2021: 2). Bearing in mind the unprecedented transmission of false information online, it is hardly surprising that researchers working within the field tend to utilise models and terminology derived from the domain of epidemiology; thus, misinformation is conceptualised as a viral pathogen passed on from one person to another, with certain individuals acting as superspreaders and others joining forces to cognitively immunise society against it (see van der Linden 2022). On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that social media has enabled greater public scrutiny and may prevent misinformation, in general, from spreading.

Within the realm of studies focusing on false information, one may distinguish the three most commonly used, overlapping terms, namely: *misinformation*, *disinformation*, and *fake news*. Owing to the paucity of precise definitions, said labels are often used interchangeably (Jussila et al. 2021: 3). Recent research on health-related misinformation has further highlighted the complexity of defining and addressing misleading information in contemporary communication environments. In particular, studies in health communication emphasise the persistence of inaccurate beliefs, and the difficulties associated with correcting misinformation once it becomes embedded in public discourse (see Schulz

& Nakamoto 2024; Zhou & Shen 2025). Such research demonstrates that misinformation is not only a matter of factual inaccuracy but also involves cognitive and communicative processes shaping how individuals interpret and retain information. In view of these complexities, many studies adopt the broader term *misinformation* to refer to misleading or inaccurate content circulating in digital communication, without necessarily determining the communicative intentions behind it (see Jussila et al. 2021; van der Linden 2022; Wang et al. 2019). Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, for the purpose of the ongoing analysis the authors adopted the all-embracing term *misinformation* for all types of false, factually inaccurate or misleading information circulating online. In doing so, we aim not only to prevent prospective terminological discrepancies, but also to bypass a number of yet unresolved issues, a few of which we shall now briefly describe. To start with, *disinformation* and *misinformation* are both used in reference to false or misleading information, with the former often being seen as concocted wilfully, and the latter characterized as being created or shared without malicious intentions (Wardle & Derakhshan 2017). However, in any scientific investigation in which the researcher assumes the role of an observer rather than a participant "intent can be difficult to establish" (van der Linden 2022: 460). Further controversies surround the term *fake news*, described in "Fake news: Understanding media and misinformation in the digital age" (2020: 15) as "social media circulation of false information mimicking the style of contemporary news". Viewing the above definition from the wide perspective of current research (e.g., van der Linden 2022: 360-461) and keeping in mind the ever-so-subtle ways in which Internet users are being manipulated on a daily basis, one may come to the conclusion that news items do not have to be blatantly *fake* in order to be misleading. Furthermore, it is worth noting that after the 2016 US presidential election, the term under scrutiny started functioning in the public domain as a politicised rhetorical device to such a degree that certain scholars insist upon rejecting it altogether in favour of the already-mentioned *misinformation* (Wang et al. 2019: 2).

As noted above, *multimodal misinformation* is understood in this study as misleading or factually inaccurate content conveyed through the interaction of verbal and visual modes. In social media communication such messages frequently combine written text with images, memes, screenshots or other visual elements which contribute to the interpretation of the message and shape its persuasive potential. In the present study, the focus is on verbo-pictorial messages circulating on social media platforms.

The term *anti-vaccine tweets*, introduced above, refers to social media messages expressing scepticism toward vaccination, questioning vaccine safety or effectiveness, or discouraging

vaccination uptake. The term *tweet* is retained throughout the paper because the analysed material was collected when the platform was still officially called Twitter, and its messages were referred to as tweets. Although the platform was rebranded as X in 2023 and the term *post* is now used in the interface, the term *tweet* remains widely used in academic literature.¹ From a linguistic perspective, tweets may be treated as a genre of short-form digital discourse characterised by brevity, high intertextuality and frequent multimodal composition combining textual and visual elements. While tweets often circulate alongside other forms of misinformation, such as fabricated news or misleading headlines, they constitute a distinct genre of social media communication whose structural and multimodal properties influence how misinformation is constructed and interpreted.

3. Corpus data and methodology

Having identified the phenomena that constitute the mainstay for the upcoming discussion, we shall now describe the methodological aspects of our study. Principally, the present paper attempts to address the following research question: how do metaphor and metonymy function as cognitive mechanisms structuring multimodal misinformation in anti-vaccine tweets?

As regards the subject matter of the paper, it focuses solely on misinformation revolving around the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic. The choice of relevant research material was inspired by a report² published in 2021 by the non-profit organization The Center for Countering Digital Hate³ (henceforth CCDH), which examined a sample of anti-vaccine content shared and posted on Facebook and Twitter. The main assumption governing the foregoing inquiry was that while a great many people may disseminate anti-vaccine information on social media platforms, the original message they share can be traced back to a handful of creators. Despite being a mere hypothesis, the above-mentioned conjecture seems valid, since – according to the report – 12 individuals (i.e., Joseph Mercola, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Ty and Charlene Bollinger, Christiane Northrup, Sherri Tenpenny, Rizza Islam, Rashid Buttar, Ben Tapper, Erin Elizabeth, Sayer Ji, Kelly Brogan and Kevin Jenkins), labelled as *The Disinformation Dozen*, were proven to be responsible for up to 65% of anti-vaccine content on the social media platforms scrutinised in the sample, including 17% of anti-vaccine information shared on Twitter (now X).

Following this and bearing in mind the research question posed above, we first decided to create a corpus composed of messages shared by the members of *The Disinformation Dozen*. Specifically, we aimed to collect the 100 most retweeted tweets from each individual. Since Twitter itself does not possess any in-built functionality that would allow its users to segregate tweets based on the number

of retweets, we were forced to employ an external instrument that offers such a feature, in this case the social media content analysis tool *Popsters*⁴. During data collection, several limitations emerged. In May 2022, Twitter introduced its crisis misinformation policy, leading to the suspension of numerous accounts disseminating anti-vaccine content. Although most accounts were later reinstated, some tweets had been permanently removed. Consequently, the accounts of Ty and Charlene Bollinger and Kelly Brogan were excluded from the study. In addition, the accounts of Kevin Jenkins and Ben Tapper were reinstated only in January 2023, resulting in a reduced number of tweets within the selected timeframe. As a result, the final corpus comprises 932 tweets that were among the most frequently retweeted posts produced by the analysed accounts, rather than the initially intended 1,200.

As regards data collection, the timeframe adopted for the purpose of the study spans 19 months, starting on 1st September 2021 and ending on 31st March 2023. The choice of the starting point was not arbitrary, as it coincides with the official approval of the first COVID-19 vaccine, namely Pfizer-BioNTech⁵, an event which undoubtedly generated intense anti-vaccine sentiments that were frequently voiced in online discussions.

Since the research material was meant to be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, it had to be subjected to additional processing aimed at classifying collected examples. The initial corpus comprised 932 tweets and was divided into two analytically distinct categories: 458 mono-modal tweets operating exclusively on the verbal mode, and 474 multimodal tweets combining verbal and visual elements. The latter category also included tweets containing automatically generated link previews (see Fig.1), as these incorporate visual components (i.e., thumbnails) that contribute to interpretation and user engagement.



Figure 1. An example of a link preview. Source: <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1578886708547837952>

Given the multimodal focus of the study, only the latter group ($N = 474$) was subjected to further analysis. From this subset, 158 tweets were retained based on their explicit reference to vaccination. Within this reduced dataset, metaphorical and/or metonymic mappings were identified in 113 tweets, indicating that figurative cognitive mechanisms play a prominent role in vaccination-related multimodal misinformation.

As noted above, in an effort to answer the research question, the present study seeks to synthesise both quantitative and qualitative data. In the strict sense, the paper falls within the ambit of explanatory sequential mixed methods, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018: 51-52; 304-305), in which a quantitative analysis is followed by a qualitative one, as a means to foster a more complete and complex understanding of the research problem in question.

Following the cognitive linguistic approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by Hart (2008; 2010), the analysis focuses on cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy, which are used to reinforce and spread ideologies (cf. Duda & Nycz 2022 for other expressive functions of metaphor and metonymy in discourse). This approach also responds to the long-standing problem in CDA of how to account for the mediation between discourse and society, for which Wodak (2006) explicitly argues that socio-cognitive concepts are indispensable, as they provide the missing link

between linguistic form, social practice, and ideological meaning. This falls within the scope of referential strategies, which – according to Hart (2010: 49) – "can be used to exploit human capacity for categorizing coalitional groups in terms of a dichotomous in-group and out-group". What is more, the way in which in-groups and out-groups are constructed depends on a number of cues, cultural ones being the most prominent. Most importantly, as illustrated by Hart (2010; 2011), metaphor as a construal operation – especially involving the blending of elements from two input spaces, through a generic space, to create the fourth emergent output space (Fauconnier & Turner 2002) – has an incredible power of representing and reinforcing people's beliefs, which is crucial for text-producers in constructing ideologically loaded messages. In turn, metonymy being a kind of profiling/backgrounding cognitive mechanism – as based on Littlemore's (2015) research findings, as well as those of Hart (2011) and Brône and Feytaerts (2003) – plays a number of roles in ideological discourse, for example as a referential strategy to emphasise certain characteristic features of social actors or as a marked reference-point construction in humour processing.

In turn, the distinction between mono-modal and multimodal tweets is based on a well-grounded understanding of modality as "the channel used as the manner of execution" (Żebrowska 2014: 8), and of modes which "embody the qualities of perception" (Holly 2009: 392, as quoted in Żebrowska 2014: 9). Since the distinction between the two terms is largely a matter of analytical focus, the term mode will be employed throughout the present study. As Górska (2020: xiii) elucidates, a single communicative act may be expressed with the use of different semiotic modes (verbal, visual/pictorial, gestural, sound, music, and so on) which may be combined in a number of ways. The present research focuses on multimodal tweets operating on at least two modes, here verbal and visual/pictorial being the most frequent combinations. Within the pictorial mode, the examples chosen for the qualitative analysis represent only the so-called static visuals, that is photos and pictures, as the analysis of videos and clips (dynamic visuals, to use Forceville's (2020) taxonomy) requires more elaborate analytical tools, and hence will be incorporated in our future research on manipulation and misinformation in digital discourse.

4. Quantitative distribution of metaphor and metonymy

In the final dataset of 113 messages, metonymy proved to be the dominant device, with a total of 158 metonymic instances identified, often with more than one metonymic relation occurring within a single tweet. The most frequent metonymic patterns – restricted to those identified more than once in the dataset – are presented in Table 1, and include INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION (e.g. *syringe* for vaccination), PERSON FOR ACTION ASSOCIATED WITH THAT PERSON (e.g. *Dr Fauci* for

mandatory vaccination), PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT (e.g. *Pfizer* for vaccine), SYMBOL FOR INSTITUTION (e.g. *a gavel* for court in the context of vaccine-related lawsuits), ACTION FOR EFFECT (e.g. *vaccination* for myocarditis), PRODUCT FOR ACTION (e.g. *vaccine* for vaccination), and PART FOR WHOLE (e.g. *a hole in the skin* for vaccine injection) alongside a range of less frequent but analytically relevant institutional and causal relations.

Table 1. Recurrent metonymic patterns in the multimodal anti-vaccine dataset. Source: Own processing

Metonymic pattern	Frequency
Instrument for action	25
Person for action	17
Producer for product	17
Symbol for institution	15
Action for effect	14
Product for action	12
Part for whole	10
Container for contents	8
Cause for action	6
Institution for people	5
Institution for action	4
Person for institution	3
One of many	3
Feature for a person	3
Effect for action	2
Place for institution	2
Tool for profession	2
Place for people	2

The foregoing distribution suggests that metonymy functions as a key cognitive mechanism, enabling the compression of complex medical, social, and institutional processes into cognitively salient representations that facilitate ideological positioning and the effective dissemination of misinformation without the need for explicit argumentation.

In contrast, metaphorical mappings were relatively rare in the dataset, with only 22 metaphorical instances identified. Among these, orientational metaphors accounted for 13 cases, including MORE/GOOD IS UP (10 instances) and LESS/BAD IS DOWN (3 instances), while the remaining examples involved incidental instances of metaphorical blending rather than systematic metaphorical frameworks. The marked imbalance between the frequency of metonymy (158 instances) and metaphor (22 instances) suggests that multimodal anti-vaccine misinformation relies primarily on local, context-dependent metonymic shortcuts rather than on elaborate cross-domain metaphorical mappings. These quantitative tendencies provide the empirical grounding for the qualitative analysis

that follows, in which selected verbo-pictorial tweets are examined to illustrate how specific metonymic and metaphorical construals interact with visual framing to enhance the persuasive force of misinformation.

5. Multimodal analysis of selected verbo-pictorial tweets

In alignment with the mixed-methods approach outlined above, the examples for the upcoming qualitative analysis were selected using purposive sampling, also referred to as a qualitative method of filling the sample. This approach entails "selecting research subjects rather than starting with a predetermined sampling frame" (Robinson 2023: 5645). The decision to employ this method was guided by its successful application in studies examining Twitter (now X) (cf. Sibona & Walczak 2012; Sibona et al. 2020), as well as in research analysing multimodal texts (Czachur et al. 2022; Mormol-Fura & Kopecka 2025). More importantly, however, using purposive sampling in our study allows for the selection of diverse and representative examples that most effectively demonstrate the cognitive mechanisms involved in the manipulation of verbo-pictorial information, or more specifically, the creation of COVID-19 misinformation within the realm of digital discourse.

5.1 Metonymy and irony/humour in COVID-19 tweets

The first two examples in the ongoing analysis are centred around manipulation and misinformation through injecting humour, and also, as described by Tandoc et al. (2018: 6-7) through playing "on the ludicrousness of issues". Here, metonymy contributes primarily to humour and irony through marked reference-point constructions and incongruity (cf. Brône & Feytaerts 2003). In contrast, the third example illustrates a more typical use of metonymy as a referential and expressive cognitive mechanism, whereby selected elements of a scene are foregrounded in order to shape the evaluative interpretation of the message (cf. Littlemore 2015; Hart 2011).

In the first example presented in Figure 2 below, the combination of three modes may be observed, namely visual (iconic), written language and spoken language. At a visual level, we can see a close-up from the poster advertising the well-known 1990s film entitled *Mrs. Doubtfire* picturing the main character; here, an iconic visual representation serves the purpose of providing the background for the wordplay which takes place at a verbal level. The name is changed from *Mrs. Doubtfire* to *Mrs Doubt Pfizer* in order to evoke a PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT metonymic mapping, whereby the name of the pharmaceutical company stands for the vaccine it produces, thus activating associations related to vaccination through a single lexical element. At the level of written language, in turn, the second element of the morphologically complex surname, that is *-fire*, is changed to an independent

morpheme *Pfizer*, while at the level of spoken language, the modification involves a mere addition of the sound [z].



Figure 2. Ben Tapper's tweet of 3 February 2023.
Source: <https://x.com/DrBenTapper1/status/1621286669067362304>

The cognitive mechanism of metonymy, which is at work here, whereby Pfizer stands for a COVID-19 vaccine the company produces, plays a couple of roles (see Brône & Feyaerts 2003). Firstly, metonymy is used here as a euphemism to juxtapose contrastive 'out-group' and 'in-group' perspectives on vaccination (see Littlemore 2015) and hence forms coalitional groups through polarisation schema (van Dijk 1998). Instead of using the direct term *anti vaxxer*, the author of the tweet postulates the use of the milder indirect term *Mrs Doubt Pfizer*, in this way suggesting that their attitude towards vaccination is not as strict as those belonging to the 'out-group' should think, but rather reserved. Additionally, the combination of these three modes generates a humorous effect in making up the new name – *Mrs Doubt Pfizer* – for a person who is reluctant to have the COVID-19 vaccination, or inoculation in general. The specificity of humour interpretation in this tweet depends on the selection through profiling and metonymy (Brône & Feyaerts 2003: 13-14; Hart 2011: 174-179), whereby the term *anti vaxxer* profiles that out-groupers see the author and the members of their group as opponents or enemies of vaccination, and the term *Mrs Doubt Pfizer* highlights that the author and the members of their group, in-groupers, actually see themselves as not the ones opposing COVID-19 vaccines, but doubting it and asking questions. In this way the author skilfully and gently reinforces their audience's beliefs about COVID-19 vaccines, and most likely about inoculation in general, a strategy consistent with the construction of in-group and out-group identities described in CDA (van Dijk 1998; 2006).

As for the second example presented in Figure 3, the tweet combines two modes, namely visual and written language. What strikes a reader most in the visual aspect of this tweet is its largely metonymic

nature. There is a clear contrast between the person on the left (covered in a large number of symbols and icons and carrying a large Progress Pride Flag combined with a sign symbolising Islam) and the person on the right (wearing black and carrying a small American flag). Looking at the individual on the left, we can name a number of metonymic mappings that give rise to an almost grotesque picture of a faceless figure embodying a wide range of ideas and/or institutions.



Figure 3. Christiane Northrup's tweet of 29 December 2022.
Source: <https://x.com/DrChrisNorthrup/status/1608255299261022208>

First of all, five syringes evoke a CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS metonymic mapping (a syringe metonymically represents a vaccine) or as INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymy, in which a syringe stands for taking a vaccine. In more detail, the two syringes in the person's right arm most likely represent the original two doses of COVID-19 vaccines and the three syringes in the person's left arm may represent booster shots. Another, here COVID-19 related, metonymic mapping SALIENT PROPERTY OF A CATEGORY FOR THE WHOLE CATEGORY is realised visually through the surgical face mask, which represents COVID-19 restrictions. The remaining symbolic signs (Progress Pride Flag, black star and crescent, Black Lives Matter, red hammer and sickle, Pink Venus and Fist, Chinese yin yang, CNN, Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and a few others) all represent metonymically different ideologies and institutions through a PART FOR WHOLE relationship. In this case, a symbol stands for an institution (e.g., CNN, Facebook, Twitter) or for an ideology (e.g., Islam, Communism). It may also represent a social movement or a group of people (e.g., LGBTQ, people of colour, women's liberation movement). In contrast, the person on the right is wearing black and the only symbol that we can see is an American flag, which may be interpreted metonymically as standing for national identity or a set of socio-political values associated with it. Unlike the person on the left who is faceless, the one on the right has the face of an ancient philosopher,

blond hair, blue eyes and a beard, and is known as Yes Chad, whose image is often used in social media to debase an interlocutor, especially when the interlocutor tries to mock or bully the other party. Here, the image may be interpreted as MEMBER OF A CATEGORY FOR CATEGORY (GREEK PHILOSOPHERS) metonymy, and more specifically as a metonymic pattern GREEK PHILOSOPHER/-S FOR WISE/INTELLIGENT PEOPLE.

Additionally, at the verbal level there is an 'us and them' construal represented in the speech bubbles, which can be interpreted as a form of discursive polarisation strategy. The person on the left saying *They brainwashed you*, suggests that *they* – meaning a dominant social group or institution, the 'out-group' – influenced the beliefs of the person on the right. The latter replies, *Really?*, which is clearly an ironic question implying that, looking at all these symbols, it is actually the person on the left that must have been manipulated by all of the groups and organisations visually represented all over him/her. This example is multimodal evidence that, as Littlemore (2015: 103) suggests, "metonymy [...] has the potential to be a more manipulative trope than metaphor because it is more subtle and less likely to be noticed". Such constructions contribute to the discursive framing of anti-vaccine positions as acts of resistance against perceived institutional authority and demonstrate how metonymy contributes not only to humour and irony, but also to the discursive construction of ideological divisions.

In contrast to the previous examples, which rely on humour and irony, the following tweet, presented in Figure 4, illustrates a more typical form of metonymic construal, frequently observed in the dataset, where visual elements associated with vaccination activate the broader vaccination context and frame the issue in expressive terms. The tweet combines two modes, namely visual and written language. At the visual level, the image depicts a syringe being placed next to a vial containing a vaccine, both positioned on a medical tray. The visual composition foregrounds objects associated with the act of inoculation and thereby evokes the concept of VACCINATION through several metonymic mappings. First of all, the syringe functions as an instance of INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymy, whereby the instrument (syringe) stands for the act of vaccination. Closely related is the PRODUCT FOR ACTION relation, in which the vaccine itself stands metonymically for the process of vaccination. Additionally, the hand holding the syringe may be interpreted as PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, where a body part (hand) stands for the person performing the action, most plausibly a medical professional administering the injection.



Figure 4. Christiane Northrup's tweet of 25 December 2022.
Source: <https://x.com/DrChrisNorthrup/status/1607076044854464513>

At the verbal level, the short caption *Christmas miracle* introduces an evaluative frame that contrasts with the visual representation of medical intervention. The juxtaposition of the caption with the image suggests that the reported increase in opposition to school vaccine mandates – referenced in the link preview to a New York Times article – is presented as a positive or celebratory development. In this way, the tweet relies on visually grounded metonymic relations to activate the concept of VACCINATION, while simultaneously framing the reported social reaction to vaccine mandates in an approving light, and thereby presenting opposition to vaccination policies as a form of legitimate resistance.

5.2 Conceptual blending in COVID-19 tweets

In a small number of verbo-pictorial tweets we observe clear emergent structures, which may be interpreted in terms of conceptual blending (see Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Hart 2008; 2010). Therefore, one representative example is discussed below to illustrate how verbo-pictorial tweets may construct persuasive meanings through integration networks.

In the example shown in Figure 5 below, we also observe a construction of verbo-pictorial blended space involving an emergent structure, in which elements in each input space are combined together through completion, as illustrated in Figure 6 below. In two counterpart input spaces the theme of superheroes is conveyed visually, referred to as Truth Heroes, alongside the textually presented action of fighting for people who *are injured and gas-lighted by Big Pharma*. The two input spaces are connected through a generic space, which contains the abstract theme/action structure of agents defending others against a perceived threat. Elements from both inputs are selectively projected into the blended space, where the members of the so-called Disinformation Dozen (as presented in CCDH)

are conceptualised as heroic defenders fighting on behalf of victims of alleged pharmaceutical manipulation, and resisting the perceived dominance of institutional actors such as governments and pharmaceutical companies. Note that the faces of the superheroes depicted on the tweet are mimetic icons of the Twitter profile pictures of the so-called Disinformation Dozen. The blending process here results in the emergent structure, whereby providing people with true information about vaccines by the 'information dozen'/experts, is conceptualised as superheroes fighting for people in need (those injured and tricked). It is worth noting that selective projection is present in the blended space analysed. The part and parcel of our background knowledge about superheroes is that they are good and that they always fight evil in the world. These relevant structures, however, are not projected in the blended space because, most probably, the author chose to leave this implied rather than overtly stated. As Hart (2008: 97) elucidates, "integration networks are constructed according to speakers' communicative (and rhetorical) intentions. In other words, ideologically, speakers may choose to recruit a particular structure in order to promote a certain perceived reality", a process that aligns with CDA accounts of discursive representation and ideological positioning.

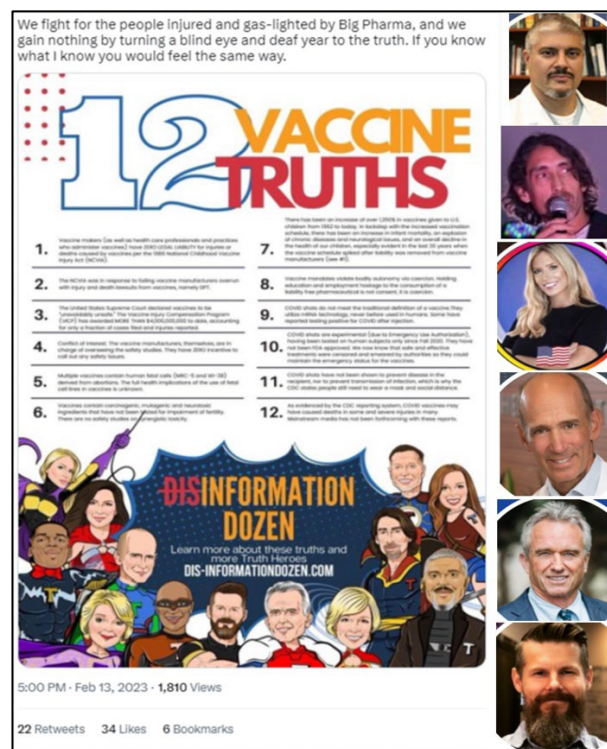


Figure 5. Ben Tapper's tweet of 13 February 2023, and – on the right – profile photos of some of the people portrayed in the tweet. Source: <https://x.com/DrBenTapper/status/1625162953161953282>

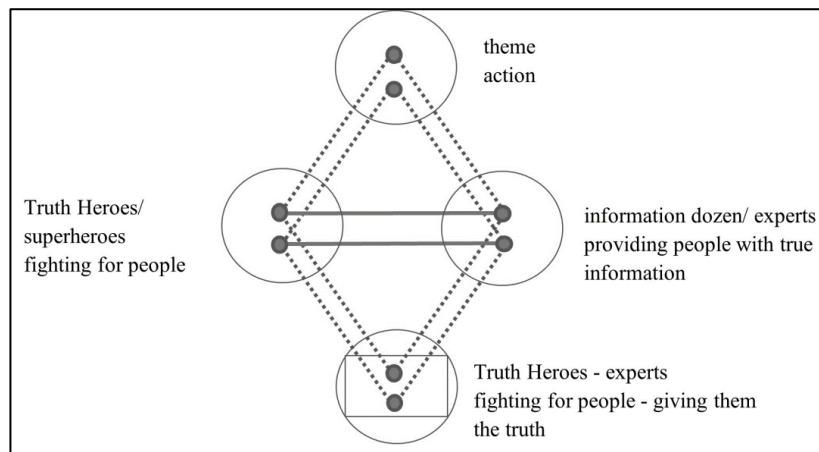


Figure 6. Conceptual blending network for 'superheroes fighting for the truth for people'. Source: Own processing

Additionally, an aspect of the tweet that strikes the recipient is what in "Multimodal argumentation and rhetoric in media genres" (2017) is called multimodal paradox. There is a clear contrast between the two states presented in the tweet, namely the name of the group *disinformation dozen*, which shows completely opposed viewpoints on the COVID-19 vaccines. There is, again, 'us and them' construal, through which we, 'in-group', believe we are information dozen, and they, 'out-group', think we are disinformation dozen. This juxtaposition is further evidenced in the statement, *If you know what I know you would feel the same way*, which suggests that the author of the tweet has the knowledge, which gives them power and emphasises their superior position.

6. Conclusions

The data analysis conducted as part of our research shows that verbo-pictorial tweets constitute a substantial proportion of the dataset and frequently rely on visually grounded cognitive mechanisms to convey simplified and emotionally salient representations of vaccination-related issues. It is possible that multimodal tweets are highly popular due to the fact that a single, often simple and symbolic, visual element can effectively encapsulate a significant amount of information that is easily decoded by the recipient. This economy of expression proves to be especially useful on Twitter (now X), which is a predominantly text-based platform with imposed character limitations (the length of a single tweet cannot exceed 280 characters). In other words, visually aided tweets are more expressive than messages which consist solely of text. Consequently, the results of our analysis contribute to the already existing research-based evidence, which shows that visual (mis)information is more persuasive and triggers emotional response more than pure verbal content (e.g., Heley et al. 2022). Heley et al. (2022: 515), who present a typology of visual misinformation stating the importance of using visuals as a manipulative discourse strategy, also stress that "visual manipulations are often imperceptible and easily overlooked, resulting in individuals accepting visual images as reality".

What is more, not only are visuals more engaging and salient, but they are also better understood, remembered longer and shared more eagerly.

As for cognitive mechanisms, metonymy emerges as the dominant device in the dataset analysed, while metaphor plays a supporting and often complementary role. Importantly, metonymy performs different functions depending on the communicative context. In some cases, it operates as a reference-point mechanism contributing to irony or humour, often through incongruity and the reinforcement of stereotypical representations used to ridicule an opponent in a debate. In other cases, however, metonymy assumes a more typical referential and expressive function, whereby selected elements are foregrounded in order to guide the evaluative interpretation of vaccination-related issues. This expressive potential of metonymy, as well as its capacity to become a manipulative discourse strategy, has already been acknowledged by researchers in cognitive linguistics and discourse studies (see, for example, Littlemore 2015). The presented analysis confirms these observations and further demonstrates that verbo-pictorial metonymy may be complex, highly productive, and frequently combined with other cognitive mechanisms, most notably metaphor. Many of these metonymic constructions also contribute to the discursive framing of vaccination debates as a struggle between institutional authority and individual autonomy, thereby presenting anti-vaccine positions as forms of resistance against perceived external control. In turn, the use of verbo-pictorial metaphor in the tweets allowed the authors to produce innovative and persuasive or, manipulative, construal operations with the view to stressing the opposing 'us and them' and hence manifesting negative representation of the 'out-group' (see Hart 2008).

When viewed through the prism of CDA (see van Dijk 2006), the examples discussed in this article may be interpreted as instances of discursive strategies that contribute to the construction and reinforcement of ideological positions in online communication. As evidenced by the qualitative analysis, the creators of misinformation employ a range of strategies typical of manipulative discourse, including emphasising their privileged access to knowledge, discrediting institutional sources of information, and encouraging audiences to adopt particular beliefs as factual. These strategies are closely related to the construction of in-group and out-group distinctions, which play a central role in shaping the interpretation of vaccination debates.

Undoubtedly, there remain a number of issues which necessitate further investigation, such as multimodal analysis of dynamic visuals combined with verbal messages also found in a number of tweets. Last but not least, although misinformation is the scope of studies of many scholars

representing various fields of knowledge, the integration of cognitive linguistics frameworks into discourse studies dealing with misinformation will not only enrich our knowledge on the topic, but may also result in constructing mechanisms of dealing with misinformation in an effective way.

Notes and abbreviations

1. Google Scholar search limited to publications from 2023 onward (i.e., following Twitter's rebranding as X) returned approximately 2,090 results for the search term *X posts*, compared to approximately 39,200 results for *tweet*, indicating the continued dominance of the latter term. Some most recent publications serving as evidence include, for example, Elmas et al. 2025 and Xu et al. 2026.
2. Available at: <https://counterhate.com/research/the-disinformation-dozen/>
3. CCDH aims to "protect human rights and civil liberties online" and "stop the spread of online hate and disinformation through innovative research, public campaigns and policy advocacy" (source: <https://counterhate.com/about/>).
4. Available at: <https://popsters.com/>. Intended primarily for influencers and professionals working in marketing, *Popsters* allows its users to analyse what types of posts attract audiences on a number of social media platforms.
5. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine>

CCDH – Centre for Countering Digital Hate

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

References


1. Abdel-Raheem, A. (2023). Where Covid metaphors come from: Reconsidering context and modality in metaphor. In *Social semiotics*, 33 (5), p. 971-1010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1971493>
2. Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. In *Journal of economic perspectives*, 31 (2), p. 211-236. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>
3. Brône, G. & Feyaerts, K. (2003). *The cognitive linguistics of incongruity resolution: Marked reference-point structures in humor*. Unpublished manuscript. Leuven: University of Leuven, Department of Linguistics.
4. Cheng, Z., Kai, L. & Yanhong L. (2021). Linguistic characteristics and the dissemination of misinformation in social media: The moderating effect of information richness. In *Information processing & management*, 58 (6), p. 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2021.102679>
5. Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
6. Czachur, W., Opiłowski, R. & Smykała, M. (2022). Multimodal practices of empathy and fear in Polish refugee discourse: Analysis of magazine covers. In *GEMA Online® journal of language studies*, 22 (3), p. 63-85. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2022-2203-04>
7. Di Domenico, G., Tuan, A. & Visentin, M. (2021). Linguistic drivers of misinformation diffusion on social media

- during the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Italian journal of marketing*, 4, p. 351-369. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43039-021-00026-9>
8. van Dijk, T.A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. In *Discourse & society*, 17 (3), p. 359-383. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
 9. van Dijk, T.A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi: Sage publications. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446217856>
 10. Duda, B. & Nycz, K. (2022). Cognitive precision and expressiveness in stock market communication: A contrastive perspective. In *GEMA Online® journal of language studies*, 22 (4), p. 1-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2022-2204-01>
 11. Elmas, T., Yilmaz, F. & Gürbüz, N. (2025). "Refugees from Ukraine are called humans": A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of Turkish tweets about Ukrainian refugees. In *Media, culture & society*, 47 (1), p.75-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241271051>
 12. *Fake news: Understanding media and misinformation in the digital age*. (2020). Zimdars, M. & McLeod, K. (eds.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11807.001.0001>
 13. Fauconnier, G. & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
 14. Forceville, C. (2020). *Visual and multimodal communication: Applying the relevance principle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190845230.001.0001>
 15. Fulgoni, G.M. & Lipsman, A. (2017). The downside of digital word of mouth and the pursuit of media quality: How social sharing is disrupting digital advertising models and metrics. In *Journal of advertising research*, 57 (2), p. 127-131. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2017-020>
 16. Górska, E. (2020). *Understanding abstract concepts across modes in multimodal discourse a cognitive linguistic approach*. New York – London: Routledge. DOI: <https://10.4324/9780429282737>
 17. Grieve, J. & Woodfield, H. (2023). *The language of fake news*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009349161>
 18. Hart, C. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and metaphor: Toward a theoretical framework. In *Critical discourse studies*, 5 (2), p. 91-106. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900801990058>
 19. Hart, C. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis and cognitive science*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230299009>
 20. Hart, C. (2011). Moving beyond metaphor in the cognitive linguistic approach to CDA: Construal operations in immigration discourse. In *Critical discourse studies in context and cognition*. Hart, C. (ed.). Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, p. 171-192. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/dapsac.43.09har>
 21. Heley, K., Gaysynsky, A. & King, A.J. (2022). Missing the bigger picture: The need for more research on visual health misinformation. In *Sci commun*, 44 (4), p. 514-527. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10755470221113833>
 22. Jussila, J., Suominen, A.H., Partanen, A. & Honkanen, T. (2021). Text analysis methods for misinformation-related research on Finnish language Twitter. In *Future internet*, 13 (6), p. 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/fi13060157>
 23. Littlemore, J. (2015). *Metonymy: Hidden shortcuts in language, thought and communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09781107338814>
 24. van der Linden, S. (2022). Misinformation: Susceptibility, spread, and interventions to immunize the public. In *Nature medicine*, 28 (3), p. 460-467. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-022-01713-6>
 25. Mormol-Fura, P. & Kopecka, B. (2025). Commodification of misinformation: A multimodal analysis of conspiracy-


- themed T-shirts. In *Contributions to general and comparative linguistics*, 14, p. 203-230. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23817/bzspr.14-8>
26. *Multimodal argumentation and rhetoric in media genres*. (2017). Tseronis, A. & Forceville, C. (eds.). Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/aic.14>
 27. Musolff, A. (2022). 'War against Covid-19': Is the pandemic management as war metaphor helpful or hurtful? In *Pandemic and crisis discourse: Communicating COVID-19 and public health strategy*. Musolff, A., Breeze, R., Kondo, K. & Vilar-Lluch, S. (eds.). London: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 307-320. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350232730>
 28. Robinson, R.S. (2023). Purposive sampling. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research*. Maggino, F. (ed.). 2nd ed. Cham: Springer, p. 5645-5647. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2337
 29. Schulz, P.J. & Nakamoto, K. (2024). *Worse than ignorance: The challenge of health misinformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009289542>
 30. Sibona, C. & Walczak, S. (2012). Purposive sampling on Twitter: A case study. In *2012 45th Hawaii international conference on system sciences*. January 4-7, 2012, Maui, USA, IEEE, p. 3510-3519. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2012.493>
 31. Sibona, C., Walczak, S. & White Baker, E. (2020). A guide for purposive sampling on Twitter. In *Communications of the association for information systems*, 46 (1), p. 537-559. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.04622>
 32. Sperandio, N.E. (2020). The role of multimodal metaphors in the creation of the fake news category: A proposal for analysis. In *Revista de estudos de linguagem*, 28 (2), p. 777-799. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17851/2237-2083.28.2.777-799>
 33. Tandoc, E.C., Lim, Z.W. & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "fake news": A typology of scholarly definitions. In *Digital journalism*, 6 (2), p. 137-153. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
 34. Wang, Y., McKee, M., Torbica, A. & Stuckler, D. (2019). Systematic literature review on the spread of health-related misinformation on social media. In *Social science & medicine*, 240, 112552, p. 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112552>
 35. Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
 36. Wilson, A., Wilkes, S., Teramoto, Y. & Hale, S. (2023) Multimodal analysis of disinformation and misinformation. In *Royal society open*, 10 (12): 230964. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.230964>
 37. Wodak, R. (2006). Mediation between discourse and society: Assessing cognitive approaches in CDA. In *Discourse studies*, 8 (1), p. 179-190. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445606059566>
 38. Xu, Y., Friginal, E. & Hu, C. (2026). A multi-dimensional analysis of English tweets by Chinese and American automotive companies. In *International journal of applied linguistics*, p. 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.70132>
 39. Zhou, J. & Shen, L. (2025). *Persistence of misinformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009397339>
 40. Żebrowska, E. (2014). Multimodal messages. In *Journal of multimodal communication studies*, 1 (1), p. 8-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/jmcs.2014.1.1.2>

Contact data

Author 1#

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i> <i>email:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Bożena Duda PhD in linguistics / Assistant Professor Institute of English Studies University of Rzeszów al. mjr. W. Kopisto 2b, 35-315 Rzeszów bduda@ur.edu.pl Cognitive semantics, metaphor and metonymy, multimodality, discourse studies, intertextuality.</p>
---	--	--

Author 2#

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i> <i>email:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Paulina Mormol-Fura PhD in linguistics / Assistant Professor Institute of English Studies University of Rzeszów al. mjr. W. Kopisto 2b, 35-315 Rzeszów pmormol@ur.edu.pl Multimodal discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, media linguistics, taboo in language.</p>
--	--	--

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES THROUGH VISUALS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF CARTOONISH ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DURING WARS¹

Ansa Hameed 

Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Received: 5.05.2026 **Reviewed:** 15.05.2026 and 18.05.2026

Similarity Index: 0%

Bibliographic description: Hameed, A. (2026). Constructing narratives through visuals: A semiotic study of cartoonish illustrations of the role of the United Nations during wars. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 62-84. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.04>

Abstract: This study examines the linguistic and visual portrayal of the United Nations in selected online cartoons depicting various global conflicts and wars. Drawing on Barthes's semiotic framework and Forceville's theory of visual metaphor, the study analyzes how multimodal signs, symbolic representations, and metaphorical imagery contribute to the framing of the United Nations within wartime narratives. The findings reveal that the United Nations has been portrayed as largely ineffective and passive during various worldwide conflicts. Almost all depictions of the organization portray it as a fragile role in the selected visual narratives.

Keywords: cartoons, conflicts, semiotics, United Nations, visual metaphors, wars.

1. Introduction

Visuals speak louder than words. Based on this everyday philosophy, cartoons are considered a medium for constructing narratives that have long-lasting impacts on the audience. Similarly, the depiction of organizations helps to build an image of them and how they operate in certain situations. Political cartoons serve as a potent medium for visual commentary on socio-political events, often encapsulating complex narratives and ideological stances within their graphical representations (Al-Dala'ien et al. 2022). Specifically, these visual narratives frequently reflect public perceptions and

¹ This research is supported via funding from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, project number (PSAU/2026/R/1447).



media critique of international bodies and their effectiveness during global conflicts (Hameed & Alsager 2023). Visual political communication plays a central role in shaping public understanding of war, conflict, and global governance. Studies show that political cartoons construct narratives through semiotic devices, multimodal framing, metaphor, and ideological encoding, especially in wartime contexts (Lulu et al. 2022). These cartoons routinely depict institutions, actors, and power relations through symbolism, visual metaphor, and representational strategies (Al-Momani et al. 2016). Research also demonstrates that images can influence interpretations of peace, legitimacy, humanitarianism, and conflict mediation (Hutchison & Bleiker 2021). Shaikh et al. (2019: 78) comment, "Published cartoons are not ordinary in their nature; they change minds, make beliefs, transform ideas, guide both directly and indirectly".

The United Nations (UN) organization works for a safe, sustainable, and prosperous future for the world, without geographical boundaries. The main foci are establishing peace, combating terrorism, promoting education, providing health care, balancing resources, defending human rights, endorsing gender equality, and protecting the environment. Peacekeeping, as defined by the UN, is a way for countries torn by conflict to help create conditions for sustainable peace (Gu et al. 2023). UN peacekeepers, including military, police, and civilian personnel from many countries, monitor and observe peace processes as they emerge in post-conflict situations and assist ex-combatants in completing the peace agreements they have signed (Guo 2012).

However, although peacekeeping operations are widely covered in political discourse, no existing study explicitly examines how cartoon illustrations construct the narrative of the United Nations' role in wartime, despite extensive semiotic work on Gaza, Russia–Ukraine, Middle Eastern conflicts, and institutional depictions more broadly (Al-Dala'ien et al. 2022; Elhosary & Elkashif 2025; Guta & Eissa 2025). Likewise, although UN peacekeeping tasks such as ceasefire monitoring, civilian protection, buffer zones, and humanitarian facilitation are documented (Korson 2015), there is no research on how these functions are visually portrayed or symbolically reframed in cartoons. This gap is significant because cartoons can simplify or distort complex peacekeeping mandates through symbolic cues such as blue helmets, scale contrasts, metaphors of weakness or authority, and narrative roles like protector, bystander, or failed actor (Gondwe & Walcott 2024). Without systematic analysis, the ways cartoons shape the public perception of UN involvement in war remain underexplored.

This study, therefore, delves into the semiotic construction of the UN's role during prominent wars, as depicted in online media cartoons, to uncover the underlying ideological frameworks and critically assess the portrayal of its interventions and neutrality (Guta & Eissa 2025). The presented study employs a semiotics framework to deconstruct the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in these cartoonish illustrations, thereby elucidating how visual elements shape public opinion and ideological perspectives on the UN's engagement in conflict zones (Santika et al. 2025). This analytical lens is applied to understand how the visual 'text' of political cartoons interacts with verbal text, molding intended meaning and embedding it within the public consciousness (Zhabotynska & Ryzhova 2022).

The research aims

- To analyze the linguistic and visual semiotic resources used in online media cartoons to construct representations of the United Nations' role during major wars and conflicts.
- To examine how ideological meanings and media perspectives toward the United Nations are linguistically and visually encoded through signs, symbols, and visual metaphors in the selected cartoons.
- To analyze ideological narratives (e.g., legitimacy, neutrality, failure, protection) presented in the selected wartime narratives

In line with the objectives, the research seeks to answer the following question: How does the media visually portray the role of the UN agency during wartime through cartoons?

This research is significant as it contributes to the growing body of knowledge in linguistics, particularly in semiotic and multimodal discourse analysis. It helps understand the role of media in representing institutional performance through a caricatured lens, particularly the UN, a world-renowned agency for peace and stability. Moreover, the study provides insight into how media discourses, in the form of cartoons, represent serious issues, offering a critical perspective.

2. Literature review

2.1 Media and cartoons: A focus on visual narratives

Fairclough (2003) emphasizes the role of media discourse in sustaining power relations by promoting particular ideologies. Media discourse is considered one of the most influential means of shaping public perception and persuading audiences (Afzal et al. 2026). Similarly, Wodak and Reisigl (2001)

argue that media narratives are deeply embedded within socio-political and historical contexts, often reflecting dominant ideological positions and institutional representations. One important form of media discourse is the visual narrative, particularly political cartoons and caricatures. As multimodal texts that combine visual and textual elements, cartoons convey political and social realities in a concise yet impactful manner. Through satire, symbolism, exaggeration, and metaphor, they simplify complex political issues, making them more accessible and emotionally engaging for wider audiences (Asror et al. 2025; Hameed & Alsager 2023). Visual political communication plays a central role in shaping public understanding of war, conflict, and global governance. Studies show that political cartoons construct narratives through semiotic devices, multimodal framing, metaphor, and ideological encoding, especially in wartime contexts (Lulu et al. 2022). Ashfaq and Hussein (2013) further note that cartoons transform intricate social and political situations into understandable visual representations, while simultaneously offering criticism and commentary.

The literature on visual narratives and semiotics highlights the communicative power of images in constructing meaning and influencing public interpretation. Visual narratives rely on symbolic elements, cultural codes, and contextual cues to convey layered meanings beyond explicit textual expression (Zhabotyńska & Ryzhova 2022). Consequently, political cartoons function not only as artistic expressions but also as ideological discourses that shape audience perceptions of political actors, institutions, and global events.

2.2 Theoretical and conceptual framework

The present study adopts two complementary theoretical paradigms: Barthes's semiotic theory and Forceville's visual metaphor theory.

Semiotics, broadly defined as the study of signs and symbols within social life, originates from Saussure's concept of "semiology" (cited in Mehawesh 2014: 253). Within this tradition, Barthes (1977; 1998) extends semiotic analysis by examining how images communicate meaning at multiple levels through denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning conveyed through visible elements such as characters, objects, and settings, whereas connotation involves the cultural, political, and ideological associations attached to those elements. In Barthes's framework, myth represents the broader ideological narratives and value systems embedded in visual representations. This framework enables a systematic decoding of cartoon elements, including symbols, captions, and characters, at literal, symbolic, and ideological levels. Semiotic analysis has

therefore been widely applied to political cartoons to uncover how visual signs and cultural codes construct ideological representations and shape public interpretations (AlShurafa et al. 2021).

Alongside semiotics, the study employs Forceville's (1996) visual metaphor theory to examine how cartoons communicate complex ideas through symbolic substitution and analogy. Expanding Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, Forceville argues that metaphor is not limited to language but can also operate visually and multimodally. In visual metaphors, meaning is constructed through the interaction between a "source" domain and a "target" domain, in which attributes of one concept are projected onto another. Political cartoons frequently rely on metaphorical representations, depicting leaders as animals, nations as objects, or institutions through symbolic imagery. These metaphors condense complicated political realities into accessible visual forms while simultaneously promoting ideological meanings (Zarifian 2025).

Building on these theoretical foundations, the study employs semiotic and visual metaphor analysis to explore how cartoonish illustrations construct narratives about the United Nations' wartime role and shape public perceptions of its diplomatic and peacekeeping functions. Table 1 below presents an outline of the study's conceptual framework, integrating Barthes's semiotics (how meaning is built) and visual metaphor theory (how figurative mapping works) to analyze cartoons.

Table 1. Conceptual framework for analysis. Source: Own processing

Analytical stage	Theoretical basis	Focus of analysis	Role in metaphor construction	Application to cartoon analysis
Denotation	Barthes' Semiotics	Literal and surface-level visual meaning	Helps identify the target domain by recognizing explicitly depicted actors, objects, and settings	Identify visible elements such as the UN, political leaders, weapons, flags, gestures, captions, colours, and spatial arrangements
Connotation	Barthes' Semiotics	Symbolic, cultural, and emotional meanings associated with visual signs	Helps identify the source domain through symbolic associations, exaggerations, stereotypes, colour use, and visual framing	Interpret symbolic cues such as weakness, power, aggression, or neutrality represented through posture, size, darkness/lightness, facial expressions, and caricatured exaggeration
Visual metaphor	Forceville's Visual Metaphor Theory	Source–target domain mapping through visual analogy or substitution	Explains how metaphorical meaning is constructed visually	Analyze figurative representations such as the UN depicted as a fragile human, puppet, or broken object to understand ideological framing
Myth / Ideological narrative	Barthes' Myth Theory	Ideological meanings and broader socio-political narratives	Explains how repeated metaphors construct dominant narratives and public perceptions	Reveal ideological narratives concerning the UN's legitimacy, passivity, institutional weakness, political dependency, or failure during wars and conflicts

2.3 Analysis of visual rhetoric: A review of related studies

Various studies have analyzed visual narratives in general and cartoons in particular. Table 2 below presents a comprehensive summary of relevant studies. These studies have been divided into thematic categories related to the presented study.

Table 2. A summarized commentary on relevant research. Source: Own processing

Theme	Core focus of studies	Representative studies	Citations
War and conflict cartoons	Semiotic and visual framing of wars (Israel-Palestine, Gaza, Russia-Ukraine)	Victim/villain depictions; national symbols and metaphors; negotiation and ridicule	Gondwe & Walcot 2024; Mohamed 2024; Al-Dala'ien et al. 2022
UN and multilateral narratives	Diplomatic discourse, 2030 Agenda temporality, securitization	Online vs. offline UN diplomacy; figurative UN discourse; Kosovo securitization practices	Sakamoto et al. 2024; Telleria 2024
Multimodal visual narratives	Text-image interactions in political and social critique	Drone warfare narratives; AI-generated war images; institutional critique in Nigerian strikes; cartoon ambiguity	AlQahtani & Alharbi 2026; Kilby & Lennon 2021
Crisis discourse	War metaphors, biopower, eco-critique, moral discourse	Military COVID rhetoric; biopower narratives; patriarchal crisis framing; pandemic cartoons; ageism in memes	Giorgis et al. 2023; Noval 2025
Media framing of regional conflicts	National stance construction, war/peace frames	Algeria-Morocco media narratives; Pakistan social-media conflict frames	Liu et al. 2025; Hussain & Fahmy 2024
Analytical frameworks	Tools for visual/multimodal interpretation	Secondary conflict methodologies; mental model theory	Yadav 2021; Abdel-Raheem 2021

Shaikh et al. (2019: 78) comment, "Published cartoons are not ordinary in their nature; they change minds, make beliefs, transform ideas, guide both directly and indirectly." Research on the semiotics of selected graphics shows that visual rhetoric shapes how people see these institutions (Wang 2024). A cartoonish style, both playful and direct, can make the UN seem more relatable while also highlighting its weaknesses. This mix encourages viewers to think critically about the stories being told and to reflect on the challenges of global governance during armed conflicts. When looking at the United Nations and its actions during wars, images often portray the UN as either a peacekeeper or a bureaucracy constrained by global politics (Sakamoto et al. 2024). Cartoon-style drawings of the UN often use symbols such as the UN emblem, peace doves, and olive branches, as well as metaphors like weighing scales or broken shields, to depict its work, struggles, and the criticism it faces.

The present study builds on these theoretical and empirical insights by probing how cartoonish illustrations narrate the UN's wartime role through semiotic and visual metaphor analysis.

3. Research methodology

The presented research employs a qualitative design to uncover the meanings conveyed through the cartoons. The analysis is rooted in social semiotics, drawing primarily on the work of Roland Barthes and visual metaphor theory to reveal both explicit and implicit meanings rooted in visual representations (discussed above).

Data is collected from online sources employing a purposive sampling technique, based on the following premises:

- Depict the UN in the context of war or conflict
- Contain symbolic, exaggerated, or metaphorical elements
- Originate from diverse geopolitical contexts to capture ideological variation

Around eight cartoons were selected for analysis, each related to a prominent war or major conflict around the world. In this regard, the following war-related areas have been identified and selected: Syria, Azerbaijan, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Palestine, Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan-Iraq-Libya, and America-Iran (details for each country, along with source links, are provided in Appendix A). Furthermore, for analytical purposes, the study integrates Barthes's semiotic framework with Forceville's visual metaphor theory to examine how meanings are constructed in political cartoons. The analysis begins at the denotative level by identifying the literal visual elements of the cartoons, including characters, objects, captions, gestures, and spatial arrangements, which help determine the target domain of the metaphor, such as the United Nations or wartime situations. At the connotative level, the symbolic, cultural, and emotional associations attached to these elements are interpreted through features such as exaggeration, caricature, framing, image size, facial expressions, and colour symbolism, thereby facilitating the identification of the source domain and the establishment of metaphorical mappings between the source and target domains. Finally, at the mythic level, the study examines how these visual metaphors construct broader ideological narratives about the United Nations's legitimacy, neutrality, effectiveness, or powerlessness during global conflicts, thereby linking literal representation with ideological critique.

For analysis purposes, the study follows a systematic coding and interpretation procedure. This includes the following stages:

Stage 1: Recurrent viewing to identify periodic motifs and themes

Stage 2: Codes are developed inductively and may include:

- Power/weakness
- Neutrality/bias

- Action/inaction
- Victimhood/responsibility

Stage 3: Each image is analyzed in the following stages:

- Semiotic (denotation, connotation, myth)
- Metaphoric (visual mapping and meaning)

Stage 4: Identify patterns, contrasts, and recurring narratives across the dataset

The study has no ethical implications as all images are retrieved from publicly available sources (see Appendix A for details). However, the study has certain limitations as it is based on personal interpretation of the selected images. The interpretive nature is often regarded as subjective, as cultural and political meanings vary across audiences. Moreover, the selection of cartoons may not include all geopolitical regions and conflicts.

4. Findings of the study

As mentioned above, the present study examines the semiotic analysis of the cartoonish representation of the UN's role during various global wars. The first figure (Fig. 1 below) analyzed concerns the war in Syria. Table 3 below presents the findings.



Figure 1. Cartoon 1 UN and Syria. (Source: <https://www.chappatte.com/en/images/the-u-n-and-syria/>)

Table 3. Analysis of cartoon 1. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	UN official carrying briefcase labelled "UN"; paper labelled "Security Council"; speech bubble from UN official: "OK, I'll ... opposition"; large tank with armed soldiers; tank firing weapon; speech bubble from tank: "...as soon ...them off"; battlefield scene with smoke	A UN representative approaches a heavily armed tank and says he will negotiate with the opposition, while the tank continues firing and replies that it will do so only after destroying them	Literally depicts a UN official attempting diplomacy with an armed aggressor who is actively attacking and has no intention of stopping

Connotation	Large tank vs small UN official = imbalance of power; "Security Council" paper = bureaucracy and formal diplomacy; tank speaking while firing = aggression without restraint; "talk to the opposition" = false neutrality; "finished them off" = extermination before negotiation	The cartoon portrays the UN as passive, bureaucratic, and naïvely diplomatic in the face of open military aggression	Suggests that the UN's reliance on negotiation and procedure is ineffective when confronting violent actors who exploit diplomacy while continuing destruction
Myth	International institutions as weak and detached; diplomacy as powerless against brute force; aggressors manipulate peace processes; neutrality can enable violence	Reinforces the idea that institutions like the UN are structurally incapable of stopping determined military aggression when they prioritize procedure over enforcement	Implies that global diplomacy often fails because it treats aggressors and victims as equal negotiating parties, allowing violence to continue under the cover of "talks"
Visual metaphor	Tank = overwhelming military power / aggressor state; tiny UN official = powerless diplomacy; "Security Council" note = bureaucratic ritual; firing while speaking = bad-faith negotiation; battlefield smoke = ongoing destruction	Diplomacy is portrayed as absurdly weak and outmatched, trying to negotiate with violence that has already chosen force over dialogue	Implies that diplomacy without enforcement becomes performative, enabling aggressors to continue violence while pretending negotiation remains possible

For the first analysis, a detailed description is provided to show where the visual metaphor originates and how it is connected to semiotics. The cartoon 1 (see Fig. 1 above) depicts a UN official carrying a briefcase labelled "UN" and holding a document marked "Security Council" while approaching a heavily armed tank firing shells across a smoky battlefield. At the denotative level, these visual elements establish the literal scene of wartime diplomacy and identify the United Nations as the cartoon's central target domain. The battlefield setting, military weaponry, and visible smoke further emphasize the ongoing violence surrounding the interaction.

At the connotative level, the exaggerated contrast between the small UN representative and the massive tank symbolizes a severe imbalance of power. The tank's continued firing while engaging in dialogue suggests aggression masquerading as negotiation. Similarly, the "Security Council" document connotes procedural bureaucracy and institutional formalism, while the UN official's calm diplomatic posture reflects passivity and ineffective neutrality. These symbolic associations construct the source domain of the visual metaphor, portraying the UN as a weak and powerless negotiator confronting overwhelming military aggression.

Through this source, target mapping, the cartoon develops a visual metaphor in which diplomacy is represented as fragile and performative in the face of violent force. The tank metaphorically represents aggressive military power, whereas the small UN figure symbolizes institutional weakness

and the inability to enforce peace. At the mythic or ideological level, the cartoon reinforces a broader narrative that international organizations such as the United Nations are structurally incapable of stopping powerful aggressors, because diplomacy and negotiation are ineffective without enforcement. In doing so, the cartoon naturalizes the belief that global institutions fail during wartime conflicts by treating aggressors and victims as equivalent parties in political dialogue (see Fig. 1 above).

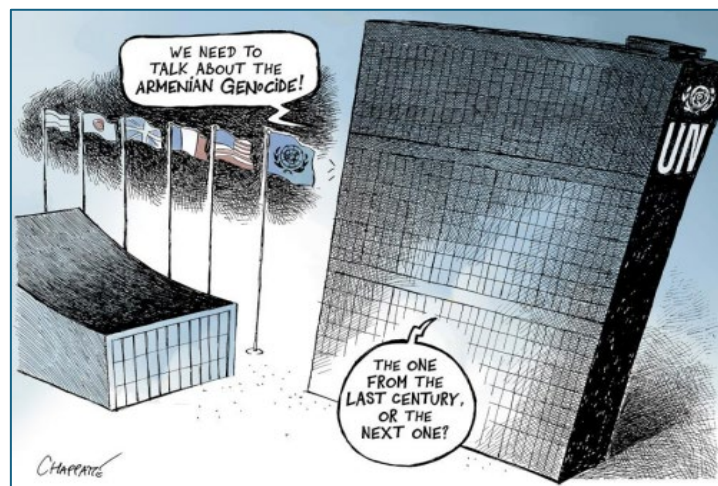


Figure 2. Cartoon 2 after Azerbaijan's war in Karabakh
(Source: <https://www.chappatte.com/en/images/after-azerbaijans-war-karabakh>)

Table 4. Analysis of cartoon 2. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	Two buildings, one marked as "UN" and other having multiple flags (symbol of UN), a speech bubble "We need to the Armenian Genocide! "; another response asks, "The....the next one? "	UN headquarters building is shown prominently; multiple national flags are displayed; a speech bubble states, "We need to talk about the Armenian Genocide! "; another response asks, "The.....the next one? "	Depicts a discussion occurring in the UN, referencing genocide across time, comparing official space with a troubling question
Connotation	Two buildings as mark of UN headquarters (existence as huge organization), two speech bubbles	The UN building appears large and imposing yet detached; the dialogue introduces irony and dark humour; the mention of "next one" suggests inevitability	The UN is connoted as reactive rather than preventive, engaged in discussion rather than action; the tone implies failure to stop recurring atrocities.
Myth	International institutions as weak and detached; diplomacy as powerless against brute force; aggressors manipulate peace processes; neutrality can enable violence	Genocide is framed as a recurring historical pattern; institutional responses appear cyclical and ineffective.	Reinforces the ideological narrative that global institutions are incapable of preventing large-scale human tragedies,

Visual metaphor	Massive dark building = dominant geopolitical power; tiny UN structure = institutional weakness exaggerated size difference = imbalance of authority; dark shading = intimidation and control; isolated UN presence = diplomatic insignificance in global conflicts.	The UN building symbolizes institutional authority; temporal reference ("last century" vs. "next one") functions metaphorically to compress past and future into a continuous cycle.	Constructs the metaphor: <i>history repeats itself due to institutional inaction</i> , suggesting that failure to act ensures recurrence of atrocities.
-----------------	--	--	---

The cartoon constructs a critical narrative in which the United Nations is portrayed as symbolically present but operationally ineffective, with its organizational diplomacy deemed inappropriate amid immediate military violence. Through the contrast between delayed dialogue and ongoing destruction, the image reinforces the ideological perception that global governance organizations like the UN lack real power in wartime (see Fig. 2).



Figure 3. Cartoon 3 United Nations helplessness at the beginning of the conflict in Yugoslavia
 (Source: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/cartoon_by_behrendt_on_the_united_nations_helplessness_at_the_beginning_of_the_conflict_in_yugoslavia_1992-en-ab699f9d-8d2a-4c73-87a8-76e1b64393f0.html)

Table 5. Analysis of cartoon 3. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	A thin, weak soldier; helmet labelled "UN"; fire; hose spraying weakly	The UN is shown as a frail soldier trying to put out a fire with a small hose	The cartoon literally depicts the UN attempting to control a crisis but lacking strength/resources
Connotation	Weak body, tired expression, ineffective tool (hose), large fire	The UN appears powerless, overwhelmed, and incapable of controlling the situation	Suggests the UN's efforts are insufficient and symbolic rather than effective
Myth	Image of global peacekeeper failing; imbalance between problem (fire) and response (weak hose)	The UN is portrayed as an institution that cannot enforce peace in serious conflicts	Reinforces the belief that international organizations are ineffective in stopping wars

Visual metaphor	Fire = war/conflict (Yugoslavia); weak hose = limited intervention; frail soldier = weak authority	The Yugoslav conflict is like a raging fire, while the UN response is too weak to stop it	Implies that the UN's intervention was too little, too late, and incapable of preventing destruction
------------------------	--	---	--

The cartoon criticizes the UN by portraying it as weak and ineffective during the Yugoslav conflict. The large fire represents the intensity of the war, while the frail UN soldier and ineffective hose show that the organization lacks the power and resources to control or stop the violence (see Fig. 3 above).

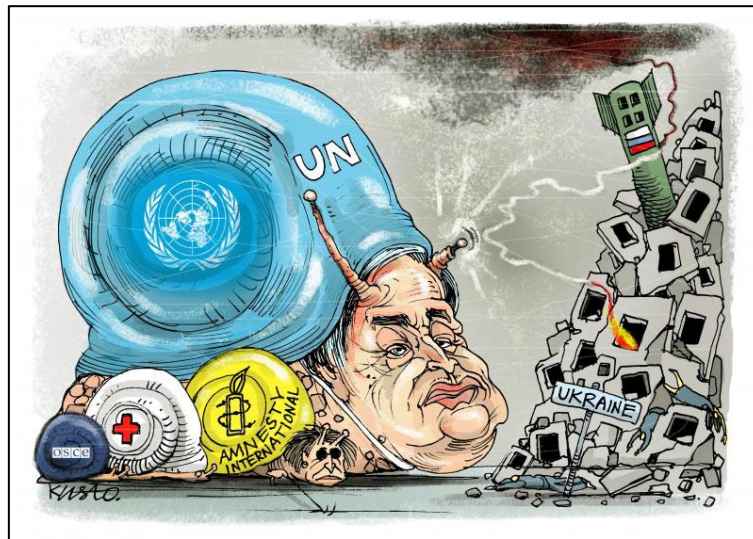


Figure 4. Cartoon 4 war in Ukraine
(Source: <https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/snails-and-war-ukraine>)

Table 6. Analysis of cartoon 4. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	A large blue snail shell labelled "UN"; the face resembling António Guterres; logos of Amnesty International and OSCE; a crumbling structure labeled "Ukraine" with fire and destruction	The UN and associated organizations are depicted as slow-moving snails approaching a collapsing Ukraine	Literally shows international organizations including UN moving slowly while Ukraine is being destroyed
Connotation	Snail imagery (slowness, weakness); tired facial expression; small, ineffective companion organizations; burning ruins	The UN and NGOs appear ineffective, delayed, and incapable of responding adequately to crisis	Suggests global institutions like UN are too slow and weak to intervene meaningfully in urgent conflicts
Myth	Global peace institution (UN) symbolized as passive observers rather than active enforcers	The cartoon frames international bodies as structurally incapable of stopping war or protecting nations	Reinforces a broader belief that international organizations and UN lack real power and are mostly symbolic
Visual metaphor	Snail = slow diplomacy; collapsing tower labelled "Ukraine" = state under attack; fire = war (implicitly the Russian invasion of Ukraine); tiny scale of aid vs massive destruction	Ukraine's destruction is rapid and overwhelming, while international response is sluggish and minimal	Implies that the response of global institutions is too slow and insufficient compared to the scale of the crisis

The analysis of cartoon 4 reveals that the UN, including other agencies responsible for action during violent periods, has a slow process to intervene in the war situation. This shows the lack of power of an international organization like the UN, designed to stop these wars. Again, the cartoon emphasizes the UN's ineffectiveness (see Fig. 4 above).



Figure 5. Cartoon 5 Palestine-Israel Conflict (Source: <https://arab.news/j4tye>)

Table 7. Analysis of cartoon 5. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	Group of suited officials wearing hats labelled European Union, United Nations, and a hat styled like the United States flag; table filled with many empty glasses; a single small Israel flag placed apart; one figure reclining or disengaged	International representatives sit around a table while Israel is represented only by a small flag, physically separated from the group	Literally depicts global powers including UN gathered in discussion, with Israel isolated and not directly represented as an equal participant
Connotation	Empty glasses (lack of substance/action); hunched, whispering figures (secrecy, indecision); exaggerated noses and postures (elitism or hypocrisy); isolation of Israel's flag	The meeting appears performative, unproductive, and disconnected from real outcomes	Suggests that international diplomacy on the Israel–Palestine issue is ineffective, symbolic, or exclusionary
Myth	Powerful global actors portrayed as detached decision-makers who fail to resolve conflicts	Reinforces the idea that international institutions and major powers are incapable of fairly or effectively managing the Israeli Palestinian conflict	Implies systemic bias, inefficiency, or lack of genuine commitment to peace
Visual metaphor	Empty glasses = hollow negotiations; crowded table = global involvement; isolated flag = political isolation; disengaged posture = apathy	The peace process is like a meeting where nothing meaningful is being "poured" or achieved, while one side remains sidelined	Implies that diplomatic efforts on parts of all agencies including UN are stagnant, lacking substance, and fail to include or address key realities of the conflict



Figure 6. Cartoon 6 Iraq war

(Source: <https://www.welcometopalestine.com/article/united-nations-security-council-resolutions-israel/>)

Table 8. Analysis of cartoon 6. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	Large figure with U.S.-flag patterned shoe; document labelled "UN Resolutions" on his back (burning); pig-like tail; stepping forward aggressively; small figure speaking at a U.N. podium; destroyed building labelled "Arafat's Compound" with smoke	A giant, caricatured man (representing the U.S.) dominates the scene, appearing to ignore a much smaller speaker at the UN while destruction occurs nearby	Literally depicts a powerful U.S. figure disregarding UN resolution and overpowering smaller international voices amid conflict
Connotation	Burning paper = disregard for international law; U.S. flag shoe = American dominance; pig tail = moral corruption or greed; exaggerated size difference = imbalance of power; destroyed compound = consequences of military/political actions; finger-to-mouth gesture = silencing dissent	The U.S. is shown as dismissive of international agreements and overpowering weaker voices, while its actions contribute to destruction	Suggests hypocrisy, unilateralism, and lack of accountability in U.S. foreign policy, especially regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict
Myth	Superpower acting above global law; international institutions portrayed as weak or ineffective; smaller nations unable to challenge dominant powers	Reinforces the belief that powerful countries (like U.S.) can ignore international norms without consequence	Implies a world order where justice is uneven, and global governance systems fail to restrain dominant actors
Visual metaphor	Burning UN resolutions = rejection of diplomacy/law; giant body = overwhelming power; crushing motion = suppression; ruined building = real-world consequences of political decisions; pig features = moral critique	The U.S. behaves like a force that overrides international consensus provided by UN while causing destruction	Implies that international law established by agencies like UN is being "burned" or ignored, and that power overrides justice,

This cartoon portrays the United States as a dominant power that ignores international law and silences weaker voices, suggesting that global rules don't apply equally to everyone. The UN is portrayed as a powerless agency unable to stand up to powerful countries (see Fig. 6 above).

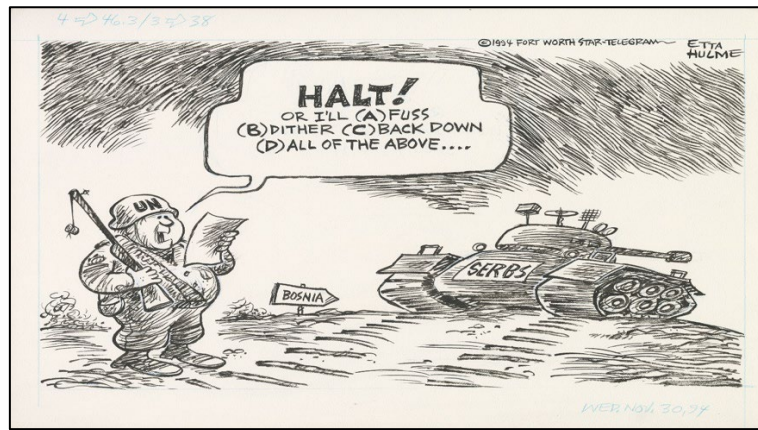


Figure 7. Cartoon 7 Bosnia- Serbia war (Source: <https://libraries.uta.edu/ettahulme/image/20108700>)

Table 9. Analysis of cartoon 7. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	UN peacekeeper wearing helmet labelled "UN"; holding a paper; speech bubble saying: "HALT! OR I'LL (A)..... BACK DOWN (D)ABOVE..."; large tank labelled "Serb"; sign pointing to "Bosnia"; barren, damaged landscape	A UN soldier confronts a powerful Serbian tank but instead of issuing a strong command, he reads out weak, indecisive options	Literally depicts a UN peacekeeper facing a military threat but responding with uncertainty and hesitation
Connotation	Multiple-choice speech = indecision and lack of authority; small soldier vs large tank = imbalance of power; "fuss/dither/back down"= ineffectiveness; paper in hand = bureaucracy; empty/desolate land = war damage and urgency	The UN appears unsure, overly bureaucratic, and incapable of decisive action in the face of aggression	Suggests that international peacekeeping forces (UN)are weak, passive, and unable to stop violence effectively
Myth	International organizations as ineffective peacekeepers; bureaucracy replacing real action; powerful aggressors facing little resistance	Reinforces the idea that the UN cannot enforce peace in serious conflicts, especially when facing determined military forces	Implies systemic failure of global institutions like UN to protect vulnerable regions during crises like the Bosnian War
Visual metaphor	Multiple-choice options = paralysis in decision-making; oversized tank = overwhelming aggression; small hesitant soldier = powerless diplomacy; barren land = consequences of inaction	Peacekeeping is portrayed like a test where the "answers" are all weak, leading to no real solution	Implies that hesitation and lack of decisive intervention by UN allow conflict and destruction to continue unchecked

The analysis of this cartoon shows the UN as indecisive and ineffective, unable to take strong action even in the face of clear aggression (see Fig. 7 above).



Figure 8. Cartoon 8 US-Israel-Iran war 2026
 (Source: The Hindu Newspaper <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVc2mn9EhYk/>)

Table 10. Analysis of cartoon 8. Source: Own processing

Concept	Signs / Symbols / Linguistic tags	Findings from the cartoon	Interpretation
Denotation	Caricature of Donald Trump pulling a block labelled "IRAN"; another political leader watching; stacked blocks labeled "WORLD ORDER", "SYRIA," "MIDDLE EAST", "TRADE DEAL", "UN", "NATO", "GAZA", "UKRAINE"; leaking oil barrel on top; partial globe visible above	Two political leaders are shown removing the "IRAN" block from the base of a fragile tower made of geopolitical issues and institutions, causing the structure to wobble	Literally depicts world politics as a precarious stacked structure in which pulling out Iran threatens the stability of the whole system and UN just a powerless block
Connotation	"IRAN" as a load-bearing block = strategic importance; unstable tower = fragile global order; leaking oil barrel = oil politics and economic stakes; globe overhead = worldwide consequences; Trump pulling block = reckless intervention	The cartoon suggests that Iran is deeply tied to the balance of global politics, and removing or destabilizing it could trigger wider international disorder	Implies that aggressive policy toward Iran is not isolated, but risks destabilizing interconnected global systems including diplomacy, trade, war zones, and alliances
Myth	World order as fragile and interdependent; superpower intervention as destabilizing rather than protective; Middle East as the fault line of global politics; institutions like NATO and the UN as pillars of stability	Reinforces the ideological view that the global system depends on delicate geopolitical balances, and unilateral intervention by major powers can produce systemic collapse	Suggests that global peace is maintained through careful diplomacy and interdependence, while reckless superpower action threatens to unravel the international order
Visual metaphor	Jenga-like block tower = world politics; removing one block = foreign policy intervention; collapsing stack = geopolitical crisis; oil barrel at top = unstable burden of resource politics	Global politics is visualized as a fragile balancing game in which one miscalculated move can destabilize everything	Implies that international relations are precarious, interconnected, and vulnerable to collapse when key political structures are disturbed

5. Discussion

Ashfaq and Hussein (2013) observe that cartoons turn complex social and political issues into clear visual images while offering critique and commentary. The present study analyzed eight cartoons retrieved from online sources on the role of the UN during major wars across different socio-political

regions and time periods. Each cartoon represents the UN's role in a variety of settings, characters, and goals. The time span spans more than 35 years, covering different wars, both internal and external, from 1992 to 2026. The findings are summarized in Table 10 to provide a critical overview.

Table 11. UN depiction in the selected cartoons as per the findings. Source: Own processing

Figure #	Context of war	Time frame	UN depiction
1	Syria civil war	2012	UN shown as ineffective in stopping violence; engaged in diplomacy with limited impact
2	Azerbaijan-Armenia war	2023	UN portrayed as operationally limited; lacks enforcement power
3	Yugoslavia internal and external conflicts	1992	UN depicted as weak and under-resourced; unable to control escalating violence
4	Ukraine-Russia war	2022	UN shown as slow and constrained; structural limits reduce effectiveness
5	Palestine- Israel conflicts	2023	UN portrayed as stagnant and unable to influence meaningful negotiations
6	Iraq-Israel conflict	2017	UN depicted as ignored by powerful states in Middle East tensions
7	Bosnia- Serbia war	1992	UN shown as hesitant and indecisive; failure to protect vulnerable populations
8	Iran-America-Israel conflicts	2026	UN portrayed as globally ineffective and powerless before major powers

Research shows that images can shape perceptions of peace, legitimacy, humanitarian efforts, and conflict resolution (Hutchison & Bleiker 2021). The findings from the analyzed cartoons reveal the consistent linguistic and semiotic construction of the United Nations (UN) as ineffective, constrained, and symbolically powerless during armed conflicts. Across cartoons about the Syrian Civil War, the Bosnian War, and the Russia–Ukraine War, the UN is repeatedly depicted through visual metaphors of weakness, passivity, and institutional insignificance. These representations are achieved through multimodal semiotic resources such as exaggerated size contrasts, dark imagery, spatial marginalization, bureaucratic symbols, and caricatured body language. The denotative elements of the cartoons typically establish the UN as the target domain through recognizable signs such as the UN logo, references to the Security Council, peacekeeping symbols, or official representatives, whereas the connotative level constructs source domains associated with helplessness, fragility, or performative diplomacy.

The findings further show that visual metaphors are key in shaping ideological meanings. For example, tanks, large buildings, weapons, smoke, and dominant military imagery symbolically represent aggressive geopolitical power, while small or isolated UN figures stand for diplomatic weakness and procedural limits. Through these source–target mappings, the cartoons build larger mythic stories in which international institutions seem unable to stop violence or influence powerful

actors. These images align with Barthes's idea of myth, in which repeated symbolic links make certain ideological beliefs about institutional failure and global power imbalances seem natural. These metaphors simplify complex political realities into clear visual representations while also conveying ideological messages (Zarifian 2025).

Moreover, the cartoons rely heavily on exaggeration, irony, and symbolic juxtaposition to intensify criticism of the UN. The recurring contrast between military force and diplomatic language reinforces a discourse that portrays negotiation as ineffective or merely performative. Similarly, visual cues such as disproportionate scaling, shadowing, destruction imagery, and battlefield settings contribute to the connotative framing of the UN as marginal, reactive, and overshadowed by dominant political powers. These findings support the argument that political cartoons function not merely as humorous commentary but as multimodal ideological texts that shape public perceptions through condensed symbolic communication.

At the same time, the findings highlight the inherent nature of political cartoons as a critical and exaggerated form of media discourse. As Shaikh et al. (2019) note, cartoons can shape audience perspectives, so it is always important to examine their content. By emphasizing visible inaction and symbolic weakness, the cartoons favour narratives of institutional failure while downplaying alternative portrayals of diplomacy, mediation, or humanitarian efforts. As a result, the semiotic and metaphorical framing of the UN in these cartoons helps shape the broader ideological view of the organization as a politically limited and symbolically weakened actor in contemporary wartime discourse.

Overall, this suggests that perceptions of UN incompetence in wartime contexts stem not only from structural limitations but also from geopolitical realities and representational bias. The organization, while facing its own limitations (especially amid powerful state conflicts), remains the most critical platform for diplomacy and international cooperation. The crisis of the Security Council, rooted in the organization itself, has led its members to rely on a fragile consensus among the permanent members that hampers decisive action in conflicts in which major powers are engaged or have strategic interests (Asrar & Hussein 2024). Thus, the preferred reading puts the UN not as completely inefficient, but as a politically limited institution whose ability to act rests on the convergence of member-state interests.

6. Conclusion

Given that visual narratives are more impactful than simple stories, the presented study aimed to examine the visual representation of the UN in online media cartoons. Eight cartoons were purposively selected from various online sources depicting major conflicts and wars around the world, with the UN shown as an assisting power. For analytical purposes, Barthes' semiotic theory and Forceville's visual metaphor theory were used. The semiotic theory helped scrutinize the connotative and denotative meanings, as well as the myths. On the other hand, visual metaphor theory helped identify the metaphorical construction of ideological content.

The study finds that the selected political cartoons depict the United Nations using repeated symbolic and metaphorical patterns. These patterns portray the organization as weak, passive, and ineffective during wartime. By applying Barthes's semiotic framework and Forceville's visual metaphor theory, the analysis reveals how visible elements such as UN symbols, official representatives, peacekeeping imagery, and battlefield scenes portray the organization as the target domain. At the same time, features such as exaggerated size differences, dark imagery, isolation, destruction, and bureaucratic symbols create source domains linked to helplessness, fragility, and performative diplomacy. These source-target connections produce visual metaphors that frame the UN as powerless in the face of dominant military and geopolitical forces. Ideologically, the cartoons reinforce broader myths about the ineffectiveness of international institutions and the supremacy of military power over diplomatic efforts. The findings also show that political cartoons use strategies such as satire, caricature, irony, symbolic contrasts, and visual exaggeration to turn complex geopolitical issues into easily understood narratives. As a result, the cartoons not only reflect political events but also help shape public views of the UN through visual and linguistic processes. Overall, the study emphasizes the usefulness of semiotic and visual metaphor analysis for revealing how media cartoons create ideological discussions about international organizations during global conflicts.

Given the limited data available to explore the UN's role in wars as portrayed through cartoons, it is further suggested that future researchers investigate the topic from other perspectives as well. The study also suggests possible actions and strategies for relevant stakeholders to improve the organization's structure and resources, thereby enhancing future performance.

List of abbreviations

UN – United Nations

References

1. Abdel-Raheem, A. (2021). Multimodal metaphor and (im)politeness in political cartoons: A sociocognitive approach. In *Journal of pragmatics*, 185, p. 54-72. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.08.006>
2. Afzal, A., Latif, A. & Khuram, M. (2026). Critical discourse analysis of media discourse: power, ideology, and representation. In *Al-Aasar*, 3, p. 32-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63878/aaj1329>
3. Al-Dala'ien, O. A., Al-Shboul, Y., Aldowkat, I. M. & Al-Takhayinh, A. (2022). Visualizing the Russia-Ukraine war: A semiotic analysis of Arab social media cartoons. In *Theory and practice in language studies*, 12, p. 2712-2722. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1212.30>
4. Al-Momani, K., Badarneh, M. A. & Migdadi, F. (2016). A semiotic analysis of political cartoons in Jordan in light of the Arab spring. In *Humor – International journal of humor research*, 30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2016-0033>
5. AlShurafa, N., Alssadi, W., Elyas, T. & AlRawi, M. (2021). Investigating the cultural signs and ideological representations in Masameer Saudi cartoon: Discursive and semiotic analysis. In *British journal of Middle Eastern studies*, 49 (5), p. 1052-1076. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1901419>
6. AlQahtani, S. & Alharbi, A. (2026). Beyond the image and within the text: Visual narratives of drone warfare in the Ukraine–Russia conflict. In *Language & communication*, 108, p. 40-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2026.03.001>
7. Ashfaq, A. & Hussein, A. B. (2013). Political cartoonists versus readers: Role of political cartoonists in building public opinion and readers' expectations towards print media cartoons in Pakistan. In *Mediterranean journal of social sciences*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p265>
8. Asrar, S., & Hussein, M. How the US has used its veto power at the UN in support of Israel. 26 October 2023. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/how-the-us-has-used-its-veto-power-at-the-un-in-support-of-israel>
9. Asror, M. K., Muhajjalín, A. G., Yasykur, A. & Chotimah, D. N. (2025). Representation of international criticism of the Middle East conflict in Arab cartoons on Instagram. In *Arabi journal of Arabic studies*, 10(1), p. 26-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24865/ajas.v10i1.939>
10. Barthes, R. (1977). *Rhetoric of the image in image, music, and text*. (ed. & trans. Stephen Heath, p. 151-163). London: Fontana.
11. Barthes, R. (1998). *The semiotic challenge*. New York: Hall & Wang.
12. Elhosary, M. & Elkashif, M. (2025). Cartooning, framing, and virality: Unraveling the power of political cartoons during the 2023–2024 Gaza war – A comparative approach. In *International communication gazette*, 88, p. 253-283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485251357870>
13. Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
14. Forceville, C. (1996). *Pictorial metaphor in advertising*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
15. Giorgis, P., Semenets, O. & Todorova, B. (2023). "We are at war": The military rhetoric of COVID-19 in cross-cultural perspective of discourses. In *Frontiers in artificial intelligence*, 6, 978096. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2023.978096>
16. Gondwe, G., & Walcott, C. (2024). Victims or villains? How editorial cartoons depict the 2023 Israel-Palestine war. In *Online Media and global communication*, 3, p. 1-26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/omgc-2023-0061>

17. Gu, Y., Guo, S., Qin, X., Qu, W., Wang, Z., & Zhang, T. (2023). Global justice index report 2022. In *Chinese political science review*, 8 (2), p. 133-239. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-023-00240-0>
18. Guo, R. (2012). Options for cross-border conflict management. In *Developments in environmental science*, p. 233-254. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-098319-6.00008-x>
19. Guta, H., & Eissa, E. (2025). Echoes of Gaza: Semiotic analysis of Palestinian and Israeli political cartoons during the 2023/24 war on Gaza. In *Journal of Arab & muslim media research*, 18 (1), p. 101-132. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr_00096_1
20. Hameed, A., & Alsager, H. N. (2023). A semiotic study of contemporary Middle Eastern internal dilemmas in Arab news cartoons. In *World journal of English language*, 14, p. 472-483. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n1p472>
21. Hussain, S., & Fahmy, S.S. (2024). Social media and conflict: A visual analysis of war and peace frames in Pakistan. In *SAGE Open*, 14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241291627>
22. Hutchison, E., & Bleiker, R. (2021). Visuality of peace and conflict. In *Oxford University Press eBooks* (p. 175-189). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190904418.013.14>
23. Kilby, L., Lennon, H. (2021). When words are not enough: Combined textual and visual multimodal analysis as a critical discursive Psychology undertaking. In *Methods in psychology*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.metip.2021.100071>
24. Korson, C. (2015). Framing peace: The role of media, perceptions, and United Nations peacekeeping operations in Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire. In *Geopolitics*, 20 (2), p. 354-380. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2015.1006362>
25. Liu, R., Chen, J., & Chen, C. (2025). How Algerian and Moroccan media framed their nation's stance in reporting the Algeria-Morocco diplomatic break: A corpus-based news values analysis of political narratives. In *SAGE Open*, 15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251382486>
26. Lulu, R. A., Racman, S. M. H. A., & Habeeb, L. S. (2022). A multimodal analysis of political cartoons and the discourse of Palestinians' displacement: Sheik Jarrah case. In *rElections*, 29, p. 700-717. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v29i3.262809>
27. Mehawesh, M. I. (2014). The socio-semiotic theory of language and translation: An overview. In *International journal of languages and literatures*, 2, p. 251-269. DOI: <https://ijll.thebrpi.org/vol-2-no-2-june-2014-abstract-15-ijll>
28. Mohamed, S.A.H. (2024). A semiotic analysis of Palestinian and Israeli political cartoons on the 2023 Gaza war across digital cartoon platforms (Arabic). In *Arab media and society*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70090/AMS.38.SAHM1>
29. Noval, A. (2025). Representasyon ng piling editorial karton sa panahon ng pandemya: Isang eco-critical discourse analysis. In *The Palawan scientist*, 17, p. 97-113. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69721/tps.j.2025.17.1.10>
30. Sakamoto, T., Araki, M., Ito, H., & Matsuoka, T. (2024). How different are offline and online diplomacy? A comparative analysis of public statements and SNS posts by delegates to the United Nations. In *Frontiers in big data*, 7, 1304806. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdata.2024.1304806>
31. Santika, R. G., Rohanda, R., & Supianudin, A. (2025). Deconstructing myths in Osama Hajjaj caricatures: Semiotic analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict on Instagram. In *Studi Arab*, 16, p. 80-9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35891/sa.v16i1.6528>
32. Shaikh, N. Z.,-Tariq, R. & Najeeb-us-Saqlain. (2019). Cartoon war... A political dilemma! A semiotic analysis of political cartoons. In *Journal of media studies*, 31, p. 74-92. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/75191580/Cartoon_war_A_political_dilemma_A_semiotic_analysis_of_political_cartoons


33. Telleria, J. (2024). Temporality in the United Nations 2030 Agenda: development or rupture? In *Futures*, 164, 103498. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2024.103498>
34. United Nations. (2008). *United Nations peacekeeping operations: Principles and guidelines*. New York Publications.
35. Wang, N. (2024). Analysis of visual images using the social semiotic. In *Communications in humanities research*, 34, p. 42-53. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/34/20240106>
36. Wodak, R., & Reisigl, M. (2001). Discourse and racism: European perspectives. In *Annual review of Anthropology*, 30, p. 175-199. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.28.1.175>
37. Yadav, R. (2021). Wars in Review: Subaltern methodologies in conflict studies. In *Millennium journal of international studies*, 49, p. 417-427. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298211036506>
38. Zarifian, M. (2025). Visual metaphor: likeness of unlike things in cartoons. In *RUDN journal of studies in literature and journalism*, 30, p. 130-142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2025-30-1-130-142>
39. Zhabotynska, S., & Ryzhova, O. (2022). Ukraine and the West in pro-Russia Chinese media: A methodology for the analysis of multimodal political narratives. In *Cognition, communication, discourse*, 24, p. 115-139. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2022-24-09>

Appendix A

Details of the Cartoons

Cartoon 1: UN and Syria, Chappatte in International Herald Tribune, (23 rd March 2012). Available at: https://www.chappatte.com/en/images/the-u-n-and-syria/
Cartoon 2: After Azerbaijan's war in Karabakh (23 rd September 2023). Chappatte in Le Temps, Geneva. Available at : https://www.chappatte.com/en/images/after-azerbaijans-war-karabakh
Cartoon 3: Cartoon by Behrendt on the United Nations' helplessness at the beginning of the conflict in Yugoslavia (1992). Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/cartoon_by_behrendt_on_the_united_nations_helplessness_at_the_beginning_of_the_conflict_in_yugoslavia_1992-en-ab699f9d-8d2a-4c73-87a8-76e1b64393f0.html
Cartoon 4: Snails and the War in Ukraine, Oleksiy Kustovsky, Cartoon movement. Available at: https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/snails-and-war-ukraine
Cartoon 5: Amjad Rasmi, The Arab News, 12 May 2023. Available at: https://arab.news/j4tye
Cartoon 6: Iraq war UN Resolution on Palestine, Carlos Latuff, 29 th August 2017. Available at: https://www.welcometopalestine.com/article/united-nations-security-council-resolutions-israel/
Cartoon 7: Bosnia-Serbia war, Etta Hulme, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 30 Nov 1994. Available at: https://libraries.uta.edu/ettahulme/image/20108700
Cartoon 8: America-Israel-Iran war 2026, soumyadip.sinhart, 4 March 2026, Published in The Hindu Newspaper. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DVc2mn9EhYk/

Contact Data

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Ansa Hameed PhD. in English Linguistics Associate Professor Department of English Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA 18, Al-Kharj 11942, Saudi Arabia a.zahoor@psau.edu.sa Applied linguistics, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, ecolinguistics</p>
---	---	--

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

**THE ROLE OF FOOD AND COOKING IN DEPICTING EMOTIONS
IN "LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE" BY LAURA ESQUIVEL***Robert Kiełtyka* *Casimir Pulaski University of Radom, Poland***Received:** 12.02.2026 **Reviewed:** 26.03.2026 and 26.04.2026**Similarity Index:** 0%**Bibliographic description:** Kiełtyka, R. (2026). The role of food and cooking in depicting emotions in "Like water for chocolate" by Laura Esquivel. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 85-105. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.05>**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of food and cooking in expressing emotions in Laura Esquivel's "Like water for chocolate". Drawing on the theory of conceptual metaphor and metonymy, it argues that culinary discourse may be viewed as construing emotional meaning through recurring patterns rooted in bodily experience. Magical realism reinforces these patterns by depicting emotions as physically transmitted through food. Cooking thus becomes an alternative means of communication, which enables characters to express feelings and face social restrictions.**Key words:** culinary discourse; conceptual metaphor; conceptual metonymy; embodiment; magical realism.**1. Introduction**

In recent decades, food has attracted the attention of scholars as an important cultural and semiotic phenomenon. As argued by many researchers, food is not only a source of nourishment, but it also shapes identities, social relations, and emotional expression (see Albala 2011; 2013; Counihan & Van Esterik 2013; Grzaśko & Kiełtyka (in press); Parasecoli 2008; Poulain 2017). This interest has led to the rise of food studies as an interdisciplinary field combining literary studies, anthropology, sociology, history, and linguistics. Within this field, culinary discourse refers to the symbolic and narrative use of food in texts (Jurafsky 2014; Koç et al. 2012). It is also noteworthy that, as emphasized by Ashley et al. (2004) and Counihan (1999), in literature, food often serves as a semiotic resource for expressing socially restricted desires, repressed emotions, and cultural values.



There is a particularly strong link between food and emotion. Common expressions use food, taste, and temperature to convey emotions (e.g., *to swallow one's pride*, *to stew in anger*). From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, these expressions are not accidental language use, but rather systematic conceptual patterns (Kövecses 2000; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Emotions are abstract, so concrete, sensory domains like food are frequently used to understand them. A rich context for analysing these metaphorical patterns can be found in literature (see Gibbs 2006).

As argued by Bowskill (2019), the novel "Like water for chocolate", published in 1989 by Mexican author Laura Esquivel, is a relevant example of the connection between food and emotions. The novel is structured around a recipe in each chapter, placing cooking at the core of the story. In Tita's (the main character's) case, cooking is a way of expressing her feelings: love, sadness, passion or frustration. These emotions are thus channelled through cooking and are lived and experienced by those who taste her dishes. The novel is set in Mexico in the early twentieth century, when strict family traditions and social rules created an environment in which people found it difficult to communicate openly (Beasley-Murray 2010; Schaefer 1994). In this context, the kitchen is the place where Tita can express her feelings through her cooking and transform them into something tangible that can be experienced by others.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the interplay of conceptual metaphor and metonymy in selected culinary scenes in Esquivel's novel, demonstrating how magical realism literalises embodied figurative structures as a mechanism of emotional communication. The paper draws on Cognitive Linguistics theories, specifically Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Conceptual Metonymy Theory (CMTT). These theories may be used to account for how people use food as metaphor and/or metonymy for expressing emotions which become embodied (see Barrett & Lindquist 2008) and shared among people. The CMT and CMTT underlying this paper were first introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further explained and elaborated by, among others, Kövecses (2002; 2015; 2020), Radden and Kövecses (1999), and Littlemore (2015). The basic idea is that the experiential aspect of human emotion is grounded in bodily experiences including sensations such as heat, pressure, containment and physiological reactions such as crying, sweating, trembling or nausea.

2. Literature review: Food, emotion, and meaning in literary and cognitive perspectives

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses 2000; 2002; 2006; Lakoff & Johnson 1980), emotional experience is structured through systematic mappings from more concrete source domains,

such as objects, substances, temperature, and force, onto more abstract target domains. These mappings are grounded in embodied experience, that is, in recurrent patterns of bodily sensation, perception, and action. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, abstract concepts are not understood independently of the body but are rooted in sensorimotor experience, which provides the basis for conceptualisation. In the case of emotion, this embodied grounding manifests itself in patterns such as heat, pressure, containment, and movement (Kövecses 2000; 2006; 2020), which are regularly employed in both everyday language and literary representation.

Within literary studies, the role of food has been examined from a variety of perspectives. Studies of "Like water for chocolate" have primarily focused on its cultural, feminist, and identity-related dimensions. For instance, Skipper (2010) approaches the novel as part of a broader discourse on food and narrative, highlighting how culinary practices function as sites of knowledge, pleasure, and identity formation. Similarly, Pilcher (1998) situates food within the construction of Mexican national identity, demonstrating how culinary traditions encode historical and social meanings. From a literary and gender-oriented perspective, Schaefer (1994) examines the novel in terms of women's artistic expression and resistance, showing how food operates as a medium through which female subjectivity is articulated in a restrictive social context. These approaches collectively establish food as a culturally and symbolically loaded domain, but they tend to treat it primarily as a thematic or sociocultural resource rather than as a cognitive mechanism of meaning construction.

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, however, food may also be viewed as a source domain that enables the conceptualisation of abstract phenomena, including emotion. Although CMT has been widely applied to emotional experience across different domains, its application to culinary discourse, especially in literary texts, remains relatively underexplored. In particular, the interaction between metaphor and metonymy in the representation of embodied emotional experience in narrative contexts has received limited attention. This gap is especially notable given that literary texts often foreground precisely those embodied and experiential dimensions of meaning that cognitive linguistics seeks to explain (Gibbs 2006; Kövecses 2015).

In this respect, magical realism provides a particularly relevant framework for bridging literary and cognitive approaches. As discussed by Bowers (2004), Faris (2004), and Zamora & Faris (1995), magical realism is characterised by the integration of the supernatural into otherwise realistic settings, resulting in a narrative mode in which extraordinary events are presented as part of everyday reality.

One of the key features of this mode is the literalisation of figurative language: metaphors that would normally function at a conceptual level are realised as actual events within the narrative. This characteristic makes magical realism especially suitable for examining the relationship between figurative thought and narrative structure.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that while previous research has successfully demonstrated the cultural, symbolic, and ideological significance of food in the novel (Skipper 2010; Pilcher 1998; Schaefer 1994), there remains a need for an account of how culinary discourse functions as a cognitive mechanism for structuring emotional meaning. By integrating insights from cognitive linguistics with the narrative logic of magical realism (Bowers 2004), the present study aims to address this gap and to show how embodied figurative structures underpin both the representation and the experience of emotion in the novel.

3. Methodology and theoretical framework

3.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and emotion

The CMT suggests that abstract concepts are mapped from more physical or bodily domains (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; 1999). As emotions are highly abstract entities, they are difficult to embody in a concrete mental image and therefore need to be described by metaphors such as EMOTION IS A SUBSTANCE, THE BODY IS A CONTAINER, and EMOTIONS ARE PHYSICAL FORCES (Kövecses 2000; 2006; 2020). These metaphors are based on bodily experiences of the feelings and bodily sensations experienced when one is in an emotional state.

3.2 Conceptual metonymy and embodied access

According to Radden and Kövecses (1999: 21; see also Barcelona 2000), metonymy is a cognitive mechanism that enables an entity in an Idealised Cognitive Model to function as a reference point for another entity in the same model. Emotions are usually inferred from bodily or behavioural signs (Kövecses 2006; 2013). In the novel, emotions are hardly ever referred to by name and are consequently represented through bodily signs such as weeping, perspiration, vomiting or sexual excitement. These bodily signs, acting as metonymic triggers, are instantiated within the cultural cognitive frame (Kövecses 2000).

The relationship between metaphor and metonymy is a relation of complementarity. This interrelation between the two, referred to as metaphonymy by Goossens (1990), was studied by, among others,

Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Galera Masegosa (2014). As Kövecses (2017: 16) puts it: "often it is the metonymy that motivates a corresponding metaphor." Metonymies of emotion refer to the somatic, facial and behavioural symptoms of an emotion. The metaphors are derived from the metonymies. For example, the metaphor EMOTION IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER is motivated by the metonymy INCREASE IN BODY TEMPERATURE FOR EMOTION. This is one of the elements that are developed in the narrative of food, heat and containment in the novel. As indicated by Kövecses (2013: 78):

"In the case of most emotions, we experience changes in the body. This gives rise to the general metonymy THE FEELING OF BODILY CHANGE FOR THE EMOTION. Here the emotion-specific notion of FEELING OF BODILY CHANGE is generalized into the concept of FEELING. This generic concept then becomes the source domain for emotions in general: EMOTIONS ARE FEELINGS."

The observation emerging from the above quotation underlies the analytical logic of the present study: metonymic bodily cues are identified first, and metaphorical mappings are then shown to be grounded in and motivated by those cues.

3.3 Analytical procedure

The corpus used for this paper comprises all twelve chapters of Esquivel's (1992) novel, all of them focusing on a monthly recipe. The first step of the analytical procedure was to read the text of the novel in order to identify all scenes in which food preparation, cooking or eating is associated with an emotional state or emotional effect on one or more characters. This enabled me to single out eighteen candidate scenes present in different chapters of the book (see Table 1). From this material, due to space limitations, I selected seven scenes for detailed analysis which met the following three criteria: (1) they contained a source-to-target mapping illustrating the definitions of conceptual metaphor and metonymy outlined in Sections 3.1 and 3.2; or (2) they displayed a clear bodily or behavioural response functioning as a metonymic cue; and/or (3) they portrayed how magical realism turns a figurative idea into something real that actually happens in the story, so that a conceptual mechanism (metaphor and/ or metonymy) becomes visible in the events taking place rather than just in the words used in the novel. The selection required that each scene met at least two of the three criteria simultaneously: (1) a cross-domain metaphorical mapping, (2) a clear metonymic bodily cue, and (3) a magical-realist literalisation of the figurative structure. Five scenes (Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.7) met all three criteria; Section 4.3 met criteria 1 and 2; and Section 4.6 met criterion 2 only, but was included because it demonstrates a structurally distinct metonymic pattern – the

equation of culinary space with emotional selfhood – that is absent from all other selected scenes and essential to a complete account of the figurative system.

I classified a figurative idea as a *conceptual metaphor* when it was possible to establish a clear cross-domain mapping – that is, when certain properties of the culinary source domain (e.g., preparation, transformation, ingestion, heat) were mapped onto the target domain of emotion. In turn, I treated a figurative structure as a *conceptual metonymy* when a bodily reaction or physical sign (e.g., tears, heat, nausea, arousal) provided access to an emotional state within a single conceptual domain, functioning as what Radden and Kövecses (1999: 21) describe as a reference point for another entity within the same Idealised Cognitive Model. Finally, I interpreted those cases in which a metonymic bodily cue simultaneously motivated a cross-domain metaphorical mapping as *metaphonymy* following Goossens (1990) and Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Galera Masegosa (2014).

My approach is qualitative and interpretive, and as such it follows the tradition of cognitive poetic analysis (Gibbs 2006; Stockwell 2002). The goal of the study is to analyse the underlying structural relationships between concepts emerging in the novel rather than to measure their frequency of occurrence. Nevertheless, I applied the identification criteria described above consistently in the analysis of all the candidate scenes to ensure verifiability of my choices. While the goal of the analysis is interpretive rather than frequency-based, the distribution of figurative types across the eighteen candidate scenes is presented in Table 1 to allow independent verification of the selection and to provide a transparent overview of the sample.

Table 1. All eighteen candidate scenes identified in the corpus, with figurative type and selection status.

Source: Own processing

Chapter	Scene	Figurative type	Selected for detailed analysis
Ch. 1 (January)	Christmas sausage rolls / sensory memory and joy	Metonymy	No
Ch. 1 (January)	Sausage-making ritual / Mamá Elena's surveillance	Metonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 2 (February)	Tita's tears fall into the wedding cake batter	Metonymy	No

Ch. 2 (February)	Wedding cake / collective grief transmitted through ingestion	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 3 (March)	Blood and roses before cooking quail	Metonymy	No
Ch. 3 (March)	Quail in rose petal sauce / desire transmitted through food	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 4 (April)	Mole preparation at baptism / erotic charge in kitchen	Metaphor	No
Ch. 5 (May)	Chorizo preparation / Tita's suppressed grief	Metonymy	No
Ch. 5 (May)	Mamá Elena supervises sausage-making / Tita's grief	Metonymy	No
Ch. 6 (June)	Breakdown in dovecote / Tita ceases to function in kitchen	Metonymy	No
Ch. 7 (July)	Chencha's soup restores Tita to her senses	Metaphor	No
Ch. 7 (July)	Ox-tail soup for Mamá Elena / bitterly rejected	Metonymy	No
Ch. 8 (August)	Champondongo preparation / anger as pressure in a container	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 9 (September)	Three Kings' Day bread / memory of Nacha through cooking	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 10 (October)	Cream fritters for Gertrudis / sisterly bond	Metonymy	No
Ch. 11 (November)	Beans with chile / emotional conflict around John's visit	Metonymy	No
Ch. 12 (December)	Chiles in walnut sauce / collective desire at wedding feast	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)
Ch. 12 (December)	Candles / self-immolation through memory, LOVE IS FIRE literalised	Metaphtonymy	Yes (*)

(*) The seven scenes marked were selected for detailed analysis as they most clearly represented the range of figurative structures operating in the novel.

4. Culinary metaphor and metonymy in the representation of emotion

In this section I present a cognitive-linguistic analysis of how food and cooking function as metaphorical and metonymic resources for emotional expression in "Like water for chocolate" (Esquivel 1992). My analysis does not focus on isolated stylistic features, but rather identifies recurring conceptual patterns and shows that culinary discourse may be interpreted as a coherent system of emotional meaning (see Kövecses 2015; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). I pay particular attention to the interaction between metaphor and metonymy, that is metaphonymy, where bodily reactions ground abstract conceptualisations (Goossens 1990; Kövecses 2013; Radden & Kövecses 1999; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez & Galera Masegosa 2014).

4.1 Food as emotional substance: EMOTION IS FOOD

The main metaphor in the novel is EMOTION IS A SUBSTANCE, which is narrowed down to the EMOTION IS FOOD metaphor. Emotions are regarded as entities that can be prepared, transmitted, and consumed. Esquivel makes this idea literal by putting emotions directly into food, even though everyday language often describes emotions as substances (Kövecses 2000; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). In the wedding cake scene, Tita's tears fall into the batter, making the guests feel very sad and sick. The story shows that the emotional effect is real (Esquivel 1992: 39):

"But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication – an acute attack of pain and frustration – that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and into the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. Everyone there, every last person, fell under this spell, and not very many of them made it to the bathrooms in time – those who didn't join the collective vomiting that was going on all over the patio."

From a cognitive standpoint, physiological responses like crying and nausea serve as metonymic cues (PHYSICAL REACTION FOR EMOTION), establishing the metaphor of emotion as a consumable entity. Metonymy gives the novel's emotional meaning a strong foundation. Instead of naming feelings directly, the text uses physical reactions like crying, vomiting, sweating or wailing, all of which show how someone is feeling (Kövecses 2006; Radden & Kövecses 1999). These metonymies (like WEEPING FOR SADNESS) enable readers to infer how someone feels based on what they already know from their own experiences (Kövecses 2013). One may easily understand that metaphor and metonymy coexist and mutually influence and motivate each other. As Kövecses (2017: 16)

states: "Emotion-related metonymies serve to capture the physiological, expressive, and behavioural responses associated with emotions. The relationship between these metaphors and metonymies is that the metaphors are based on the metonymies".

Therefore, as the quotation clearly shows, the metaphor EMOTION IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER is based on the heat of the body. In turn, in the absence of metonymic cues, the metaphor EMOTION IS FOOD would lack experiential validity.

4.2 Expressing and experiencing emotions

The metaphor EXPRESSING EMOTION IS COOKING FOOD structures Tita's actions. Cooking becomes her primary form of emotional articulation in a context where verbal expression is suppressed. Culinary processes – mixing, heating, transforming – map onto emotional development. The novel's recipe-based structure reinforces this association, positioning cooking as the main organisational principle of narrative and emotion.

The related metaphor EXPERIENCING EMOTION IS EATING FOOD conceptualises emotional reception as ingestion. The episode with quail in rose petal sauce illustrates this clearly (Esquivel 1992: 51): "But something strange was happening to Gertrudis. On her the food seemed to act as an aphrodisiac; she began to feel an intense heat pulsing through her limbs. An itch in the center of her body kept her from sitting properly in her chair. She began to sweat, imagining herself on horseback with her arms clasped around one of Poncho Villa's men".

Here, the SEXUAL DESIRE IS HEAT metaphor is grounded in the BODY HEAT FOR EMOTION metonymy (Kövecses 2000), and this interaction may be interpreted as a case of metaphonymy (Goossens 1990). Our feelings of attraction are like a burning fire. This idea is based on the connection between our bodies and emotions. When we feel desire, it feels as if our body temperature rises, and this physical sensation helps us understand desire as a powerful force that can take over.

4.3 Emotional contagion

Another interesting concept emerging from the novel is the idea that emotions may spread collectively through food. This supports the view that emotions may be viewed as a socially distributed phenomenon. The following quotation from the novel (Esquivel 1992: 217-218) illustrates the pattern at hand:

"Today, instead of feeling a terrible longing and frustration, they felt quite different; tasting these chilies in nut sauce, they all experienced a sensation like the one Gertrudis had when she ate the quails in rose petal sauce. Again Gertrudis was the first to feel the symptoms. [...] When she left, the party started to break up. All the other guests quickly made their excuses, coming up with one pretext or another; throwing heated looks at each other; they too left. The newlyweds were secretly delighted [...]. They needed to get to the hotel."

Notice that while Kövecses (2015) emphasizes the cultural and contextual grounding of emotion metaphors, distributed cognition in the sense of Hutchins (1995) provides a complementary framework for understanding how emotions may operate across interacting bodies and material artefacts.

Metonymies such as "heated looks" (BODY HEAT / INTENSE LOOK FOR EMOTION) and a hurried departure used in the text allow the reader to understand that the characters are mutually desirous of each other, even though it is not explicitly stated. These are the visible actions that indicate the characters' inner emotions and are based on cultural associations between heat, intense looks, and attraction. Since these similar reactions are repeated at different times in the novel, the reader gradually recognizes them as symptoms of desire. In this respect, the repeated pattern points to the metaphor SEXUAL DESIRE IS HEAT, which is grounded in the BODY HEAT FOR EMOTION metonymy, and this is again an example of the interaction called metaphonymy (Goossens 1990). Moreover, the BODY HEAT FOR EMOTION metonymy can also be found in the target domain of the conceptual metaphor EXPERIENCING EMOTION IS EATING FOOD, whereby eating causes powerful physical reactions which, in turn, signal emotional states. Thus, individual bodily reactions become part of a shared emotional experience and, therefore, relate food, body, and emotion in the narrative.

4.4 Anger and frustration: EMOTION IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER

Chapter 8 (August) contains the clearest example in the whole novel of the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER. According to Kövecses (2000: 24), this is one of the most basic ways in which anger is understood in English, and Esquivel draws on it with remarkable density in this scene. The emotional pressure builds through a series of triggers – hours of exhausting work, a pan of mole sauce dropped and destroyed on the stairs, and a poorly timed confrontation with Pedro – before the novel renders Tita's state through a cluster of pressure and container images (Esquivel 1992: 68-69): "The anger she felt within her acted like yeast on bread dough. She felt its rapid rising, flowing into every last recess of her body; like yeast in a small bowl, it spilled over to the outside, escaping in the form of steam through her ears, nose, and all her pores."

The conceptual structure here is clearly identifiable: Tita's body is the container, her anger is a substance that keeps expanding until there is no room left for it, and the release happens through her physical openings – ears, nose, pores. These bodily details work metonymically: the physical signs of overflow stand in for the internal emotional state, giving us BODILY RELEASE FOR EMOTIONAL OVERFLOW. When this metonymy motivates and underpins the container metaphor – the body's literal overflow providing the experiential basis for ANGER IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER – the result is what can be called metaphonymy (Goossens 1990). The metonymy is not simply accompanying the metaphor; it is giving it its grounding in the body. Two further expressions of the same pattern appear shortly after: "Tita was literally 'like water for chocolate' – she was on the verge of boiling over" and "She felt her head about to burst, like a kernel of popcorn" (Esquivel 1992: 69).

The narrator's use of the word *literally* is worth pursuing further. It signals the way magical realism operates throughout this novel: what in ordinary language would be a dead metaphor is presented as if it is genuinely happening. It also reveals the meaning of the novel's title – *like water for chocolate* refers to water heated to just below boiling point, the temperature needed to dissolve chocolate properly. At this moment in the story, Tita is that water: a substance right at the limit of what its container can hold.

One thing that sets this scene apart from others in the novel is that the anger does not travel into the food and affect the people who eat it. Unlike the wedding cake episode, where Tita's grief passes directly into the batter and produces a collective wave of weeping among the guests, here the emotion stays inside the body. The container holds, but only barely, and the overflow is physical and bodily rather than culinary. This makes the scene the purest illustration of EMOTION IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER in the novel. It develops the broader metaphor BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTION (Kövecses 2000; Lakoff & Johnson 1980) in a very specific way: anger is something that builds pressure and has to find a way out, or break the container in the process.

4.5 Longing and memory: MEMORY IS PRESERVED FOOD

Chapter 9 (September) brings a different kind of emotion into the novel – the quiet ache of longing for a past that is gone and cannot be brought back. This feeling surfaces through a simple domestic act: Tita preparing the Three Kings' Day bread (*rosca de reyes*). What is notable is that it is not the bread itself that triggers the memories, but an earlier step in the process – forming the chocolate

squares that will be served at the party. As Tita works with the chocolate, the physical effort of cooking opens up a wave of memories centred on Nacha, the woman who raised her in the kitchen and who was, in every meaningful sense, her real mother. Tita is not choosing to remember; the memories arrive on their own, carried by the body and the senses – the feel of the work in her hands, the smells around her – rather than by any conscious decision. This makes the scene one of the clearest examples in the novel of how a present sensory experience can give access to an emotional state that belongs to the past. Rather than describing Tita's feelings directly, the text communicates them through a sequence of sensory details (Esquivel 1992: 77):

"Those happy days when Nacha was with her seemed so distant now. Nacha! The smells: her noodle soup, her chilaquiles, her champurrado, her molcajete sauce, her bread with cream, all were far away in a distant past. They could never be surpassed, her seasoning, her atole drinks, her teas, her laugh, her herbal remedies, the way she braided her hair and tucked Tita in at night."

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, this passage illustrates the metonymy **SENSORY TRACE FOR EMOTIONAL BOND**. The specific dishes Nacha used to make – their smells, their flavours, the familiar rituals around them – stand in for the whole relationship. The sensory aspect of what the two women shared provides access to the emotional whole. What makes this particular instance worth examining is that the metonymy works across time rather than space. Tita is not reaching for something that is physically far away; she is reaching for something that no longer exists. The act of making food in the present opens a doorway into a world of feeling that has passed. At the same time, these sensory cues do more than simply trigger a memory – they ground an emotional state in the body, providing the experiential basis for the metaphor that follows. When metonymy operates in this way, motivating and underpinning a metaphorical mapping, the result is metaphonymy: the metonymy does not merely accompany the metaphor but gives it its force.

This becomes clearer a little further on, in the following passage: "If she could bring back a single moment from that time, a little of the happiness from those days, she could prepare the Kings' Day bread with the same enthusiasm she had felt then!" (Esquivel 1992: 77-78). The "if she could" construction is telling. Tita is not simply wishing she could remember Nacha more clearly. She is wishing she could cook the way she once did, with the same feeling alive inside her – and she imagines eating the finished bread with her sisters, laughing and joking, just as they used to. What she longs for is not the memory itself but the whole emotional world that once gave meaning to the act of cooking. This is where the conceptual metaphor **MEMORY IS PRESERVED FOOD** comes in. In the same way that preserving food stops it from decaying, following a recipe that belongs to a

relationship keeps something of that relationship alive. It holds off the fading that time brings to everything.

The scene also connects to the wider metaphor LIFE IS A RECIPE, which gives the novel its entire structure – one recipe per chapter, one month per stage of life. What the novel does at the macro level happens here at the level of a single moment in the kitchen. To follow the recipe is to follow the memory; to complete the bread well, with genuine feeling behind it, would be a way of keeping Nacha present. The hope that this might be possible is what gives the act of cooking its emotional weight in this scene (Kövecses 2015; Gibbs 2006).

4.6 Power and control: THE KITCHEN IS A DOMAIN OF AUTHORITY

One dimension of emotional experience that the analysis so far has not yet fully addressed is power – more specifically, the way that controlling the kitchen stands in for controlling someone's emotional and social life. Throughout the novel, Mamá Elena's dominance in the kitchen is a metonymy for her dominance over Tita as a person: CONTROL OVER FOOD PRODUCTION FOR CONTROL OVER THE SELF. This pattern is clear from the very first chapter (January), where Mamá Elena runs the collective sausage-making ritual, decides who does what, and keeps a close eye on every stage. Her presence in the kitchen is not just physical; it is a metonymic sign of emotional surveillance – of the constant monitoring of Tita's inner life. The pattern is stated even more plainly in Chapter 5 (May), where the text states that Mamá Elena "kept coming into the kitchen to supervise the preparation of the sausage" (Esquivel 1992: 37), even as Tita, devastated by Pedro's departure, has lost all interest in the work.

When Tita is eventually forced out of the kitchen in Chapter 6 (June) – after her breakdown in the dovecote – and sent to live at Dr Brown's house, this removal works as a metonymy for a complete loss of self. The kitchen is the container; Tita's identity and capacity to act and feel are what it contains. Losing access to it means losing herself. She is not simply leaving a room; she is being stripped of the only space in which she has ever had any freedom. The reversal of this process is equally significant. In Chapter 7 (July), Tita returns to the ranch after tasting a "spoonful of soup that Chenchá had made and brought to Dr John Brown's house", which restores her to her senses (Esquivel 1992: 54). From that point, her gradual return to the kitchen enacts the metonymy REGAINING CULINARY SPACE FOR REGAINING EMOTIONAL SELFHOOD. This recovery comes before

and makes possible the wider resolution of the narrative: Tita cannot be herself, cannot love, and cannot resist until she is back where she belongs (Bordo 1993; Counihan 1999).

4.7 Grief and death: *LIFE IS A FLAME / LOVE IS FIRE*

The final chapter (December) contains the most striking example of how magical realism works in the novel. After twenty-two years of separation, Tita and Pedro are finally free to consummate their love in the dark room, which Pedro has prepared and filled with 250 candles. During the encounter Pedro dies from the sheer intensity of the experience, entering what the novel describes as the luminous tunnel. Tita is left alone with his body and realises that she has lost all feeling: "With Pedro died the possibility of ever again lighting her inner fire" (Esquivel 1992: 117). In response, she begins to eat the candles from the box that John had given her, one by one, reliving her memories of Pedro until the heat of those memories causes the candles to ignite inside her. This act – a kind of self-immolation driven by memory – is what starts the fire: "the fiery bodies of Pedro and Tita began to throw off glowing sparks. They set on fire the bedspread, which ignited the entire ranch" (Esquivel 1992: 118). Tita dies in the flames and joins Pedro in the tunnel. The fire burns for a week and leaves nothing but ash.

This scene brings to life two dead metaphors that we use so routinely we have stopped noticing them: LOVE IS FIRE and LIFE IS A FLAME. In everyday language we speak of passion *burning*, of love being *extinguished*, of the *flame* of life – none of which we think of as figurative any more. Esquivel takes these worn-out expressions and makes them physically real: the fire is both the literal expression of Tita and Pedro's passion and an actual event that destroys the ranch. What is worth paying attention to here is how the literalisation is prepared. Throughout the final chapter the novel uses the language of inner candles and fire in a way that sets up what is to come. John had earlier told Tita about the "candles we carry inside ourselves" (Esquivel 1992: 117) – and that is precisely what she acts on when she eats the physical candles, trying to fuel the inner ones. The metaphor is not simply called upon; it is performed through the body.

The metonymic foundation for all of this has been laid down throughout the whole novel in terms of BODY HEAT FOR DESIRE – the same metonymy that drives the quail in rose petal sauce scene. By the final chapter, twenty-two years of suppressed desire have built up to the point where the release is, quite literally, explosive. This makes the ending the clearest example of metaphonymy in the novel (Goossens 1990): the metonymy of bodily heat (BODY HEAT FOR PASSION) motivates and gives

force to the metaphorical fire (LOVE IS FIRE), and magical realism closes the gap between the two until they are one and the same thing. In this way the final scene brings the novel's figurative logic to its natural end: what started as an emotion that could only be expressed through food finishes as a fire that burns down the very place where that emotion was kept hidden for so long.

4.8 Summary of figurative patterns

Table 2 summarises the figurative structures identified across the seven scenes selected for analysis. The classification distinguishes three categories – conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, and metaphonymy – and documents for each scene the relevant mapping or metonymic relation, the emotional effect produced in the narrative, and the function of magical realism in activating or literalising the figurative structure.

Table 2 Summary of the figurative structures identified in the analysis. Source: Own processing

Scene	Type of figurative structure	Mapping / relation	Emotional effect	Magical realism role	Frequency in full sample (n=18)
Wedding cake Ch. 2 (February)	Metaphonymy	TEARS FOR SADNESS (metonymy) → EMOTION IS A SUBSTANCE THAT CAN BE TRANSFERRED (metaphor); tears as physical vehicle of grief entering batter	Collective weeping and nausea among wedding guests; grief transmitted socially through ingestion	Literalises the transfer: metonymic cue (tears) becomes actual causal agent	2 / 18
Quail in rose petal sauce Ch. 3 (March)	Metaphonymy	BODY HEAT FOR DESIRE (metonymy) → SEXUAL DESIRE IS HEAT / EXPERIENCING EMOTION IS EATING FOOD (metaphor); rose petals as condensed erotic charge	Gertrudis experiences overwhelming physical heat and sexual arousal; she leaves with a soldier	Heat becomes literal: body temperature rises to the point of physical action (flight)	2 / 18
Champanongo preparation	Metaphonymy	BODILY RELEASE FOR	Tita's anger stays inside the	Literalises dead metaphors (like	1 / 18

Scene	Type of figurative structure	Mapping / relation	Emotional effect	Magical realism role	Frequency in full sample (n=18)
Ch. 8 (August)		EMOTIONAL OVERFLOW (metonymy) → ANGER IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER / BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTION (metaphor); anger expanding as yeast, escaping through pores; like water for chocolate – at the edge of boiling over	body; overflow is bodily (steam through pores, head about to burst) rather than culinary; emotion does not transfer to food or guests	water for chocolate, head about to burst); narrator uses "literally" – figurative structure becomes physical reality	
Sausage-making ritual / Mamá Elena's surveillance Ch. 1 (January)	Metonymy	CONTROL OVER FOOD PRODUCTION FOR CONTROL OVER THE SELF; PHYSICAL ACT FOR EMOTIONAL STATE; Mamá Elena's supervision of the kitchen stands for total control over Tita's emotional life; bodily compliance encodes suppressed resistance	Submission to maternal authority encoded in bodily gesture; kitchen as domain of controlled selfhood	No supernatural element; metonymy operates at purely narrative level	5 / 18
Three Kings' Day bread / chocolate squares Ch. 9 (September)	Metaphonymy	SENSORY TRACE FOR EMOTIONAL BOND (metonymy) → MEMORY IS PRESERVED FOOD / LIFE IS A RECIPE (metaphor); Nacha's specific dishes stand for the whole	Longing for Nacha and lost childhood; cooking in the present as a way of preserving an emotional bond that would otherwise fade with time	No supernatural transfer; magical realism is structural – the recipe format of the whole novel literalises LIFE IS A RECIPE at the micro-level of this scene	1 / 18

Scene	Type of figurative structure	Mapping / relation	Emotional effect	Magical realism role	Frequency in full sample (n=18)
		relationship; present sensory experience opens doorway into past emotional state; metonymy motivates metaphor			
Chilies in nut sauce Ch. 12 (December)	Metaphonymy	BODY HEAT FOR DESIRE (metonymy) → EXPERIENCING EMOTION IS EATING FOOD (metaphor); collective arousal triggered by dish; "heated looks" as metonymic cue	Distributed desire among all dinner guests; social emotion spread through shared ingestion	Literalises distributed cognition: emotion becomes a socially shared bodily state	2 / 18
Final fire / consummation Ch. 12 (December)	Metaphonymy	BODY HEAT FOR PASSION (metonymy) → LOVE IS FIRE / LIFE IS A FLAME (metaphor); twenty-two years of suppressed heat finds cathartic release; Tita eats candles to fuel inner fire – bodily metonymy enacts the metaphor literally	Tita and Pedro's love consummated and simultaneously fatal; emotion as force that transcends bodily containment	Full literalisation of dead metaphor: fire is simultaneously figurative and physically real	1 / 18

5. Discussion and conclusions

Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Conceptual Metonymy Theory and their interaction (metaphonymy), this paper analysed seven scenes selected from eighteen candidate scenes identified across all twelve chapters of the novel; the selection criteria are set out in Section 3.3, and the full inventory of figurative structures is summarised in Table 2 in Section 4.8.

The analysis identified three main types of conceptual metaphor. The first group consists of substance metaphors, in which emotion is treated as a material that can be prepared, transferred, and consumed: EMOTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES, narrowed to EMOTIONS ARE FOOD (Sections 4.1, 4.3). A related variant, EMOTION IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER (Section 4.1), further specifies emotion as a heated substance under pressure. The second group involves process metaphors mapped onto cooking and eating: EXPRESSING EMOTION IS COOKING FOOD and EXPERIENCING EMOTION IS EATING FOOD (Section 4.2). The third group includes structural metaphors: LIFE IS A RECIPE, and LOVE IS FIRE / LIFE IS A FLAME (Sections 4.5, 4.7), ANGER IS PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER, and BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTION (Section 4.4), and MEMORY IS PRESERVED FOOD (Section 4.5). Among all of these, the EMOTIONS ARE FOOD network functions as the overarching schema. It provides the basic conceptual premise – emotion as a substance – that magical realism literalises throughout the novel, and its presence in four of the seven analysed scenes (Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7) makes it the dominant figurative pattern in the text.

The metonymy analysis identified six recurring patterns. The most frequent is BODILY REACTION FOR EMOTION (also expressed as PHYSICAL REACTION FOR EMOTION), present in all seven scenes through tears, nausea, heat, arousal, bodily tension, or physical displacement. This supports Kövecses' (2013) argument that bodily cues form the experiential foundation for metaphorical mappings. The second most common is PHYSICAL ACT FOR EMOTIONAL STATE (Sections 4.2, 4.6), followed by SENSORY TRACE FOR EMOTIONAL BOND (Section 4.5), BODILY RELEASE FOR EMOTIONAL OVERFLOW (Section 4.4), CONTROL OVER FOOD PRODUCTION FOR CONTROL OVER THE SELF, and REGAINING CULINARY SPACE FOR REGAINING EMOTIONAL SELFHOOD (both in Section 4.6).

Furthermore, in six scenes – the wedding cake (4.1), the quail in rose petal sauce (4.2), the chilies in nut sauce (4.3), the champondongo preparation (4.4), the Three Kings' Day bread (4.5), and the final fire (4.7) – metonymy and metaphor interact as metaphonymy: a metonymic bodily cue simultaneously motivates and gives experiential validity to a metaphorical mapping. These are the most figuratively complex moments in the novel, and the ones where magical realism most clearly collapses the boundary between metonymic sign and metaphorical vehicle.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. Although eighteen candidate scenes were identified through a systematic reading of all twelve chapters, because of space limitations, only seven were

selected for analysis. The study is therefore best described as a theoretically informed qualitative survey rather than a comprehensive corpus analysis. In addition, the entire analysis is based on the English translation by C. and T. Christensen (1992); translation choices may have introduced or obscured figurative patterns present in Esquivel's Spanish original, and a comparative study of both versions would be a valuable next step.

In conclusion, this paper has shown that culinary discourse in "Like water for chocolate" forms a coherent cognitive-semiotic system in which food, cooking, and eating serve as the main channels for emotions that cannot be spoken openly. The EMOTIONS ARE FOOD metaphor network, grounded in a range of specific metonymic patterns, drives this system. Magical realism intensifies these figurative structures, turning conceptual metaphors into literal narrative events. These findings support the broader claims of Kövecses (2015) and Gibbs (2006) that literary language does not invent new cognitive patterns but activates and heightens the embodied figurative structures through which emotional experience is ordinarily organised.

Abbreviations

CMT – Conceptual Metaphor Theory

CMTT – Conceptual Metonymy Theory


References

1. Albala, K. (2011). *Food cultures of the world encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
2. A recipe for discourse: Perspectives on *Like Water for Chocolate*. (2010). Skipper, E. (ed.) Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi.
3. Ashley, B., Hollows, J., Jones, S. & Taylor, B. (2004). *Food and cultural studies*. London – New York: Routledge.
4. Barrett, L. F. & Lindquist, K. A. (2008). The embodiment of emotion. In *Embodied grounding: Social, cognitive, affective, and neuroscientific approaches*. Semin, G.R. & Smith, E.R. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 237-262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805837.011>
5. Beasley-Murray, J. (2010). *Posthegemony: Political theory and Latin America*. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.
6. Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
7. Bowers, M.A. (2004). *Magic(al) realism*. London – New York: Routledge.
8. Bowskill, S. (2019). Como agua para chocolate and 'Intimas suculencias': Laura Esquivel's nueva literatura and the creation of a canon of women writing about food, knowledge and pleasure. In *Modern languages open*, 1 (3), p. 1-23.

9. Counihan, C. (1999). *The anthropology of food and body: Gender, meaning, and power*. London – New York: Routledge.
10. *Critical perspectives in food studies*. (2012). Koç, M., Sumner, J. & Winson, A. (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Esquivel, L. (1992). *Like water for chocolate*. Translated by C. Christensen & T. Christensen. New York: Anchor Books. (Original work published 1989).
12. Faris, W.B. (2004). *Ordinary enchantments: Magical realism and the remystification of narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
13. *Food and culture: A reader*. 3rd ed. (2013). Counihan, C. & Van Esterik, P. (eds.). London – New York: Routledge.
14. Gibbs, R.W. (2006). *Embodiment and cognitive science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
15. Goossens, L. (1990). Metaphonymy: The interaction of metaphor and metonymy in expressions for linguistic action. In *Cognitive linguistics*, 1 (3), p. 323-340.
16. Grząśko, A. & Kiełtyka, R. (in press). On the metaphorical and symbolic nature of feasting in G. Axel's *Babette's feast* (1987). In *Roczniki Humanistyczne KUL*.
17. Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
18. Jurafsky, D. (2014). *The language of food: A linguist reads the menu*. New York – London: W.W. Norton.
19. Kövecses, Z. (2020). *Extended conceptual metaphor theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
20. Kövecses, Z. (2006). *Language, mind, and culture: A practical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Kövecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
22. Kövecses, Z. (2017). Metaphor and metonymy in folk and expert theories of emotion. In *Metaphor in communication, science and education*. Ervas, F., Gola, E. & Rossi, M.G. (eds.). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 29-42.
23. Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
24. Kövecses, Z. (2013). The metaphor–metonymy relationship: Correlation metaphors are based on metonymy. In *Metaphor and symbol*, 28 (2), p. 75-88.
25. Kövecses, Z. (2015). *Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
26. Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
27. Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
28. Littlemore, J. (2015). *Metonymy: Hidden shortcuts in language, thought and communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
29. *Magical realism: Theory, history, community*. (1995). Zamora, L.P. & Faris, W.B. (eds.). Durham – London: Duke University Press.
30. *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads: A cognitive perspective*. (2000). Barcelona, A. (ed.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
31. Parasecoli, F. (2008). *Bite me: Food in popular culture*. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

32. Pilcher, J.M. (1998). *¡Que vivan los tamales! Food and the making of Mexican identity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
33. Poulain, J.-P. (2017). *The sociology of food: Eating and the place of food in society*. Translated by A. de La Prade & S.M. Thompson. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
34. Radden, G. & Kövecses, Z. (1999). Towards a theory of metonymy. In *Metonymy in language and thought*. Panther, K.-U. & Radden, G. (eds.). Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins, p. 17-59.
35. *Routledge international handbook of food studies*. (2013). Albala, K. (ed.). London – New York: Routledge.
36. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, F.J. & Galera Masegosa, A. (2014). *Cognitive modeling: A linguistic perspective*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
37. Schaefer, C. (1994). *Textured lives: Women, art, and representation in modern Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
38. Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. London: Routledge.

Contact data

	<p><i>name:</i></p> <p><i>academic title / rank:</i></p> <p><i>department:</i></p> <p><i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i></p> <p><i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Robert Kieltyka dr hab., prof. URad (Linguistics) Associate Professor Department of Modern Languages Casimir Pulaski University of Radom Malczewskiego 20a, 26-600 Radom, Poland r.kieltyka@urad.edu.pl Cognitive linguistics, history of the English language, morphology-semantics interface, diachronic semantics.</p>
--	---	---

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

**DETERMINING THE AMBIVALENCE OF EMOTION CONCEPTS RELYING ON
VALENCE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL CONCEPTUAL PROXIMATES***Kostiantyn Mizin* * *Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav**Pereiaslav, Ukraine**Oleksandr Petrov* *Vinnitsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy State Pedagogical University**Vinnitsia, Ukraine***Corresponding author***Received:** 7.03.2026 **Reviewed:** 11.03.2026 and 27.03.2026**Similarity Index:** 3%

Bibliographic description: Mizin, K. & Petrov, O. (2026). Determining the ambivalence of emotion concepts relying on valence indicators of emotional conceptual proximates. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 106-124. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.06>

Abstract: The article proposes a corpus-based methodology built on the notion of "emotional conceptual proximates". The framework is applied to SEHNSUCHT in German culture and LONGING in North American culture, alongside the non-ambivalent emotion concepts HATE and LOVE vs. HASS (HAß) and LIEBE. The study distinguishes between "ambivalent emotion concept" and "ambivalence of emotion concept", identifies the main types of ambivalent emotion concepts in the two cultures, and compares their conceptual structures by mean valence values to reveal cross-cultural differences.

Keywords: ambivalence, emotion concept, emotional conceptual proximate, language corpus, cross-cultural contrast.

1. Introduction

In many approaches within the humanities and cognitive sciences, the world is often conceptualised in terms of dichotomous structures (cf. an individual's perception of objective reality through the prism of "embodied" orientations (e.g., UP vs. DOWN), sociocultural oppositions (e.g., US vs. THEM), intercultural oppositions (e.g., COLLECTIVISM vs. INDIVIDUALISM), etc.). Conceptualising the world on the basis of binary categories necessitates a permanent balancing act between opposing entities. A striking example of such balancing is the polarisation of an individual's emotional world (negative vs. positive emotions) as one of the components of their mental world (Mizin et al. 2023: 224). This distinction is widely conceptualised in psychology either as a bipolar evaluative dimension or as



coexisting affective systems (Russell & Carroll 1999). Within these frameworks, emotional experience is understood as structured along opposing or interacting valence systems, which may also give rise to ambivalent states involving simultaneous positive and negative evaluations.

In the context of the constructivist approach in psychology, which is largely supported by culture-oriented branches of linguistics, emotions are viewed as a product of the complex dynamics of social interaction and the broader cultural context in which this interaction takes place (Kövecses 2003). As a result of social interaction among individuals, complex (derived) emotions arise on the basis of basic emotions; a separate group of the former constitutes "double" emotions, i.e., those in which the "combination" of two emotions is explicitly expressed. If these "combined" emotions are polar opposites, then this is a case of ambivalent emotions (Lomas 2017; Moss & Couchman 2012), which are often referred to as *dual*, *mixed*, or *conflicting* (see, e.g., Bamberg 1997; Stamenov 2004). Numerous scientific studies in various fields of psychology are devoted to the analysis of this phenomenon, but there has been a noticeable lack of work carried out in the field of cognitive linguistics, whose adherents have been advocating the idea since the end of the last century that emotions are conceptualised and represented in cognition through emotion concepts (ECs) (Kövecses 1990; Wierzbicka 1999).

Representatives of cognitive linguistics, as well as other culture-oriented scientific fields, often consider ECs as cultural or ethnopsychological concepts (Goddard 2018; Mizin 2025; Ogarkova et al. 2013; Panasenko 2013; Panasenko et al. 2023; Pinich 2023; Pinich & Morozova 2024; Underhill 2015), which cannot be used as culture-free analytical tools in analyses of any disciplinary orientation (Ogarkova 2013). This is consistent with the widespread view in psychology that the perception and verbal expression of emotions, including basic ones, differs in certain ways across cultures (Doyle et al. 2021), since culture affects the ways in which languages are used as vehicles to express emotion (Robinson & Altarriba 2015). Therefore, by studying ECs, it is possible to reveal the peculiarities of categorisation and conceptualisation of the objective world of a particular culture.

Given that ECs are culturally marked, their meaning is best seen when analysed in terms of a network of related senses, considered either as overlaps, synonyms or antonyms, and through the analysis of a cluster of other notions related to it either by inclusion, extension or opposition (cf. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk & Wilson 2010). Within this framework, such relations function as inter-cluster connectors, linking (1) equivalent ECs, grounded in semantic similarity, (2) ambivalent ECs, arising from oppositional or conflicting evaluative profiles, and (3) blended ECs, resulting from processes of conceptual extension. Accordingly, the analysis of a given EC should encompass not only its internal

structure but also its position within this network, including its links based on (1) similarity (equivalence), (2) opposition (ambivalence), or (3) extension (blending).

It must be clarified here that the term *equivalence* in this context should not be taken to mean intercultural equivalence¹ but rather ECs within a given culture that have the same valence² (however, the same valence does not necessarily mean conceptual equivalence). Such ECs (see, e.g., JOY and HAPPINESS in North American culture (NAC): Kövecses 2008) can overlap in numerous situations. Equivalent ECs are capable of forming not only overlapping but also triplet clusters, and their lexical labels usually perform the function of pragmatic intensification in speech. Unlike equivalent ECs, ambivalent ECs have opposite valence. They are based on the property of a number of emotions to change valence depending on the emotional situation³.

All three groups of ECs – equivalent, ambivalent, and blended⁴ – are able to demonstrate cross-cultural differences (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk et al. 2013). In British English, e.g., overlapping and triplication of ECs correlate with a tendency for the co-occurrence of positive emotion terms with positive ones and negative emotions with negatively charged ones (Bednarek 2008). As for ambivalent ECs, although they exist in every culture, not every culture has terminological designations for these concepts, resulting in interlingual gaps. For example, in German there is a name for "hated love" – *Hassliebe*, while in other languages, including English, no such one-word term exists, and the corresponding meaning is conveyed by the phrase *love-hate relationship*. This is consistent with the fact, revealed in the study of various European languages, that some of these languages are more flexible and freer in mixing and reversing the connections between opposite emotions compared to English, which, in fact, may be significant for how individuals experience and conceptualise emotions in different cultures (Mizin et al. 2023; Stamenov 2004). Interlingual asymmetry in terms for ambivalent and mixed emotions is clearly evident when comparing English with German (Mizin & Letiucha 2019).

In this regard, the following **research questions (RQ)** remain unanswered:

RQ 1: Does the ambivalence indicator of the conceptual structure of those ECs whose linguistic designations clearly indicate their ambivalence differs from those ECs with lexical labels that do not contain the semantics of ambivalence?

RQ 2: Can any EC, regardless of whether it represents a basic or derived emotion, be potentially ambivalent?

RQ 3: What factors – extralinguistic and/or intralinguistic – can influence the cross-cultural asymmetry of ambivalent ECs?

A scientifically sound approach to these issues requires a coherent interdisciplinary methodology, as the human emotional world is a complex and diffuse phenomenon operating at the intersection of the physical and mental dimensions. In addition, the study of this phenomenon is hampered by its correlation with cultural factors. Taking this into account, the proposed study applies a corpus-based methodology based on interdisciplinary scientific procedures.

2. Material and methods

The research questions posed above can be answered using a corpus-based methodology, the core construct of which is "emotional conceptual proximates" (ECPs⁵). This methodology is based on corpus data analysis, which can be used to determine the valence indicators of ECPs of the ambivalent EC SEHNSUCHT in German culture (GC⁶) and its partial equivalent in NAC LONGING⁷, along with the non-ambivalent ECs HATE and LOVE in NAC and HASS (HAß) and LIEBE in GC. The aim is also to identify the main types of ambivalent ECs in the compared cultures and compare the conceptual structures of the studied ECs by the mean valence value, which makes it possible to identify certain cross-cultural specifics of these ECs.

The hypothesis of the proposed study is that any EC can be potentially ambivalent because its conceptual structure usually contains meanings that are opposite in valence. This means that depending on the interplay of contextual factors, not only ambivalent but also other ECs can change their valence. Since ECs are cultural phenomena, the balance of ambivalent meanings may be slightly different in cross-cultural equivalents.

Methodologically, the notion of "ECP" is based on the idea that the conceptual structure of any EC is hierarchically organised and dynamic, representing a "cocktail" of various meanings that are objectified at the level of language. These meanings indicate the connections between EC and other cultural concepts. As a rule, each EC is dominated by emotion-related senses, which in their turn represent those ECs that closely correlate with it. It is therefore possible, within the conceptual structure of EC, to identify the emotional concepts in closest conceptual proximity to it – emotional conceptual proximates (Mizin & Slavova 2023: 4). The latter have the closest connections (associations) with the ECs whose conceptual structure is being studied. At the same time, each EC has its own hierarchical configuration of ECPs, the identification of which provides a clear understanding of the content of the EC as a whole.

The procedure for determining ECPs is based on corpus data, namely on the frequency of the lemmas that objectify these ECPs. These are lemmas that function as collocates and co-occurents of query

words, i.e. lexical labels used as search inputs in the corpus and representing the emotional concepts under study. To illustrate how ECPs are identified, consider the query word *love* in COCA. Among its most frequent collocates are *respect*, *passion*, and *hate*. In corpus contexts such as *deep respect and love* or *a love-hate relationship*, these collocates reflect both overlapping and oppositional conceptual links. Only those collocates that lexicalise emotions (e.g., *respect*, *joy*, *fear*) are selected as ECPs, while non-emotional items are excluded.

In representative corpora, lists of collocates are generated automatically by entering the relevant query word. However, in order to obtain an adequate representation of a given EC, a manual selection is carried out, including only those lemmas that verbalise emotions and objectify the underlying concepts, i.e. ECPs. By establishing the most relevant ECPs in the conceptual structure of a given EC, it is possible to identify the intracultural equivalents of this concept (EC overlaps) and ECs opposite to it, as well as to determine its affective characteristics, in particular its valence⁸. Comparing the valence indicators of the conceptual structures of ECs from different cultures makes it possible to establish a balance between their synonymous (equivalent) and opposite (ambivalent) meanings.

Building on this valence approach, the distinction between ambivalent and blended ECs is based on the valence configuration of their ECPs. Specifically, ECs are classified as ambivalent when their ECP distribution includes a statistically significant proportion of both positively and negatively valenced proximates. In contrast, blended ECs involve conceptual extension or combination but do not necessarily exhibit oppositional valence patterns in their ECP profiles. Thus, the classification is grounded in corpus-derived collocational data rather than solely in lexical form. In this sense, collocational patterns serve as empirical indicators of conceptual structure.

In order to implement this analytical framework, the corpus-based research methodology is divided into the following stages:

1. Formation of samples (N=20⁹) of the most relevant ECPs of ambivalent and non-ambivalent ECs. The analysis of ECPs of non-ambivalent ECs is carried out to elucidate the notion "ambivalence of EC". Notable examples here are the opposing ECs HATE and LOVE in NAC and HASS (HAß) and LIEBE in GC, since the fusion of the emotions of hatred and love may underlie the formation of ambivalent ECs (e.g., HASSLIEBE in GC).
2. Identification of differences in the conceptual structures of the studied ECs by determining synonymous (overlapping) and opposite (ambivalence) meanings, as well as the valence indicators of their ECPs. Valence indicators of the latter are established on the basis of the data presented in M. Bradley and P. Lang (1999)¹⁰.

3. Based on mean valence indicators¹¹, comparison of the conceptual structures of ambivalent ECs SEHNSUCHT in GC and LONGING in NAC with the aim of identifying their cross-cultural specificity against the background of differences in the balance of oppositely valenced meanings of cross-cultural equivalents.

The ECP samples were generated both automatically and manually, based on the data from the English-language Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and "Wortprofil 2024" of the German-language corpus Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache (DWDS), as these corpora meet the criteria necessary to achieve the objectives of the proposed research:

1. The availability of an automatic function for generating a list of occurrence forms of the query word based on frequency¹².
2. The substantial size of these corpora, because the larger the corpus, the greater the potential representativeness of the data¹³.
3. Commensurability of the time span of the compared corpora creation¹⁴.
4. Restriction of the corpus material to one language variant, since both English and German have regional variants (there are significant differences between some of these variants)¹⁵.

3. Results and discussion

Ambivalence can be manifested in ECs either explicitly, when it is inherent in their lexical labels, or implicitly, where the latter do not formally signal the presence of ambivalent meanings. Regardless of this, the natures of both the former and the latter are based on the property of a number of conceptualised emotions to change their valence to the opposite. Psychologists still disagree on how this happens and what factors cause the ambivalence of emotions. Some psychologists believe that ambivalent emotions can be divided into consecutive and simultaneous (Carrera & Oceja 2007): the former arise when the emotion of one valence is quickly replaced by the emotion of the opposite valence, while the latter are the product of the simultaneous activation of emotions of opposite valence. However, more prevalent is the theory of a single bipolar affective mechanism – a single continuum with positive and negative valences at the poles, where any experience occupies one point along this spectrum (Larsen et al. 2003: 211). The two-dimensional space of the affective system, where positive and negative valences are functionally independent (Cacioppo & Berntson 1994), is based on the fact that behavioural expression is usually limited by bipolar organisation, because a person is forced to either approach or move away from a stimulus. However, at the level of basic mechanisms, such restrictive conditions do not exist, so an individual may experience simultaneous activation of positive and negative valences.

In the present study, we adopt an integrative perspective, according to which emotional experience may be structured either along a bipolar continuum or as the co-activation of functionally independent positive and negative valences. While behavioural responses often reflect a bipolar organisation (approach vs. avoidance), underlying affective mechanisms allow for the simultaneous activation of opposing valences, giving rise to ambivalent emotional states.

None of these rather contradictory theories conflicts with our assumption that the emotional world of a person is organised significantly dichotomously, when positive emotion can have its "antipode", and vice versa. It is for this reason that the conceptual structure of any EC contains meanings that are opposite to it in valence (see, e.g., Fig. 1). Given that ECs are dynamic cognitive constructs, their semantic organisation may undergo reconfiguration. This may be reflected in linguistic data as shifts in the relative salience of their components. Such variation can be associated with the coexistence or alternation of opposing evaluative meanings, rather than being directly determined by individual emotional experience. When an individual simultaneously or consecutively experiences opposing emotions, this may lead to changes in the semantic hierarchy of a particular EC. It is noteworthy that some emotions are not only closely connected but also partially blended with their opposites, resulting in the formation of ambivalent ECs. Accordingly, every ambivalent EC is mixed, but not every mixed EC is ambivalent. For example, SHAME constitutes a mixed EC but does not arise from conflicting emotions (see Turner 2009 for details).

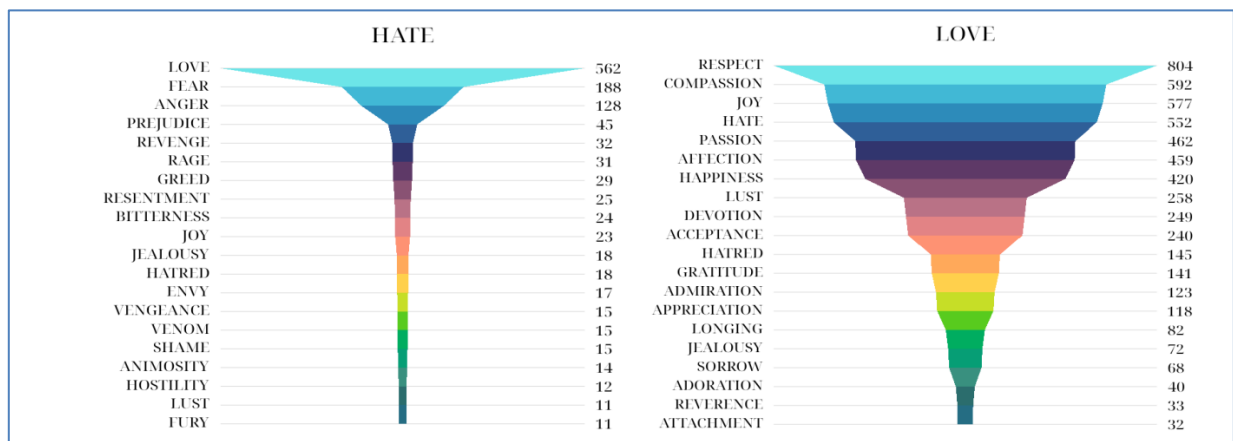


Figure 1. The most relevant ECPs of the ECs HATE and LOVE (the 20 most frequent collocates of the query words *hate* and *love*; ECPs are shown on the left, and frequency in COCA is shown on the right). Source: Own processing

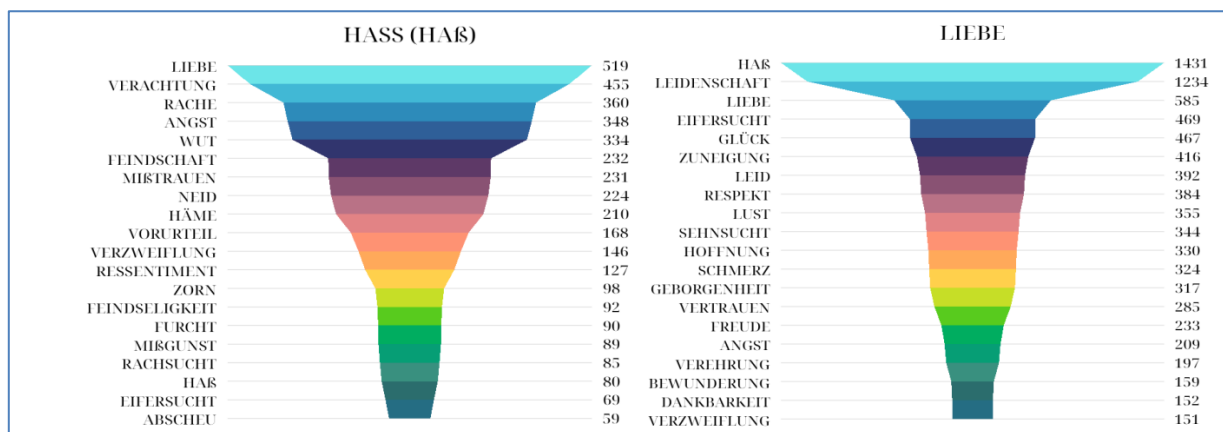


Figure 2. The most relevant ECPs of the ECs HASS (HAß) and LIEBE (the 20 most frequent collocates of the query words *Hass (Haß)* and *Liebe*; ECPs are shown on the left, and frequency in Wortprofil 2024 is shown on the right).

Source: Own processing

Based on the criterion of explicit/implicit expression of ambivalence through ECs linguistic designations, three types of such concepts can be distinguished:

1. ECs whose lexical labels clearly indicate the opposition of opposite emotions, e.g.: GC HASSLIEBE = HASS ('hate'; negative valence) + LIEBE ('love'; positive valence).
2. ECs whose ambivalence is quite noticeable in their linguistic designations, e.g.: GC GLÜCKSCHMERZ = GLÜCK ('happiness'; positive valence) + SCHMERZ ('pain'; negative valence); GC SCHADENFREUDE = SCHADEN ('harm'; negative valence) + FREUDE ('joy'; positive valence).
3. ECs whose ambivalence is not reflected in their lexical labels. This type is formed by ambivalent ECs common to both cultures, representing so-called "bittersweet" emotions (see, e.g., Scheibe et al. 2007). Notable examples here are ECs in which the meanings of the basic emotions of happiness and sadness are "mixed" (Holm et al. 2002: 608), – SEHNSUCHT, which clearly demonstrates cultural specificity in GC, and its partial equivalent in NAC LONGING. Similar "bittersweet" ECs include GC FERNWEH (WANDERLUST) and NAC WANDERLUST, GC HEIMWEH and NAC HOMESICKNESS, etc. In addition to "bittersweet" ECs, this type also comprises a number of concepts that represent emotions with ambiguous valence, e.g., NAC BEWILDERMENT and GC VERWIRRUNG, NAC PITY and GC MITLEID, NAC HESITANCY and GC ZÖGERN.

It is noteworthy that the first two types of ambivalent ECs are not represented in NAC at all¹⁶, which is consistent with the conclusion that there are no verbal designations for a number of mixed emotions in English (Bamberg 1997). The extralinguistic and intralinguistic reasons for this are still not fully understood and therefore remain a subject for further scientific study. In this particular case, it can only be tentatively assumed that the most obvious intralingual factor of such English-German interlingual asymmetry is the well-known tendency of the German language to form noun compounds. However, the emergence of compound names to denote emotions also has an

extralinguistic basis: linguistic expression is given primarily to those concepts that are relevant to a particular culture. This, of course, does not mean that Americans are unfamiliar with the emotional experiences of "hated love" or "happiness pain/luck pain". However, the relevance of these concepts in NAC and GC is probably different.

It should be noted that the notion of "happiness at the misfortune of others" is expressed in English by several words, primarily *gloating* and *glee*. However, even with the existence of lexical equivalents, there is both interlingual and, to an even greater extent, intercultural asymmetry due to the cultural specificity of the ambivalent EC SCHADENFREUDE. Still, some believe that this EC is not ambivalent, as it represents a specific kind of joy (Fronhofer 2019). If one adheres to this position, it follows that GLÜCKSCHMERZ is not ambivalent either, because it represents a specific pain. But if we proceed from the assumption that the main criterion for ECs to be categorised as ambivalent is the mixing of ECs with opposite valences, then such mixing is present in both SCHADENFREUDE and GLÜCKSCHMERZ. This mixing may not be so clearly traceable in the compound *Schadenfreude*, because the component *Schaden-* does not denote an emotion, yet when defining ambivalent ECs, one should take into account not only the lexical labels of ECs, but, more importantly, the presence of oppositional evaluative features within their conceptual structure.

The stimulus for such mixing in these ECs is the natural need to achieve emotional balance. Thus, if someone who is perceived negatively by a particular person achieves a good result, this creates an imbalance because it violates that person's idea of a world where good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. The person wants to avoid imbalance, so the emotion of *Glückschmerz* signals that this imbalance must be eliminated. Conversely, the emotion of *Schadenfreude* arises in situations where there is already an imbalance (someone is in a position where, in the opinion of their opponent, they should not be), but the misfortune of another person restores this balance. In this case, the emotion of *Schadenfreude* serves as a signal that everything is fine again (van de Ven 2018).

The human desire for emotional balance can lead to the "equalization" of the emotional charge of positive or negative emotions through, albeit insignificant, mixing with opposite emotion/emotions. This is confirmed by the analysis of ECPs of non-ambivalent but at the same time opposite ECs HATE and LOVE in NAC, and HASS (HAß) and LIEBE in GC (Figure 1 and Figure 2), which has found that their semantic structure contains negative, positive, and relatively neutral meanings, some of which are synonymous (overlapping) and opposite (ambivalent) to the compared ECs.

The figures clearly demonstrate that each of the analysed ECs has its own hierarchy of the most frequent ECPs, in which the frequency of the lemmas that objectify the first (two or three) ECPs differs significantly from the frequency of other ECPs in this hierarchy. It is these first ECPs in the hierarchy of a particular EC that largely determine its content, often revealing either interchangeability with this EC in numerous situations (overlapping proximates) or complete opposition to it (ambivalent proximates), e.g., in EC HATE, the first position is occupied by its opposite LOVE, which indicates an extremely close connection between these concepts in NAC.

The corpus data also reveal how these associations are realised in discourse. For example, in COCA, the EC LOVE occurs in contexts such as "a deep love and respect for others", reinforcing its connection with positive proximates. At the same time, ambivalent patterns are attested in examples like "their complicated love-hate relationship", where opposing valences co-occur within a single conceptual frame. Similarly, HATE appears in contexts such as "fear and hate spread quickly", demonstrating its association with negatively valenced ECPs.

Given this, it can be assumed that, despite the absence of a linguistic designation, NAC representatives are well familiar with the ambivalent emotion of "hated love". This is further confirmed by the fourth position of ECP HATE in EC LOVE. However, it is more relevant for Americans to associate LOVE not with HATE but with RESPECT, which is presumably due to the distinctive role that respect plays in their conceptualisation of love¹⁷. Unlike Americans, German speakers tend to associate EC HASS (HAß) and EC LIEBE as reciprocally opposed concepts, as evidenced by corpus data. Furthermore, the linguistic representation of EC LIEBE in German appears to emphasise LEIDENSCHAFT 'passion' more than RESPEKT 'respect'. Another difference observed in the data is that EC HATE in NAC is more frequently associated with FEAR, whereas in German EC HASS (HAß) is more closely linked to VERACHTUNG 'contempt'.

The ECP samples of non-ambivalent ECs HATE, LOVE, HASS (HAß), and LIEBE (Table 1) support the above given assumption that ECs possess an inherent potential for ambivalence. This potential arises from the multidimensional nature of their conceptual structure, which may integrate contrasting or even opposing evaluative conceptualisations, particularly at the peripheral level. Importantly, a distinction should be drawn between the ambivalence of an emotional concept and ambivalent realisations of an emotional concept in discourse. The former refers to a structural property, i.e., the capacity of an EC to accommodate divergent evaluative meanings within its conceptual organisation, as evidenced by the distribution of ECP valence indicators. The latter, by contrast, denotes context-

dependent cases in which such opposing meanings are simultaneously activated, resulting in the coexistence or tension of conflicting connotations.

Accordingly, not every use of an EC is ambivalent; however, any EC may exhibit ambivalence under specific contextual conditions. This also implies that ECs, irrespective of their dominant or prototypical valence, are capable of shifting evaluative orientation and, in certain cases, of simultaneously representing emotions with opposing valence (cf. similar observations for happiness and sadness in Larsen & McGraw 2014). On this basis, ambivalence should be treated as an inherent and empirically verifiable characteristic of ECs, rather than as a property restricted to a specific subclass of "ambivalent" concepts. Its objectivity can be assessed through statistical analysis of ECP-based valence indicators.

Table 1. Mean value of indicators of valence (V.) of the most relevant ECPs of the ECs HATE, LOVE, HASS (HAB), and LIEBE. Source: Own processing

N	HATE		LOVE		HASS (HAB)		LIEBE	
	ECPs	V.	ECPs	V.	ECPs	V.	ECPs	V.
1	LOVE	8.72	RESPECT	7.64	LIEBE 'love'	8.72	HAB 'hate'	1.98
2	FEAR	2.76	COMPASSION	7.11	VERACHTUNG 'contempt'	3.85	LEIDENSCHAFT 'passion'	8.02
3	ANGER	2.34	JOY	8.62	RACHE 'revenge'	2.79	LIEBE 'love'	8.72
4	PREJUDICE	1.96	HATE	1.98	ANGST 'anxiety'	2.76	EIFERSUCHT 'jealousy'	2.51
5	REVENGE	2.79	PASSION	8.02	WUT 'anger'	2.34	GLÜCK 'happiness'	8.25
6	RAGE	2.41	AFFECTION	8.39	FEINDSCHAFT 'animosity'	3.06	ZUNEIGUNG 'attachment'	7.04
7	GREED	3.51	HAPPINESS	8.25	MIBTRAUEN 'mistrust'	3.76	LEID 'distress'	2.00
8	RESENTMENT	3.76	LUST	7.12	NEID 'envy'	2.51	RESPEKT 'respect'	7.64
9	BITTERNESS	3.95	DEVOTION	7.41	HÄME 'glee'	2.69	LUST 'lust'	7.12
10	JOY	8.62	ACCEPTANCE	7.98	VORURTEIL 'prejudice'	1.96	SEHNSUCHT 'longing'	7.83
11	JEALOUSY	2.51	HATRED	1.98	VERZWEIFLUNG 'despair'	2.19	HOFFNUNG 'hope'	7.05
12	HATRED	1.98	GRATITUDE	7.66	RESSENTIMENT 'resentment'	3.76	SCHMERZ 'pain'	2.13
13	ENVY	2.51	ADMIRATION	7.81	ZORN 'rage'	2.41	GEBORGENHEIT 'cosy security'	7.57
14	VENGEANCE	2.79	APPRECIATION	7.39	FEINDSELIGKEIT 'hostility'	2.73	VERTRAUEN 'trust'	6.68
15	VENOM	2.68	LONGING	7.83	FURCHT 'fear'	2.76	FREUDE 'joy'	8.62
16	SHAME	2.50	JEALOUSY	2.51	MIBGUNST 'resentment'	3.76	ANGST 'anxiety'	2.76
17	ANIMOSITY	3.06	SORROW	1.65	RACHSUCHT 'vengeance'	2.79	VEREHRUNG 'reverence'	7.20
18	HOSTILITY	2.73	ADORATION	8.12	HAB 'hate'	1.98	BEWUNDERUNG 'admiration'	7.81
19	LUST	7.12	REVERENCE	7.20	EIFERSUCHT 'jealousy'	2.51	DANKBARKEIT 'gratitude'	7.66
20	FURY	2.03	ATTACHMENT	7.04	ABSCHEU 'disgust'	2.45	VERZWEIFLUNG 'despair'	2.19
\bar{x}		3.54		6.59		3.09		6.04

The statistical measurability of ECs ambivalence makes it a convenient tool for establishing their cross-cultural characteristics. Thus, a comparison of ECs HATE, LOVE, HASS (HAß), and LIEBE in terms of mean valence has revealed that this indicator is slightly different in these two pairs of cross-cultural equivalents: in ECs HATE and HASS (HAß) it is lower than 4 ($\bar{x} < 4$) but higher than 3 ($\bar{x} > 3$), and in ECs LOVE and LIEBE it is lower than 7 ($\bar{x} < 7$) but higher than 6 ($\bar{x} > 6$). Based on the 9-point scale used to measure the valence of ECPs (Bradley & Lang 1999), scores below 4.5 indicate negative valence of emotions (increase in negativity from 4.5 to 0), while scores above 4.5 indicate positive valence (an increase in positivity from 4.5 to 9). Accordingly, a score close to 4.5 demonstrates some neutrality of the emotion represented by a particular ECP. Therefore, an average value higher than 6 ($\bar{x} > 6$) indicates a fairly noticeable positive valence of ECs LOVE and LIEBE as a whole. At the same time, the valence of EC LOVE is slightly higher than that of EC LIEBE, which indicates a less positive perception of love in GC compared to NAC. Obviously, this can be explained by the close correlation in the German-speaking environment of the emotion of love, not only with hatred, anger, and fear, but also with such extremely negative emotions as pain, despair, and suffering. EC HATE is also more negative among Germans, as its conceptual structure does not contain any relevant positive proximates except for LIEBE. In contrast, Americans' more positive perception of EC LOVE is based on its correlation with love, as well as joy and lust.

These cross-cultural differences indicate higher or lower ambivalence in the analysed ECs in NAC and GC. Given that ambivalence occupies a "middle" position on the 9-point valence scale, the mean valence in ECs with clear ambivalence should be close to 4.5 ($\bar{x} \approx 4.5$). This means that EC HATE has higher ambivalence compared to HASS (HAß), and EC LIEBE compared to LOVE, i.e., it is more common among Americans to have an ambivalent perception of hatred, while Germans tend to have an ambivalent perception of love.

It is important to note that the ambivalence index of the ambivalent EC LONGING is fairly close to 4.5, which is fully consistent with the opinion expressed above (Table 2). Even closer to this index is the mean valence of EC SEHNSUCHT ($\bar{x} = 4.82$). The fact that the mean valence value for LONGING is significantly higher than 4.5 ($\bar{x} = 5.73$) means that this concept is perceived quite positively by Americans (cf. also the Geneva Emotion Wheel: Scherer 2005). This can probably be explained by the fact that this emotion is less utopian for Americans, and the desires and aspirations inherent in it have the potential to be realized (Scheibe et al. 2007). On the other hand, the utopian element of the German EC SEHNSUCHT (ECPs ENTtäUSCHUNG, VERZWEIFLUNG, MELANCHOLIE, TRAURIGKEIT) causes its mean valence score to be slightly lower. When considering the first four ECPs in the

conceptual hierarchies of ECs SEHNSUCHT and LONGING, one can notice an obvious "reversal" of valence in these hierarchies, i.e., the different relevance of positive and negative meanings, since the first position in SEHNSUCHT is occupied by existential fear, while in LONGING it is love, and conversely, in the fourth position in SEHNSUCHT there is love, while in LONGING there is fear. This difference is quite significant, so it should be taken into account when determining the cross-cultural equivalence of these ambivalent ECs.

Table 2. Mean value of indicators of valence (V.) of the ECs SEHNSUCHT and LONGING (frequency indicators are presented per 1 million words (pmw)). Source: Own processing

N	SEHNSUCHT	f/pmw	V.	LONGING	f/pmw	V.
1	ANGST	0.05	2.76	LOVE	0.05	8.72
2	WUNSCH	0.04	7.09	DESIRE	0.04	7.69
3	HOFFNUNG	0.04	7.05	HOPE	0.02	7.05
4	LIEBE	0.02	8.72	FEAR	0.01	2.76
5	SEHNSUCHT	0.01	6.94	PAIN	0.01	2.13
6	VERLANGEN	0.01	7.69	NOSTALGIA	0.009	6.21
7	SCHMERZ	0.01	2.13	SADNESS	0.008	1.61
8	ENTTÄUSCHUNG	0.01	2.39	PASSION	0.007	8.03
9	LEIDENSCHAFT	0.01	8.03	REGRET	0.006	2.25
10	VERZWEIFLUNG	0.009	2.19	JOY	0.006	8.62
11	MELANCHOLIE	0.009	2.34	ASPIRATION	0.005	7.69
12	HEIMWEH	0.008	6.21	LUST	0.005	7.12
13	BEGIERDE	0.007	7.41	HAPPINESS	0.005	8.25
14	LUST	0.007	7.69	SORROW	0.004	1.65
15	TRAUER	0.007	1.61	YEARNING	0.004	7.81
16	FURCHT	0.006	2.76	FRUSTRATION	0.003	2.48
17	SORGE	0.004	1.55	GLORY	0.003	7.40
18	TRAURIGKEIT	0.003	1.61	GRIEF	0.003	1.65
19	GLÜCK	0.003	8.25	PLEASURE	0.003	8.00
20	HASS	0.002	1.98	SATISFACTION	0.003	7.44
\bar{x}			4.82			5.73

Based on the analysis of the research sample data (Table 2), it can be assumed that the ambivalence of the conceptual structures of those ECs whose linguistic designations may indicate their ambivalence (see SEHNSUCHT), albeit to a very small extent, is nevertheless more pronounced, i.e., statistically closer to 4.5 ($\bar{x} \approx 4.5$), compared to those ECs whose labels do not contain the semantics of ambivalence (see LONGING). This contradicts the conclusions drawn from experimental studies that the American EC LONGING is more ambivalent (Scheibe et al. 2011). Needless to say, our findings should be tested on other examples of American-German ambivalent emotions, since the higher level of SEHNSUCHT ambivalence may be due to extralinguistic factors, namely the Germans' tendency toward melancholy, mistaking their desires for reality, and greater tolerance for opposing emotions (Gelfert 2005), which is consistent with the lower positivity of German SEHNSUCHT compared to LONGING. If we assume that the score of 4.5 ($\bar{x} = 4.5$) indicates the highest level of ambivalence as emotional balance, then such balance, associated with life aspirations, is higher among Germans than

among Americans, which confirms the conclusions made in previous scientific studies (see, e.g., Scheibe et al. 2011).

4. Conclusions

The proposed article attempts to define the notion of "ambivalence of EC" and identify the main types of ambivalent ECs in both German and North American cultures based on corpus data and the determination of ECP valence indicators for ambivalent and non-ambivalent ECs in the compared cultures. In order to identify the cross-cultural specificity of the studied ECs, their conceptual structures are compared by the mean value of valence. By applying the corpus-based methodology, it has been confirmed to a certain extent that, depending on the situation, not only ambivalent but also other kinds of ECs can change their valence, i.e., be potentially ambivalent. The potential ambivalence of non-ambivalent ECs is explained by the fact their conceptual structures are reflected in ECP distributions that reveal positive, negative, and relatively neutral evaluative patterns/conceptualisations, some of which are synonymous (overlapping) and opposite (ambivalent) to these ECs. This creates the basis for distinguishing the concept of "ambivalence of EC" as one of its characteristics. The objectivity of this characteristic can be verified using statistical analysis of the valence indicators of ECPs for each EC. Relying on these indicators, it was found that the ambivalence of the conceptual structure of those ECs whose linguistic designations clearly indicate their ambivalence is more pronounced compared to those ECs whose lexical labels do not contain the semantics of ambivalence. By determining the mean value of the EC valence indicator, it was also established that the balance of ambivalent meanings in cross-cultural equivalents shows noticeable differences, which are primarily due to cultural factors.

Endnotes

1. The proposed study supports the idea that complete intercultural equivalence does not exist even in closely related cultures (Chaika et al. 2025; Kapranov 2017; Mizin et al. 2019). Therefore, when comparing ECs of different cultures, we can only talk about the level of *conceptual approximation* (cf. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2021: 359).
2. In emotion theory, the term *valence* is, to a certain extent, synonymous with the term evaluation. To make things clearer, the phrase *emotional valence* is also often used. This is because valence is seen as an evaluative response to the current situation. In this way, living beings distinguish between threatening and favourable environments (Cacioppo & Berntson 1994). In other words, a situation is evaluated on a scale of "good (positive) – bad (negative)" (cf. the corresponding division of vocabulary into positive and negative terms (see, e.g., Lančarič 2016: 174).
3. This refers to an individual's subjective experience of a particular emotion, since a central component of emotions – the "feeling component" – is inherently subjective (Scherer 2005).
4. The group of mixed ECs is obviously the most numerous, as they represent derived emotions that significantly outweigh the basic ones in terms of quantity. All derived ECs can be defined as mixed, as they arise from a mixture of basic ECs; for example, shame is a "mix" of anger, fear, and sadness (Turner 2009).

5. Emotional conceptual proximates are defined as emotion concepts that maintain the closest semantic and associative connections with the core emotion concept being investigated.
6. The term *German* and the abbreviation *GC* are used to refer to both the German language and German culture. By the latter, we mean only the German-speaking community living primarily in the Federal Republic of Germany and sharing certain common cultural traits.
7. *Sehnsucht* is usually translated into English as *longing*, *yearning*, or *life-longings* (Vanderheiden 2025).
8. Valence is a primary dimension of evaluation in virtually all theories of affect (see, e.g., Barrett & Russell 1999).
9. A sample of 20 lemmas is, we believe, sufficient to provide a comprehensive overview of the semantic organisation of the analysed ECPs. Furthermore, as the Wortprofil 2024 lists are limited to 100 collocates and co-occurrences per query word, selecting more than 20 nominal lemmas specifically denoting emotions poses significant practical difficulties.
10. According to the conception of the study, ECs and ECPs that represent them are cultural concepts. This means that in the process of cross-cultural study of these concepts, it should be taken into consideration that their lexical labels may not have complete equivalents in the target languages. This fact may affect the results of our research to some extent, since due to the lack of a list of German words with their valence and arousal, processed by the ANEW method, the authors presented the data of the English equivalents of these words in Tables 1 and 2. At the same time, the authors realize that the data in these tables may be somewhat inaccurate. However, for the purposes of this study, such inaccuracy is considered irrelevant.
11. We assume that the mean valence of ECPs may, theoretically, reflect the affective orientation of a broader conceptual structure (the EC); however, we are referring here exclusively to 'cultural' valence, as it constitutes a cultural phenomenon. To date, there are no precise methods for measuring 'cultural' valence".
12. In COCA and DWDS, by entering a query word, one can obtain lists of occurrence forms sorted by frequency (the "Collocates" function in COCA and "Wortprofil 2024" in DWDS).
13. The COCA corpus comprises 1 billion words, but Wortprofil 2024 draws on an even larger corpus of 6 billion words, based on 12 corpora, e.g.: Die Welt (1999–2023); Die ZEIT (1946–2023); Wikipedia (2023). These corpora largely cover eight genres (e.g., popular magazines, newspapers, Wikipedia), whose texts are balanced in COCA. This discrepancy in the amount of material processed by Collocates and Wortprofil 2024 is insignificant for the proposed study. In addition, the authors of the study have aligned the frequency indicators of collocates presented in the study samples (Table 2), showing them in terms of per 1 million words (pmw).
14. Collocates and Wortprofil 2024 process a significant portion of contemporary texts, which is important for establishing relevant associations between speakers of American and German cultures.
15. There are, e.g., Austrian and Swiss variants of German. Therefore, when comparing English and German, one should keep in mind a certain degree of commensurability and choose one of the variants. Such commensurability exists between COCA and DWDS, since the former represents the American variant of English, and the latter represents the standard (literary) variant of German.
16. This primarily concerns single-word terms; although English is less prone to lexicalising such concepts than German, expressions like 'love-hate' (relationships) or 'bittersweet' illustrate that ambivalent emotional states can still be encoded in English, albeit through different linguistic mechanisms.
17. The conclusions drawn here are based on the current corpus-based analysis and should be interpreted within the specific scope of this study. Given the exploratory nature of the present investigation, these findings provide a foundational framework rather than exhaustive empirical generalisations.

Notes

All the examples are borrowed from the following corpora:

- 1) English: COCA <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>;
- 2) German: DWDS (Wortprofil 2024) <https://www.dwds.de/wp/>.

All the examples have been translated by the authors.

List of abbreviations

COCA – Corpus of Contemporary American English

DWDS – Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache

EC(s) – emotion concept(s)

ECP(s) – emotional conceptual proximate(s)

GC – German culture

NAC – North American culture

References

1. Bamberg, M. (1997). Language, concepts and emotions: The role of language in the construction of emotions. In *Language sciences*, 19 (4), p. 309-340. DOI: [10.1016/S0388-0001\(97\)00004-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0388-0001(97)00004-1)
2. Barrett, L.F. & Russell, J.A. (1999). Structure of current affect: Controversies and emerging consensus. In *Current directions in psychological science*, 8 (1), p. 10-14. DOI: [10.1111/1467-8721.00003](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00003)
3. Bednarek, M. (2008). *Emotion talk across corpora*. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: [10.1057/9780230285712](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230285712)
4. Cacioppo, J.T. & Berntson, G.G. (1994). Relationship between attitudes and evaluative space: A critical review, with emphasis on the separability of positive and negative substrates. In *Psychological bulletin*, 115 (3), p. 401-423. DOI: [10.1037/0033-2909.115.3.401](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.115.3.401)
5. Carrera, P. & Oceja, L. (2007). Drawing mixed emotions: Sequential or simultaneous experiences? In *Cognition and emotion*, 21 (2), p. 422-441. DOI: [10.1080/02699930600557904](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930600557904)
6. Chaika, O., Sharmanova, N., Hutyriak, O., Berezovska-Savchuk, N. & Vakulyk, I. (2025). Lost in stereotypes: Gender clichés in intercultural translation of media discourse. In *OIDA International journal of sustainable development*, 18 (12), p. 249-262. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5676062>
7. COCA. *Corpus of Contemporary American English*. Available at: <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>
8. Doyle, C.M., Gendron, M. & Lindquist, K.A. (2021). Language is a unique context for emotion perception. In *Affective science*, 2 (2), p. 171-177. DOI: [10.1007/s42761-020-00025-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-020-00025-7)
9. DWDS. *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Available at: <http://www.dwds.de/ressourcen/korpora/>
10. Fronhofer, N.-M. (2019). *Emotion concepts in context: A contrastive analysis of English and German discourse*. Doctoral thesis for a doctoral degree (Applied Linguistics English). University of Augsburg. Available at: https://opus.bibliothek.uni-augsburg.de/opus4/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/77048/file/NMFronhofer_Dissertation.pdf

11. Gelfert, H.-D. (2005). *Was ist deutsch? Wie die Deutschen wurden, was sie sind* [What is German? How the Germans became the way they are]. München: Beck. (In German)
12. Goddard, C. (2018). Vocabulary of emotions and its development in English, German and other languages. In *Handbook of language and emotion* (HSK Handbooks series). Schiewer, G.L., Altarriba, J. & Chin Ng, B. (eds.). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 1-18. DOI: [10.1515/9783110347524-024](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110347524-024)
13. Holm, O., Greaker, E. & Strömberg, A. (2002). Experiences of longing in Norwegian and Swedish 4- and 5-year-old children. In *The journal of psychology*, 136 (6), p. 608-612. DOI: [10.1080/00223980209604822](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980209604822)
14. Kapranov, O. (2017). Bicultural and language-related narratives of USA immigrants permanently residing in Sweden. In *Cross-cultural perspectives in literature and language*. Stolarek, J. & Wilinski, J. (eds.). San Diego, CA: AE Academic Publishing, p. 137-156.
15. Kövecses, Z. *Emotion concepts*. New York: Springer, 1990. DOI: [10.1007/978-1-4612-3312-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-3312-1)
16. Kövecses, Z. (2003). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: https://books.google.com.ua/books/about/Metaphor_and_Emotion.html?id=dnRKu0WAn4sC&redir_esc=y
17. Kövecses, Z. (2008). The conceptual structure of happiness. In *Happiness: Cognition, experience, language*. Tissari, H., Pessi, A.B. & Salmela, M. (eds.). Helsinki: Tutkijakollegium, p. 131-143.
18. Lančarič, D. (2016). *English lexicology. Theory and exercises*. Nümbrecht: KIRSCH-Verlag.
19. Larsen, J.T., Hemenover, S.H., Norris, C.J. & Cacioppo, J.T. (2003). Turning adversity to advantage: On the virtues of the coactivation of positive and negative emotions. In *A psychology of human strengths: Perspectives on an emerging field*. Aspinwall, L.G. & Staudinger, U.M. (eds.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, p. 211-226. DOI: [10.1037/10566-015](https://doi.org/10.1037/10566-015)
20. Larsen, J.T. & McGraw, A.P. (2014). The case for mixed emotions. In *Social and personality psychology compass*, 8 (6), p. 263-274. DOI: [10.1111/spc3.12108](https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12108)
21. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. (2021). Comparing languages and cultures: Parametrization of analytic criteria. In *Russian journal of linguistics*, 25 (2), p. 343-368. DOI: [10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-343-368](https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-2-343-368)
22. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. & Wilson, P. (2010). A contrastive perspective on emotions: Surprise. In *Review of cognitive linguistics*, 8 (2), p. 321-350. DOI: [10.1075/ml.8.2.04lew](https://doi.org/10.1075/ml.8.2.04lew)
23. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B., Wilson, P. & Niiya, Y. (2013). English *fear* and Polish *strach* in contrast: Grid approach and cognitive corpus linguistic methodology. In *Components of emotional meaning: A sourcebook*. Fontaine, J.J., Scherer, K.R. & Soriano, C. (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 425-436.
24. Lomas, T. (2017). The value of ambivalent emotions: a cross-cultural lexical analysis. In *Qualitative research in psychology*, 20 (2), p. 1-25. DOI: [10.1080/14780887.2017.1400143](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2017.1400143)
25. Mizin, K. (2025). Specificity of guilt, shame, and embarrassment in North American and German cultures: Corpus data. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow. Special issue: Cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and affective sciences*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, X (1), p. 70-84. DOI: [10.34135/lartis.25.10.1.05](https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.25.10.1.05)
26. Mizin, K. & Letiucha, L. (2019). The linguo-cultural concept TORSCHLUSSPANIK as the representative of ethno-specific psycho-emotional state of Germans. In *Psycholinguistics*, 25 (2), p. 234-249. DOI: [10.31470/2309-1797-2019-25-2-234-249](https://doi.org/10.31470/2309-1797-2019-25-2-234-249)
27. Mizin, K., Letiucha, L. & Petrov, O. (2019). Deutsche linguokulturelle Konzepte im Lichte der germanisch-ostslawischen Kontraste: Methode zur Feststellung von spezifischen bzw. einzigartigen Bedeutungen. In


Germanoslavica, 30 (1), p. 49-70. Available at: <https://asjournals.lib.cas.cz/Germanoslavica/article/uuid:fed6000f-a648-49e6-88c1-06951b9926af/pdf>

28. Mizin, K. & Slavova, L. (2023). The corpus-based methodology of close emotion concepts differentiation: A case study of ENVY and JEALOUSY. In *Cognitive studies | Études cognitives*, 23, Article 2811. DOI: [10.11649/cs.2811](https://doi.org/10.11649/cs.2811)
29. Mizin, K., Slavova, L., Petrov, O. & Yumrukuz, A. (2023). Organizing the Germans' emotional world through the prism of the opposition ORDNUNG vs. CHAOS: Ambivalent emotion concepts. In *Amazonia investiga*, 12 (61), p. 224-235. DOI: [10.34069/AI/2023.61.01](https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.61.01)
30. Moss, S.A. & Couchman, G. (2012). The conflict between the interventions that prevent burnout and the culture of modern capitalism: The benefits of ambivalent emotions. In *The Australian and New Zealand journal of organisational psychology*, 5, p. 13-24. DOI: [10.1017/orp.2012.2](https://doi.org/10.1017/orp.2012.2)
31. Ogarkova, A. (2013). Folk emotion concepts: Lexicalization of emotional experiences across languages and cultures. In *Components of emotional meaning. A sourcebook*. Fontaine, J.R.J., Scherer, K.R. & Soriano, C. (eds.). Oxford University Press, p. 46-61. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.001.0001)
32. Ogarkova, A., Panasenko, N. & Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. (2013). Language family similarity effect: Emotion term semantics in Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Slovak, and Polish. In *Components of emotional meaning. A sourcebook*. Fontaine, J.R.J., Scherer, K.R. & Soriano, C. (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 502-506. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.003.0042](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592746.003.0042)
33. Panasenko, N. (2013). The role of syntactic stylistic means in expressing the emotion term LOVE. In *Research in language*, 11 (3), p. 277-293. DOI: [10.2478/v10015-012-0016-6](https://doi.org/10.2478/v10015-012-0016-6)
34. Panasenko, N., Stashko, H. & Zabuzhanska, I. (2023). Love and rhythm in poetry and music. In *Language and emotion*. Vol. 3. Lenore Schiewer, G.S., Altarriba, J. & Ng, B.Ch. (eds.). Berlin – Boston: Walter de Gruyter, p. 1529-1558. DOI: [10.1515/9783110795486-009](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110795486-009)
35. Pinich, I. (2023). 'Love' is all you need: An attempt at critical conceptual account. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, VIII (1), p. 92-109. DOI: [10.34135/lartis.23.8.1.07](https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.23.8.1.07)
36. Pinich, I. & Morozova, O. (2024). ANGER in Ukrainian: He is getting into a bottle. In *Metaphors of ANGER across languages: Universality and variation*. Kövecses, Z., Benczes, R. & Szelid, V. (eds.). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 1319-1394.
37. Russell, J.A. & Carroll, J.M. (1999). On the bipolarity of positive and negative affect. In *Psychological bulletin*, 125 (1), p. 3-30. DOI: [10.1037/0033-2909.125.1.3](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.1.3)
38. Robinson, C.J. & Altarriba, J. (2015). Culture and language processing. In *The Routledge handbook of language and culture*. Sharifian, F. (ed.). New York, NY: Routledge, p. 240-252.
39. Scheibe, S., Blanchard-Fields, F., Wiest, M. & Freund, A.M. (2011). Is Sehnsucht only for Germans? A cross-cultural comparison of Sehnsucht in Germany and the United States. In *Developmental psychology*, 47 (3), p. 603-618. DOI: [10.1037/a0021807](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021807)
40. Scheibe, S., Freund, A.M. & Baltes, P.B. (2007). Toward a developmental psychology of Sehnsucht (life longings): The optimal (utopian) life. In *Developmental psychology*, 43 (3), p. 778-795. DOI: [10.1037/0012-1649.43.3.778](https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.43.3.778)
41. Scherer, K.R. (2005). What are emotions? And how can they be measured? In *Social science information*, 44 (4), p. 695-729. DOI: [10.1177/053901840505058](https://doi.org/10.1177/053901840505058)
42. Stamenov, M.I. (2004). Ambivalence as a dialogic frame of emotions in conflict. In *Emotion in dialogic interaction*. Weigand, E. (ed.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, p. 183-204.


43. Turner, J.H. (2009). The Sociology of Emotions. Basic Theoretical Arguments. In *Emotion review*, 1 (4), p. 340-354. DOI: [10.1177/17540739093383](https://doi.org/10.1177/17540739093383)
44. Underhill, J.W. (2015). *Ethnolinguistics and cultural concepts: Truth, love, hate and war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511862540](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511862540)
45. Vanderheiden, E. (2025). Sehnsucht (life longings) is a signpost: A German case study. In *International handbook of emotions: Resourceful cultural perspectives*. Mayer, C.-H. & Vanderheiden, E. (eds.). Springer Nature Switzerland AG, p. 73-92. DOI: [10.1007/978-3-031-86445-2_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-86445-2_6)
46. van de Ven, N. (2018). Schadenfreude and gluckschmerz are emotional signals of (Im)balance. In *Emotion review*, 10 (4), p. 305-306. DOI: [10.1177/1754073918768883](https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073918768883)
47. Wierzbicka, A. (1999). *Emotions across languages and cultures: Diversity and universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511521256](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511521256)

Contact data

Author # 1

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i> <i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Kostiantyn Mizin DSc. in Philology Professor Department of Foreign Philology, Translation and Teaching Methods Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav 30 Sukhomlynskyi St., Pereiaslav, 03680, Ukraine kostiantyn.mizin@gmail.com Contrastive linguistics, corpus linguistics, affective science, translation studies.</p>
--	--	--

Author # 2

	<p><i>name:</i> <i>academic title / rank:</i> <i>department:</i> <i>institution:</i> <i>e-mail:</i> <i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Oleksandr Petrov PhD in Philology Associate Professor Department of Germanic Philology, Translation and Foreign Literature Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University 32, Ostroz'kyj St., Vinnytsia, 21100, Ukraine alexpetroff35@gmail.com Contrastive linguistics, corpus linguistics, translation studies.</p>
---	--	---

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

DISPARATE COGNATES: POLISH *BRZOZA* VS. ENGLISH *BIRCH*

Mikołaj Rychło 

University of Gdańsk, Poland

Received: 1.01.2026 **Reviewed:** 20.02.2026 and 1.03.2026

Similarity Index: 6%

Bibliographic description: Rychło, M. (2026). Disparate cognates: Polish *brzoza* vs. English *birch*. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 125-141. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.07>

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold: firstly, to explain the difference between the pair of cognates: Polish *brzoza* and English *birch*; and secondly, to reveal the reason why these cognates cannot be brought back to identical proto-forms. It is suggested that the English *birch* developed from a collective formation, which underwent the process of singularization. The front vowel in the original collective suffix caused *i*-mutation and palatalization of the voiceless velar plosive. Consequently, Polish *brzoza* and English *birch* cannot be considered exact cognates. The study also has several implications for the method of contrasting cognates.

Keywords: diachronic word-formation, etymology, Proto-Indo-European, Slavic-Germanic cognates, phytonyms, Polish-English cognates, diachronic phonology, sound changes.

1. Introduction

This article continues a series of publications devoted to Proto-Indo-European relics preserved in modern Polish and English (Rychło 2012; 2013; 2018; 2021; Rychło & Witczak 2021). While previous research has focused primarily on structurally transparent cognates, the present study aims to situate itself within the broader context of Indo-European etymological research by addressing more intricate cases of lexical correspondence. The central research question concerns the phonological disparities between seemingly identical forms, a problem which carries significant theoretical implications for the reconstruction of derivational processes in the Late Proto-Indo-European phase.



This paper proposes a reinterpretation of the English lexeme *birch*, suggesting that it developed from a collective formation rather than being a straightforward continuation of a feminine **eh₂*-stem. The methodological approach adopted here – contrasting so-called partial cognates – is of particular significance, as it allows for a precise distinction between direct inheritance and parallel word-formation processes occurring in different linguistic branches. This issue is representative of numerous other Slavic and Germanic lexemes, illustrating the difficulties in accounting for phonological differences that have accumulated over centuries.

The study is organized into several thematic stages. It begins with an overview of the linguistic material and the comparative-historical framework (Section 2). This is followed by a rigorous examination of the phonological trajectories in Slavic and Germanic languages (Section 3), which identifies the specific sound changes that created the modern divergence between Polish and English. The core of the argument is developed in Section 4, which introduces the morphological role of Proto-Indo-European collective formations as the primary driver of this differentiation. The paper concludes (Section 5) by synthesizing these findings and reflecting on their broader implications for the methodology of contrasting cognates.

2. Material and methodology

The following section outlines the linguistic data and the analytical framework employed in this study. To account for the phonological divergence between Polish *brzoza* and English *birch*, a comparative-historical approach is utilized, drawing on evidence from across the Indo-European branches. The analysis is structured to first present the empirical data (Section 2.1) before detailing the specific phonological and morphological methodologies used to reconcile these disparate forms (Section 2.2).

2.1 The material

The primary data for this study consist of the reflexes of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root meaning 'bright' or 'shining' as applied to dendronyms. This sub-section provides a comprehensive survey of the attestations of the name for 'birch' in Slavic, Baltic, Germanic, and other Indo-European languages (2.1.1). It further examines the etymological roots and semantic motivations of these terms (2.1.2) and investigates the specific category of collective formations (2.1.3), which provides the crucial link for understanding the development of the English form.

2.1.1 The attestation of the name of 'birch' in Indo-European languages.

In this sub-section, we examine the specific attestations of the phytonym 'birch' across the major Indo-European groups, focusing on the stem variations observed in Slavic and Germanic. In Slavic, the Polish word *brzoza* has many exact cognates that point to the Proto-Slavic feminine *a*-stem:

EAST SLAVIC: Old Ruthenian: *бepэза* (*beréza*), Belarusian: *бярóза* (*bjaróza*), Carpathian Rusyn: *бepэза* (*beréza*), Ukrainian: *бepэза* (*beréza*), Russian: *бepэза* (*berjóza*).

SOUTH SLAVIC: Old Church Slavonic: *бpъза* (*brěza*), Bulgarian: *бpeзá* (*brezá*), Macedonian: *бpeза* (*breza*), Serbo-Croatian: *brěza*, Slovene: *bréza*.

WEST SLAVIC: Old Czech: *břieza*, Czech: *břiza*, Polish: *brzoza*, Slovak: *breza*, Polabian: *brezǎ*, Kashubian: *brzoza*, Slovincian: *brzôza*, Lower Sorbian: *brjaza*, Upper Sorbian: *brěza* (Derksen 2008: 88; Sławski 1974: 210; Trubachev 1974: 201; Vasmer 1987: 77).

Apart from the feminine *ā*-stem, several Slavic languages exhibit the *o*-stem variants pointing to Proto-Slavic **bĕrzь* (masculine) from Proto-Indo-European **b^herHǵós*:

EAST SLAVIC: Ukrainian: *бepез* (*bérez*) (dialectal).

SOUTH SLAVIC: Serbo-Croatian: Cyrillic script: *бpèз* (*brèz*) – dialectal, Slovene: *brèz* (Trubachev 1974: 207).

In BALTIC, we find the *o*-stems: Lithuanian *béržas* 'birch', Latvian *bērzis* 'birch'; Old Prussian *berse* 'birch' (Derksen 2015: 88; Smoczyński 2018: 112). According to Sławski (1974: 210), in Proto-Indo-European, the word belonged to feminine *o*-stems and in Slavic it transferred to *a*-stems, e.g. *snъcha* (PIE **snusos*).

In Proto-GERMANIC, the basic word for 'birch' is reconstructed as **berkō* f. 'birch', based on the following cognates: ON. *björk* f. 'birch', Norw. *bjørk* 'id.', Sw. *björk* 'id.'; OE. *beorc* f., Du. *berk* c.; OHG. *biricha*, G. *Birke* f. 'id.' (Kroonen 2013: 61; Levitskiy 2010: 98; Orel 2003: 43; Zalizniak 1965: 216-217). In addition, Old English exhibits several variants *bierce*, *byrce*, and *birce* f. 'birch' (OED), which point to PG. **berkijō* f., rather than **berkō* 'birch'. In Gothic, there is also *bercna* 'b-rune of the Gothic Runic alphabet', the word is sometimes compared with the name of 'birch' and derived from **berknō* (Lehmann 1986: 66; Orel 2003: 43).

Outside Slavic and Germanic, cognates are attested in INDO-IRANIAN:

Sanskrit: *bhūrjā*- m. 'kind of birch' (Mayrhofer 1996: 269-270),

Digor Ossetian: *бæрзæ* (*bærzæ*) (Edelman 2003: 127-128) / Iron Ossetian: *бæрз* (*bærz*) (Edelman 2003: 127-128).

ITALIC: Latin: *fraxinus*, which displays a different meaning: 'ash-tree'. (the quantity of the *a* is unknown, cf. de Vaan 2008: 240-241). As for the origin, Latin: *fraxinus* may have descended from PIE **b^hrHǵ-s-e/i-no-*, a derived adjective with zero-grade of the root (cf. Mallory and Adams 1997: 65; de Vaan 2008: 240-241).

ALBANIAN: Albanian: *bardhë* 'white' (Orel 1998: 17).

On the basis of the evidence provided above, etymological dictionaries propose the following Indo-European reconstructions: "**bherǵ-*, **bhrēǵ-* 'glänzen, weiß', wozu auch der Birkename N. Sg. **bhérǵ-s*, G. Sg. **bh_erǵós*" (Pokorny 2002[1959]: 139). Mann (1984/87: 73), who concentrates on the Late Indo-European phase, reconstructs **bhérǵos*, *ā* 'birch', 'the bright tree'. Earlier studies focusing on dendronyms in Proto-Indo-European include Friedrich (1970). Different aspects of phytonymic lexicon in several languages have also been investigated by Panasenکو (2010; 2021; 2023a; 2023b). These studies often explore the cognitive-onomasiological structures of plant names, highlighting how sensory perceptions – such as color or texture – serve as primary motivational features in naming processes. In the case of *birch*, Panasenکو's focus on the 'colorative' aspect of phytonyms provides a theoretical framework for the semantic link between the tree's white bark and the PIE root **bherh₁ǵ-* 'to shine', further illustrating how cognitive salience dictates lexical stability across Indo-European branches.

2.1.2 The etymology of the name of 'birch'

To understand the etymology of the words for 'birch' which are descended from Proto-Indo-European **b^herHǵós*, it is important to consider the semantic motivation of the etymological meaning. The verbal root from which **b^herHǵós* must have been derived is PIE **b^hreh₁ǵ-* 'shine, glow', cf. Ved. *bhrājate* 'shines, glistens', Av. *brāzaiti* 'gleams' < * *b^hreh₁ǵ-e-* (Mann 1984/87: 101; Pokorny 2002[1959]: 139; Rix 2001: 92).

It is also instructive to inspect other derivatives of the same root **b^herHǵ-*:

- 1) Polish *brzask* < Old Polish *brzazg* < Proto-Slavic **bręǵ m.* 'dawn'. For Balto-Slavic, Derksen (2008: 61 and 2015: 99) reconstructs a verbal stem **b^hreh₁ǵ-sk-* (Skt. *bhrājate* 'shine, beam'),
- 2) English *bright* < OE *beorht* adj. 'bright' (West Saxon), Merc., North. *berht* (Goth. *bairhts* adj. 'bright, clear, manifest, evident', ON *bjartr* adj. 'bright, shining; illustrious', OS *berht* adj. 'shining', OHG *beraht* adj. 'bright, shining', MHG *berht* adj. 'id.') from PG. **berhtaz* adj.

- 'bright' < PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-to-* (cf. Kroonen 2013: 60). These Germanic words are also cognates with another dendronym represented by Polish *brzost* (see the next point),
- 3) Polish *brzost* 'a species of elm' < Proto-Slavic **berstь* m. 'elm' < PIE **b^herHǵ-tó-*, cf. Derksen (2008: 37-38) for further cognates in Slavic. Cf. also Polish collective formation *brzeście* (Bańkowski 1972: 282),
 - 4) Lithuanian *brėkšti* 'dawn, get light', 'grow dark' – see Smoczyński (2018: 144),
 - 5) Welsh *berth* adj. 'beautiful',
 - 6) Alb. *bardhë* 'white' (Orel 1998: 17).

The etymological relationship between 'birch' and words meaning 'bright', 'shine', 'dawn' can be interpreted in terms of semantic motivation, i.e. the bright colour of the birch's bark is reflected in the dendronym. Moreover, it is interesting to note one of the obsolete names of March, namely Polish *brzezień*, Cz. *březan* and Ukr. березень / *berezeń* 'March', whose name must be motivated by 'birch'. The reason for that may lie in the practice of collecting birch sap (Polish *oskola*) at the break of winter and spring.

As far as the derivatives based on the word for 'birch' are concerned, an interesting connection can be observed between:

- PG **berkīnaz* adj. (ON *birkin* 'related to birch', OE *bircen*, *beorcen* id., OHG *birktin* id.) Derived from **berkō* – cf. Orel (2003: 42), and
- PSl. **berzina* 'birch forest, birch thickets; birch twigs; birch wood', 'single birch tree' (Pol. *brzezina* 'birch forest, birch thickets, birch trees in the forest; cut birch twigs; birch wood', USorb. *brězyna* 'birch forest', Cz. *březina* 'birch forest, grove, birch thickets' (since 14th c.), Ru. березина 'a felled or chopped birch', dial. 'a single birch; a large birch, a chopped birch, a birch trunk; birch wood; a rod, a birch stick; birch twigs', Ukr. березина 'birch forest; felled or fallen birch, birch tree', dial. also 'birch twigs, birch forest, grove, birch thickets' – cf. Sławski (1974: 210-211).

Beyond these primary forms, the root has yielded numerous derivatives across various branches. Of particular importance for the present study are the collective formations, as they provide the necessary morphological context to explain the phonological divergence between the Slavic and Germanic reflexes. These formations are adduced and analyzed in the following sub-section.

2.1.3 The attestation of the collective name 'group of birch-trees; birch forest, birch grove'

A number of derivatives, especially in North Germanic languages, point to PG. **berkijan* n. coll. 'birch forest, birch grove': ON. *birki* n. 'birch forest', Icel. *birki* 'birch forest; birch', Norw. *birki* 'birch forest', Sw. *björke* 'birch forest, birch grove' (Falk, Torp 1910: 74-75, s.v. *Birk*; Jóhannesson 1956: 623; de Vries 1977: 37). These tree collective names may have been descended from PG. **berkijan*, which is either derived from the Proto-Germanic arboreal term **berkō* f. 'birch' (Habrajska et al. 2020), or it can be traced back to PIE. **b^herh₁ǵijom* n. coll. 'group of birch-trees; birch forest, birch grove' (Rychło & Witczak 2022).

Apart from the Scandinavian languages, several West Germanic forms should be adduced here: OE. *bierce*, *byrce*, *birce* f. 'birch'; OS *birka*; OHG *birca* (Orel 2003: 42). Although the meaning is not clearly collective, as in the North Germanic languages, the palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/, which is still pronounced in English *birch*, must have arisen due to early Old English palatalization, which was triggered by a preceding front vowel or the approximant **j*. Since there were no such sounds (following **k*) in **berkō* f., it seems possible that OE. *bierce*, *byrce*, *birce* represent singularized reflexes of PG. **berkijō* f. coll. 'birch forest, birch grove', which, in turn, points to PIE **b^herh₁ǵijeh₂* (f. coll.). To substantiate this proto-form, it is worth adducing the Lithuanian place-name *Beržijà*. Further analysis is offered in Section 4.

SLAVIC: PSl. **berz_ьje* n. coll. 'birch grove, birch forest' (Sławski 1974: 213; Trubachev 1974: 208) demonstrates an extensive attestation and a large distribution in the Slavic languages, cf. Ru. *берёзье* n. 'birch forest, birch twigs'; OPol. *brzezje* n. 'birch forest', Pol. *brzezje* n. 'birch grove or forest'; Cz. *březí* n. 'small birch-grove', also *břízí* n. 'birch twigs, birch-wood'; Slk. *brezie* n. 'small birch-forest, birch-grove'; SC. *brêzje* n. 'birch forest', Sln. *brêzje* n. 'id.'.

Neither Trubachev (1974: 8) nor Sławski (1974: 213) provides further cognates outside Slavic, specifying that PSl. **berz_ьje* n. coll. 'birch grove, birch forest' was derived from PSl. **berza* 'birch'. In view of the Germanic equivalents, which exhibit exact sound correspondences with the Slavic comparanda, another etymological possibility becomes increasingly probable: instead of being independently derived (**berz_ьje* in Slavic and **berkijan* in Germanic), both of these collective nouns may have been inherited from a shared common ancestor. Recent research has shown that these collective formations can be substantiated with many examples.

2.2 The methodology

When comparing possible cognates (and candidates for cognates), an important basic question, which is sometimes difficult to answer, is whether the comparanda are descended from an identical proto-form in a shared ancestor language. Slavic dendronyms descended from PSl. **berza* 'birch' superficially look as if they were descended from the same etymon as the English *birch* or German *Birke*, but a closer examination reveals difficulties in tracing their developments by means of the known sound changes. Similarly, the Proto-Slavic noun **sad-ja* f. 'soot' (Polish *sadza*) does not represent the same formation as PG. **sōt-a-n* n. 'soot' (English *soot*), cf. Witczak, Rychło (2022).

The approach to contrastive analysis adopted in the present paper aims at explaining the phonological and morphological processes which have led to the discrepancies between the forms of the cognates under analysis. If the known sound changes cannot bring some cognates to an identical proto-form, the derivational processes which altered the shape of the etymon should be taken into consideration. In the conclusions, all the changes are sequenced in chronological order.

3. Phonological development of the cognates

This section investigates the sound changes responsible for the difference between Polish *brzoza* and English *birch*. Subsection 3.1 concentrates on the development from PIE **b^herh₁ĝ-eh₂* to Polish *brzoza* and Subsection 3.2 investigates changes that must have led to English *birch*.

3.1 The development of Polish *brzoza*

The first changes which transformed the PIE word **b^herh₁ĝ-eh₂* affected the laryngeals, which were either lost, as was the case with the first laryngeal, which was surrounded by the consonants, or coloured and lengthened the vowel *e*, which it followed, as was the case with the final *h₂*. Before the Proto-Slavic phase, two other developments modified the consonants: the aspirated *b^h* lost its aspiration and the palatal plosive *ĝ* underwent the *satem* assibilation leading to PSl. **z*. After these changes, the word evolved into PSl. **berza*. Following the split of the Slavic languages, in the so-called TORT sequence of sounds, metathesis took place in the language ancestral to Polish. The front vowel *e* in the resulting word **breza* gradually palatalized the preceding /r/ leading to **br^jeza*. The next development must have been the Polish sound shift (sometimes called *przegłos lechicki* 'Lechitic sound shift'), which changed **e* to *o* before one of seven consonants (*t, d, s, z, n, r* and *l*, which later developed to *ł* in Polish). The resulting word **br^joza*, probably simultaneously, saw the gradual development of the liquid trill, which can be described in the following way: *r^j > r^z > rz*. The sequence of these changes has led to Polish *brzoza*.

3.2 The development of English birch

From PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-* to PG. **berk* the following changes must have occurred: elimination of laryngeals (Ringe 2006: 15) and Grimm's Law (Ringe 2006: 93-115; Rychło 2014), the earliest evidence of which arguably dates back to the time of Pytheas (Witczak, Rychło 2023). Before the sequence of /r/ plus another consonant, the vowel underwent breaking (Ringe & Taylor 2014: 180-183), which resulted in the form recorded in Old English *beorc*. If we compare the development of words like OE *deorc* > Mod.E. *dark* and OE *beorcan* > Mod.E. *bark*, the OE *beorc* in Modern English would be expected to yield /ba:k/ and be homophonous with the verb *bark* and with the noun *bark* meaning 'the tough protective outer sheath of the trunk', but is clearly different from Modern English *birch*.

The English pronunciation with the palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ results from early Old English palatalization and assibilation, which, among other sounds, affected /k/, which eventually became /tʃ/. Hogg (1992: 252-269) discusses the processes in detail, distinguishing palatalization from assibilation. For the purposes of the present study, it is important to note that the trigger of the palatalization is a front vowel or the approximant /j/, which we do not find in such reconstructions as **berkō* f. 'birch' (Kroonen 2013: 61). Consequently, Modern English *birch* cannot go back to **berkō*, but can be considered a reflex of **berkjō(n)*, which is further discussed in Section 4.2.

The later development of the word involved the coalescence of three Late Middle English vowels /i, u, e/ into one phoneme at the close of the 16th century (cf. Wełna 1978: 216). As a result of this change, the following words are now pronounced with the same vowel /ɜ:/:

- (a) *birch, bird, dirt, first, girdle, girl, sir, stir, third, virgin* (from LME /iɾ/),
- (b) *burden, burst, church, churl, cur, curse, disturb, fur, nurse, turn, urchin, word, work, worm, worse, worst, wort* (from LME /ur/),
- (c) *certain, deserve, err, kernel, person, serve, sterling, swerve* (from LME /er/).

Loss of preconsonantal *r* in non-rhotic dialects leading to BrE /bɜ:tʃ/ concludes the sequence of changes which are summarized in tabular form in the conclusions.

4. The morphology of PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-ijeh₂*

The morphological factors relevant for the present study include the gender (discussed in Section 4.1) and the category of collective nouns (discussed in Section 4.2).

4.1 The gender

The problem requiring further explanation concerns the question of gender, namely the contrast between the unusual feminine *o*-stems indicated by some Indo-European branches contrasted with *eh*₂-stems (later *ā*-stems, as in PSI. **berza* 'birch'). Dendronyms typically exhibited feminine gender in Proto-Indo-European, which may be understood metaphorically in terms of trees giving birth to fruit. This association is reflected in many Indo-European languages, which use the same verb for 'giving birth' and for 'producing fruit', e.g. the English verb *bear*, as in *the tree bears fruit* or Polish *rodzić*, as in *drzewo rodzi owoce*.

Interestingly, the *o*-stems, which are typically masculine, display the feminine gender in many names of trees, which may be illustrated with Latin:

corulus 'hazel-tree, hazel-wood' [f.],

aesculus 'kind of oak-tree' [f.],

alnus 'alder' [f.],

citrus 'citron-tree (*citrus medica cedra*); African tree (*thuaia articulaty*)' [f.],

cornus 'cornel cherry-tree' [f.],

fāgus 'beech' [f.],

ornus 'kind of ash-tree' [f.],

quercus 'oak-tree' [f.],

taxus 'yew-tree' [f.].

Similarly, Lat. *fraxinus*, although representing the *o*-stem, exhibited the feminine gender, which suggests that this may have been the case in Proto-Indo-European. This conclusion is open to question, especially if we assume that the feminine gender developed later than Proto-Indo-European.

4.2 Derived collective names

At the level of Proto-Indo-European reconstructions, there seem to be two collective formations derived from the word for 'birch': **b^herh₁ĝijom* n. coll. and **b^herh₁ĝ-ijeh₂* f. coll. The supporting lexical material for both reconstructions is presented in Section 2.1.3. In this section, an attempt is made to support the reconstruction of PIE **b^herh₁ĝ-ijeh₂* f., from which, arguably, Modern English *birch* is descended. This feminine collective formation can be illustrated with the following parallel examples:

PG. **tainijōn-* 'basket, a collection of twigs put together' (derivative of PG. **taina-*).

Goth. **tainjo* '(large) basket', OI *teinur* f. pl. 'basket, creel', *teina-stæði* n. 'place where creels are put', OHG *zeinna*, MHG *zeine*, NHG dial *Zaine*, *Zein(e)* 'basket, net'; OE dim *tānel* 'wicker-basket' (Lehmann 1986: 340). Etymologically, PG. **tainijōn-* may be interpreted as the collective formation based on PG. **taina-* 'twig, sprig' (Goth. *tains* m. 'branch, shoot, twig', ON *teinn* m. 'twig; spit; stake', OE *tān* m. 'twig, sprout, shoot' (cf. NE *mistle-toe*, Onions 1966: 582), MLG *ten* m. 'thin metal rod; shaft of an arrow', MDu. *teen* m. 'willow twig', Du. *teen* c. 'id.', OHG *zein* m. 'twig, stick, ruler, shaft, pipe, bar (of metal)', MHG *zein* m. 'stick, twig, staff' (Kroonen 2013: 506; Lehmann 1986: 340).

PIE. **tǵ'niǵeh₂* f. coll. 'thorn-bush'.

Skt. *tṛṇyā* f. 'a heap of grass' (Monier-Williams 1999: 453), originally a collective noun derived from Ved. *tṛṇam* n. (*o*-stem) 'grass, herb, stalk';

PG. **þurnijō* f. coll. 'thorn-bush, thorny plants', attested exclusively in OE. *þyrne* f. 'briar, thorn-bush, thorny plants' (Kroonen 2013: 553; Lehmann 1986: 357; Orel 2003: 430). The derivational basis is confirmed not only by Goth. *þaurnus* m. (*u*-stem) 'thorn-plant' (< PG. dial. **þurnuz* m.), but also by ON. *þorn* m., OE. *þorn* m., E. *thorn*; OFri. *thorn* m., ODu. *thorn* m.; Du. *doorn* c. 'thorn, briar'; OHG. *thorn*, G. *Dorn* m. 'thorn' (< PG. **þurnaz* m. *o*-stem) (Levitskiy 2010: 573).

PSl. **tǵrnǵja* f. coll. 'thorn-bush', exclusively attested in Kash. *ceřńá* f. 'thorn', f. coll. 'thorn-bush, thorns'.

Etymology: A Late Indo-European archetype is supported by three independent reflexes preserved in Sanskrit, Old English and Kashubian, respectively.

Commentary: A morphological variation between Proto-Slavic **tǵrnǵja* f. coll. and **tǵrnǵje* n. coll. 'thorn-bush' seems to document an original phenomenon (PIE. **tǵ'niǵeh₂* f. coll. 'thorn-bush' vs. **tǵniǵóm* n. coll. 'id.').

References: Kroonen (2013: 553); Rychło and Witczak (2022: 166-167)

PIE. **b^hréh₂triǵeh₂* f. coll. 'group of brothers; brotherhood, fraternity'.

Gk. Att. φρᾶτρία f. coll. 'family group; clan, phratry; a subdivision of the phyle in Athens',

Lith. dial. (in Kurschat's dictionary) *brotija*, *brotijà* f. 'circle of the most faithful friends' (<

PB. **brātrijā* f. coll. 'brotherhood, brothers'.

PSl. **bratrǵja* f. coll. 'brothers; brotherhood', cf. OCS. *братрѹя*, OSln. *bratria*, OČak. (15th c.) *bratrja*, ORu. *братрѹя* f. coll., OPol. *bratrza* f. coll., LSorb. (obsolete) *bratśa*, USorb. *bratřa* pl.

'brothers', Cz. *bratři* pl. 'brothers', Slk. *bratia*, also *braträ* pl. 'brothers' (Králik 2015: 80; Mańczak 2017: 10).

Toch. A *pratri* 'brothers' (Witczak 2016: 126-130). Theoretically, it is not impossible that Toch. A *pratri* represent a collective noun of the feminine gender.

Etymology: The collective in question should be analysed in an obvious relation to the adjective (IE.) **b^hrātrijos* (< PIE. **b^hréh₂trijos*) 'pertaining to the brother', as well as the basic noun (IE.) **b^hrātēr* (< PIE. **b^hréh₂ters*) m. 'brother'.

Commentary: The feminine collective noun **b^hréh₂trijeh₂* can hardly be separated from the neuter one **b^hreh₂trijóm* (n. coll. 'group of brothers; brotherhood, fraternity'). It seems highly probable that both collective formations independently existed in Proto-Indo-European and were inherited in some daughter subgroups.

References: Lehmann (1986: 81); Rychło, Witczak (2022: 159); Witczak (2016: 126-130); Witczak et al. (2022: 162, 169).

PIE. **g^hóuijeh₂* f. coll. 'herd of cows'.

INDO-ARYAN: Ved. (only in Pāṇini) *gávyā* f. coll. 'cow-herd'.

BALTIC: Lith. *gaujà* f. coll. 'flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang'; Latv. *gauja* f. 'crowd' (originally 'herd of cows').

GREEK: Gk. Lac. *βοῦα* f. coll. 'a band of young Spartan boys' (as if from PGk. **βόφιᾶ*) (Kaczyńska 2019).

Etymology: It represents a feminine variant of the adjective **g^hóuijos* 'pertaining to cows, belonging to cows', which derives from IE. **g^hóu-* f./m. 'cow, ox'.

Commentary: The Linear B term *qo-wi-ja* (transcribed as **G^hóuijā*) seems to refer to a Mycenaean goddess, presumably a divine patron of cow-herds.

References: Kaczyńska (2019: 93-103); Rychło et al. (2024: 90-91); Rychło and Witczak (2022: 161-162); Witczak et al. (2023); Witczak et al. (2022: 163).

The examples and the studies cited above provide compelling evidence for the thesis regarding the systemic nature of collective formations in **-ijom* and **-ijeh₂* in Proto-Indo-European. Their analysis demonstrates that these derivatives were not merely marginal innovations of individual dialects but constituted a productive morphological mechanism used to designate groups of people, animals, and – crucially for the present study – plants. The evidence presented here suggests that the collective formation from which the English *birch* can be derived was already established in Proto-Indo-

European and may have persisted into the Germanic branch as a functional morphological type, albeit eventually singularized.

4.3. *Onomastic structures as a reflection of collective formations*

An additional, empirical support for the productivity of collective formations based on tree names can be found in their extensive presence in onymy, particularly in toponymy (cf., e.g., Polish place names such as *Brzezie*, *Brzezień*, *Brzeziny*, *Brzeźnia*, *Brzeźnica*, *Brzeźno*, *Brzozów*, and *Brzóze*). Dendronyms played a key role in the naming processes of many Indo-European traditions. In the Polish and Slavic context, Bańkowski's research (1972) on collective nouns derived from tree names in Polish toponymy, as well as Gliwa's (2016) analysis of the lexeme *brzoza* as a toponymic base, clearly indicate the frequent use of collective forms to designate topographical features. A similar phenomenon is observed in Silesia (Lech-Kirstein 2015) and in the South Slavic tradition (Čargonja et al. 2008), where these formations serve as stable naming bases. The presence of historical variants of both *brzoza* and *birch* in place names not only confirms their cultural significance but also provides evidence for the vitality of collective derivatives which, as argued in Section 4.2, underlie the phonological evolution of the analysed English form. This interdisciplinary link between historical lexicology and onomastics further strengthens the argument regarding the morphological genesis of the English cognate. Such a robust grounding of the proposed reconstruction in both comparative material and onomastic data allows us to proceed to a synthesis of the conclusions regarding the specific phonetic and morphological evolution of the *brzoza–birch* pair.

5. Conclusions

The present analysis of the phonological and morphological development of Polish *brzoza* and English *birch* leads to several broader conclusions regarding Indo-European comparative research. While the study has focused primarily on these Polish-English cognates, the issue of disparate phonological shapes identified here is transferable to other Slavic and Germanic languages. As such, it serves as a salient illustration of the difficulties inherent in explaining the differences among cognates that have accumulated over centuries. The results of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. Polish *brzoza* and English *birch* share a common root, but they are not exact cognates *sensu stricto*.
2. The pair representing exact cognates *sensu stricto* is Polish *brzoza* and Old English *beorc*; however, modern English *birch* is not a direct continuation of Old English *beorc*.

3. Etymological dictionaries and other publications (e.g. Kroonen 2013, Mallory and Adams 1997: 65) that derive English *birch* from OE *beorc* < PG. **berkō* should revise this lineage: English *birch* < OE *birce* < PG. **berkjō-*, because the reconstruction of the Proto-Germanic etymon of OE *birce* should include the sounds that trigger palatalization and *i*-mutation.
4. The development from PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-eh₂* to Polish *brzoza* and from PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-ijeh₂* to English *birch* can be outlined as in the table below:

Table 1 The development from PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-eh₂* to Polish *brzoza* and from PIE **b^herh₁ǵ-ijeh₂* to English *birch*.
Source: Own processing

Sound Change	From PIE <i>*b^herh₁ǵ-eh₂</i> > Polish <i>brzoza</i>	From PIE <i>*b^herh₁ǵ-ijeh₂</i> > English <i>birch</i>
1. PIE <i>*h₂</i> > \emptyset , <i>*eh₂</i> > <i>*ā</i>	<i>*b^herǵ-ā</i>	<i>*b^herǵ-ijā</i>
2. PIE <i>*bh</i> > PG. <i>*b</i> 3. PIE <i>*ǵ</i> > PG. <i>*k</i> 4. PIE <i>*ā</i> > PG. <i>*ō</i>		<i>*berk-iō-</i>
5. PIE <i>*bh</i> > PSI <i>*b</i> 6. PIE <i>*ǵ</i> > PSI <i>*z</i>	<i>*berz-ā</i>	
7. Apocope 8. Early Old English Palatalisation 9. Breaking 10. <i>i</i> -umlaut 11. <i>i</i> -lowering 12. Monophthongisation 13. Apocope		<i>*berk-i</i> <i>*berc-i</i> <i>*beorc-i</i> <i>*bierc-i</i> OE <i>bierce</i> <i>birche</i> <i>birch</i>
14. The metathesis of tort	<i>*breza</i>	
15. Palatalisation: <i>r</i> > <i>r^j</i>	<i>*br^jeza</i>	
16. The Lekhitic soundshift <i>e</i> > <i>o</i>	<i>*br^joza</i>	
17. OP <i>r^j</i> > <i>r^z</i> > P rz /ʒ/	<i>brzoza</i> /bʒoza/	
18. LME /i, u, e/ (+ /r (C)/) > ENE /əə/ (= /ə:/) 19. ENE ə: > Mod.E. ɜ: 20. Loss of preconsonantal <i>r</i> in non-rhotic dialects, vowel lengthening		BrE <i>birch</i> /bɜ:tʃ/

5. The method of contrasting cognates in modern languages serves as an effective tool for verifying established etymologies and refining our understanding of ancient lexical relationships.
6. The present study offers several implications for improving the method of contrasting cognates:
 - a) In the case of partial cognates sharing a common root, an attempt should be made to search for formerly productive derivational categories that may explain the disparate phonetic or morphological shapes of the comparanda. Regarding PG. **berkjō-*, this likely involved a

collective formation, represented by such examples as Polish *bracia*, *księża* or Greek *φρατρία*.

- b) In the case of independent derivatives (or what is labelled as derivatives in individual languages, e.g. Proto-Slavic *berzъje*), it is necessary to search for possible cognate formations in other branches. Such forms may, in fact, be inherited rather than autonomous innovations.
- c) Consequently, certain Germanic and Slavic collective nouns should not be treated as independent derivatives – as is often assumed in etymological dictionaries – but should be reassessed as potentially inherited cognates of a common ancestor.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the relevance of the onomastic evidence, which has significantly enriched the present discussion.

Abbreviations

Languages and dialects

Alb. – Albanian; Cz. – Czech; Du. – Dutch; E. – English; G. – German; Gk. – Greek; Goth. – Gothic; Icel. – Icelandic; IE. – Indo-European; Kash. – Kashubian; Lat. – Latin; Latv. – Latvian; Lith. – Lithuanian; LSorb. – Low Sorbian; MDu. – Middle Dutch; MHG. – Middle High German; Mod.E. – Modern English; Norw. – Norwegian; OČak. – Old Čakavian; OCS. – Old Church Slavic; OCz. – Old Czech; OE. – Old English; OHG. – Old High German; ON. – Old Norse; OPol. – Old Polish; OPrus. – Old Prussian; ORu. – Old Russian; OSax. – Old Saxonian; OSln. – Old Slovenian; OSw. – Old Swedish; PG. – Proto-Germanic; PIE – Proto-Indo-European; Pol. – Polish; Polab. – Polabian; PSl. – Proto-Slavic; Ru. – Russian; SC. – Serbo-Croatian; Skt. – Sanskrit; Sln. – Slovenian; Sw. – Swedish; Ukr. – Ukrainian; USorb. – Upper Sorbian; Ved. – Vedic.

Glosses

adj. – adjective; c. – genus commune (common gender); coll. – collective; dial. – dialectal; f. – feminine; gen. – genitive; id. – idem / the same meaning; m. – masculine; n. – neuter; pl. – plural; sg. – singular; s.v. – sub voce.

References


1. Bańkowski, A. (1972). Rzeczowniki zbiorowe od nazw drzew w toponimii polskiej. In *Język polski*, 52, p. 281-286.

2. Čargonja, H., Daković, B. & Alegro, A. (2008). Plants and geographical names in Croatia. In *Collegium antropologicum*, 32 (3), p. 927-943.
3. Derksen, R. (2015). *Etymological dictionary of the Baltic inherited lexicon*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
4. Derksen, R. (2008). *Etymological dictionary of the Slavic inherited lexicon*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
5. de Vaan, M. (2008). *Etymological dictionary of Latin and the other Italic languages*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
6. Edelman, D.I. (2003). *Etymological dictionary of Iranian languages*, Vol. 2. Moscow: Nauka – Vostochnaya literatura. / Edel'man D.I. *Etimologičeskij slovar' iranskikh yazykov*, Tom 2. Moskva: Nauka – Vostochnaya literatura. / Эдельман Д.И. *Этимологический словарь иранских языков*, Том 2. Москва: Наука – Восточная литература.
7. Falk, H. S. & Torp, A. (1910). *Norwegisch-dänisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsbuchhandlung.
8. Friedrich, P. (1970). *Proto-Indo-European trees: The arboreal system of a prehistoric people*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press.
9. Gliwa, R. (2016). Wyraz pospolity brzoza jako baza toponimiczna. In *Nazwy terenowe i miejscowe w przestrzeni fizycznej*. Gałkowski, A. & Gliwa, R. (eds.). Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, p. 205-215. DOI: [10.18778/8088-241-6.21](https://doi.org/10.18778/8088-241-6.21).
10. Habrajska, G., Rychło, M. & Witczak, K.T. (2020). Collective nouns denoting trees in the Scandinavian languages. In *Skandinavskaya filologiya*, 18 (2), p. 261-283.
11. Hogg, R.M. (1992). *A grammar of Old English*. Vol. 1: Phonology. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
12. Jóhannesson, A. (1956). *Isländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke Verlag.
13. Kaczyńska, E. (2019). Laconian βοῦα 'Band of Boys' as a collective noun. In *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*, 14 (1), p. 93-103.
14. Králik, L. (2015). *Stručný etymologický slovník slovenčiny*. Bratislava: Veda.
15. Kroonen, G. (2013). *Etymological dictionary of Proto-Germanic*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
16. Lech-Kirstein, D. (2015). The names of trees in Silesian toponyms. In *Onomastica*, 59, p. 223-239. DOI: [10.17651/ONOMAST.59.14](https://doi.org/10.17651/ONOMAST.59.14).
17. Lehmann, W.P. (1986). *A Gothic etymological dictionary*. Leiden: Brill.
18. Levitskiy, V.V. (2010). *An etymological dictionary of Germanic languages*. Vol. 1. Vinnitsa: Nova Knyga. / Levitskiy V.V. *Etimologičeskij slovar' germanskikh yazykov*. Tom 1. Vinnitsa: Nova Knyga. / Левицкий В.В. *Этимологический словарь германских языков*. Т. 1. Винница: Нова Книга.
19. Mallory, J.P. & Adams, D.Q. (1997). *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn.
20. Mann, S.E. (1984/87). *An Indo-European comparative dictionary*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske.
21. Mańczak, W. (2017). *Polski słownik etymologiczny*. Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.
22. Mayrhofer, M. (1996). *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*. Vol. 2. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
23. Onions, C.T. (1966). *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
24. Orel, V. (2003). *A handbook of Germanic etymology*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
25. Orel, V. (1998). *Albanian etymological dictionary*. Leiden – Boston: Brill.
26. Panasenko, N. (2021). Cognitive linguistics and phytonymic lexicon. In *The Routledge handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Wen, X. & Taylor, J.R. (eds.). New York: Routledge, p. 585-598.
27. Panasenko, N. (2023a). Diminutives in phytonymic lexis. In *SKASE journal of theoretical linguistics* [online], 20 (3), p. 38-55. Available at: <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL54/03.pdf>.

28. Panasenko, N. (2010). *Phytonymic lexicon in the system of Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages (onomasiological and cognitive analysis)*. Cherkassy: Brama-Ukrayina. / Panasenko N. *Fitonimicheskaya leksika v sisteme romanskikh, germanskikh i slavianskikh yazykov (opyt onomasiologicheskogo i kognitivnogo analiza)*. Cherkassy: Brama-Ukrayina. / Панасенко Н. *Фитонимическая лексика в системе романских, германских и славянских языков (опыт ономаσιологического и когнитивного анализа)*. Черкассы: Бrama-Украина.
29. Panasenko, N. (2023b). The essence of onomasiological bases and their types in phytonymic lexicon. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 8 (2), December 2023, p. 35-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.23.8.2.03>
30. Pokorny, J. (2002) [1959]. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern – Munich: Francke.
31. Ringe, D. (2006). *From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic*. (A linguistic history of English, vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
32. Ringe, D. & Taylor, A. (2014). *The development of Old English* (A linguistic history of English, vol. 2). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
33. Rix, H. (2001). *Lexikon der Indogermanischen Verben*. Wiesbaden, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
34. Rychło, M. (2012). An etymological comparison of English *fist* and Polish *pięść*: How they both descended from the PIE root for 'five'. In *Linguistica silesiana*, 33, p. 19-38.
35. Rychło, M. (2013). English *herd* and Polish *trzoda*: How the two words developed from one Proto-Indo-European root. In *Acta neophilologica*, XV (1), p. 155-166.
36. Rychło, M. (2018). Polish *reż* and English *rye* concealed in Polish *rżysko*: A case study of a pair of cognates and a root archaism. In *Linguistica silesiana*, 39, p. 119-133.
37. Rychło, M. (2014). Ślady prawa Grimma w angielszczyźnie w zestawieniu z polskimi wyrazami pokrewnymi: *pie*. *p > pgerm. *f. In *Język polski*, XCIV (3), p. 200-211.
38. Rychło, M. (2021). Slavic and Germanic reflexes of Proto-Indo-European root **h₂ueh₁*- 'wind': A comparative study. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, 6 (1), June 2021, p. 190-231.
39. Rychło, M., Kaczyńska, E., Kowalski, A.P. & Tomasz, K. (2024). Milk-sucking "thieves" in Indo-European folklore: An etymological analysis of zoonyms. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, IX (1), p. 84-103. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.24.9.1.08>
40. Rychło, M. & Witczak, K.T. (2022). Proto-Indo-European collective nouns in **-i₁om*: Lexical evidence. In *The journal of Indo-European studies*, 50 (1-2), p. 153-174.
41. Rychło, M. & Witczak, K.T. (2021). Proto-Indo-European **moghtis* f. 'might, power'. In *The journal of Indo-European studies*, 49 (1-2), p. 171-186.
42. Sławski F. (ed.). (1974). *Słownik prasłowiański*. Vol. 1. Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo PAN, 1974.
43. Smoczyński, W. (2018). *Lithuanian etymological dictionary*. Vol. 4. Berlin: Peter Lang.
44. Trubachev, O.N. (ed.). (1974). *The etymological dictionary of Slavic languages: Proto-Slavic lexical stock*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Nauka. / Trubachev, O.N. (red.). *Etimologicheskij slovar' slavianskikh yazykov: praslavyanskij leksicheskij fond*. Tom 1. Moskva: Nauka. / Трубачев, О. Н. (ред.). *Этимологический словарь славянских языков: праславянский лексический фонд*. Том 1. Москва: Наука.

45. Vasmer, M. (1987). *Etymological dictionary of the Russian language*. Vol. 3. Moscow: "Progress". / Fasmer M. *Etimologičeskij slovar' russkogo yazyka*. Tom 3. Moskva: "Progress". / Фасмер М. *Этимологический словарь русского языка*. Т. 3. Москва: Прогресс.
46. Vries de J. (1977). *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.
47. Weiss, M. (2009). *Outline of the historical and comparative grammar of Latin*. Ann Arbor – New York: Beech Stave Press.
48. Wehna, J. (1978). *A diachronic grammar of English. Part 1: Phonology*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
49. Witzcak, K.T. (2016). Nierozpoznane collectivum w językach tocharskich: toch. A pratri'bracia'. In *Roczniki humanistyczne*, 64 (9), p. 119-133.
50. Witzcak, K.T., Habrajska, G. & Rychło, M. (2022). Proto-Slavic collectives in *-bje from a historical and comparative perspective. In *Slavistična revija*, 70 (2), p. 157-173.
51. Witzcak, K.T., Kowalski, A.P. & Rychło, M. (2023). Dwa południowosłowiańskie herpetonimy w oświetleniu językoznawczym i etnograficznym (psł. *korvošъ 'wąż Eskulapa', psł. *guja 'wąż, żmija'). In *Slavistična revija*, 71 (4), p. 355-368.
52. Witzcak, K.T. & Rychło, M. (2023). Pytheas of Massalia and his voyage to the North Atlantic in the light of onomastics. In *Eos. Commentarii societatis philologiae Polonorum*, 110, p. 83-107.
53. Witzcak, K.T. & Rychło, M. (2022). Soot in the Saami and Germanic languages. In *Skandinavskaya filologiya*, 20 (2), p. 269-287.
54. Zalizniak, A.A. (1965). *Materials for the study of the morphological structure of Old Germanic nouns. Part II. Etymology. Principles of reconstruction and research methodology*. Trubachev, O.N. (ed.). Moscow: Nauka, p. 160-235. / Zaliznyak A.A. *Materialy dlia izucheniya morfologičeskoj struktury drevnegermanskich susčestvitel'nykh. Ch. II. Etimologija. Principy rekonstruktsiji i metodika issledovaniya*. Pod red. O.N. Trubacheva. Moskva: Nauka, s. 160-235. / Зализняк А.А. *Материалы для изучения морфологической структуры древнегерманских существительных. Ч. II. Этимология. Принципы реконструкции и методика исследования*. Под ред. О.Н. Трубачева. Москва: Наука, с. 160-235.

Contact data

	<i>name:</i>	Mikołaj Rychło
	<i>academic title / rank:</i>	Dr Hab. in Linguistics Associate Professor
	<i>department:</i>	Institute of English and American Studies, Faculty of Languages
	<i>institution:</i>	University of Gdansk prof. Marii Janion 7 St., 80-309 Gdańsk, Poland
	<i>e-mail:</i>	mikolaj.rychlo@ug.edu.pl
	<i>fields of interest:</i>	Etymology, history of English, history of Polish, morphology, diachronic phonology, Proto-Indo-European, historical and comparative linguistics.

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

**ON (C)OVERT DOMAIN BOUNDARIES IN METAPHOR AND HUMOUR
AS EXEMPLIFIED IN SELECTED MULTIMODAL PRESS
ADVERTISEMENTS IN ENGLISH***Anna Stwora* *University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland***Received:** 11.07.2025 **Reviewed:** 20.01.2026 and 18.03.2026**Similarity Index:** 0%

Bibliographic description: Stwora, A. (2026). On (c)overt domain boundaries in metaphor and humour as exemplified in selected multimodal press advertisements in English. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 142-157. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.08>

Abstract: Because of their reliance on conceptual integration, humour and metaphor may be perceived as partially overlapping dynamic cognitive processes, in that they are based on incongruities between input spaces and lead to the emergence of new meanings. The paper demonstrates the operation of humour and metaphor in tandem on the example of selected multimodal press advertisements in English. The presented study shows the workings of domain boundaries when the two phenomena are employed concurrently.

Keywords: conceptual integration, humour, metaphor, advertising discourse, domain boundaries.

1. Introduction

Owing to their reliance on the process of conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner 1998; 2002), figurativeness and humour are claimed to share much of the same conceptual territory (Attardo 1994; 2006; 2015; Brône & Feyaerts 2003; Dynel 2009; Kyratzis 2003; Müller 2015). Both entail a dynamic cognitive process in which new meanings emerge, and both operate on an incongruity between the input spaces, though they stress different aspects thereof. In response to the research need identified by Godioli and Chłopicki (2024: 157), who underscore the potential for interdisciplinary endeavours that extend the analysis of metaphor and humour's co-occurrence to multimodal content, the aim of this paper is to show how domain boundaries operate when humour and metaphor are employed together, as exemplified in selected multimodal press advertisements in English. The present paper intends to sharpen our understanding of the relationship between figurativeness and funniness in



advertising discourse, as inspired by my prior research (Stwora 2023) into the operation of the said processes working in tandem in multimodal advertising. To this end, a selection of multimodal ads that employ humour and metaphor alike is analysed through the lens of conceptual blending and multimodal discourse analysis.

2. The applicability of conceptual integration to humour research

The following discussion focuses on literature concerning metaphor and humour viewed through the lens of conceptual integration theory (Fauconnier & Turner 1998; 2002). The theory itself, also known as conceptual blending, was developed to explicate the process of "online meaning construction" (Coulson & Oakley 2000: 175; see Brône 2017) and adds more depth and complexity to the source and target domains that participate in a mapping. Unlike conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), the theory of conceptual integration takes into consideration new emergent meanings that were not present in original input spaces (Gibbs 2015) and exhibit "features that belong to neither of the input (mental) spaces" (Attardo 2006: 342-343). The cognitive space introduced by Fauconnier and Turner (1998; 2002) and labelled *the blend* integrates crucial elements, features, and relations originally present in both input spaces with a brand-new emergent structure. Thus, it gives rise to an additional meaning structure that was absent in either the source or target inputs. Following Fauconnier and Turner (2002) and Kövecses (2005), one may conclude that "the interaction or even clash of the elements present in the inputs leads to the projection of yet another set of meanings, which results from the said clash, to the blend" (Stwora 2023: 89). In other words, the cognitive operation of blending inherits from both input spaces "with shared schematic structures, prompting parallels between them" (Bullo 2017: 712), and "develops emergent content of its own, which arises from the juxtaposition of elements from the inputs" (Gibbs 2015: 171).

Another vital space in the model proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) is the generic space. Firstly, it contains an abstract, schematic structure that is "common to all spaces" (Kyratzis 2003: 5) and applies to all of them (Kövecses 2010: 271). Secondly, it gives rise to metaphorical mapping due to the identification of at least one marked similarity between the spaces involved. It should be borne in mind that all four spaces mentioned above are equally important in the creation of the figurative. Yet, while the generic space supplies the perceiver with a basic schema of metaphor production and the input spaces involved contain elementary conceptual domains, the blend seems more complex. It acts as a spur to emergent meanings because it conjures up mental images that help us reason. The blend feeds fantasy, provokes related thoughts (Krikmann 2009), and thus activates additional meanings outside the source-target frame.

A similar set of cognitive operations is involved in humour processing since comparable "dynamic aspects of meaning construction" (Evans & Green 2006: 400) are at play. Many scholars, for example, Attardo (1994; 2006; 2015), Brône and Feyaerts (2003), Dynel (2009), Kyratzis (2003), and Müller (2015), claim that the theory of conceptual integration can be used to explain humour too, and hence spotlight shared properties between metaphor and humour. The source and target spaces identified in the conceptual integration theory may correspond to scripts (scenarios). Raskin (1985: 46) defines them as chunks of semantic data and inferential information, expressed either textually, pictorially, or multimodally, that lay a firm foundation for our thinking patterns and structure our prototypical knowledge (Rosch 1978). The dynamic nature of scripts lies in the fact that they may consist of chains of events, as well as involve causality and sequentiality (Yule 2011/1996). For instance, an appointment at the doctor's requires that the patient arrive at the clinic, then go to the doctor's office. Next, the doctor checks their medical history and auscultation, examination, diagnosis, and prescription may follow. Once the predictable chain of events, cause-and-effect relationship or expected sequence is broken, the perceiver is faced with an incongruity that, in line with the incongruity-resolution theory, generates humour (Attardo 1994; Stwora 2023). For example, a role swap between doctor and patient, where the latter diagnoses the former, could potentially be seen as funny. A similar scenario-based pattern is present in metaphors, for metaphorical scenarios may be said to encompass basic mental representations of particular situations and typical outlines or postulated sequences of events held in the perceivers' minds (Colston 2018; Semino 2008). A narrative-like image of metaphorical scenarios is therefore implied, which views metaphors as mini-narratives (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi 2009; Musolff 2006). As it is claimed, "the paradigmatic NOUN A IS NOUN B formula disguises the dynamic nature of metaphor (...) [since] sensemaking happens through real or imagined metaphor *actions*" (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi 2009: 11, emphasis original).

In order to fully appreciate the applicability of conceptual integration to research on humour, the key theory of incongruity-resolution humour needs to be covered, if only briefly. It entails the activation of two scripts, or, in other words, two mental representations, one of which is more salient and thus expected by the perceiver while the other is seen as discrepant (Attardo 1994; Attardo & Raskin 1991). The kernel of this theory is the clash between a prototypical, stored scenario (Forceville 1996: 115), which is activated in one's mind along with possible assumptions as to the meaning the said scenario carries, and "new perceptual data [that] alters these previous assumptions" (Stwora 2023: 140, after Hurley et al. 2017). Let us revert to the doctor/patient example. The doctor's office itself activates the typical scenario of a situation we prototypically hold in our minds, so a role swap as a result of which it is the patient that diagnoses the doctor would be seen as incongruous with the initial interpretation we would steer towards. This perspective proposes that "salience imbalance (...) invites

the comprehender to process the more salient but eventually incompatible meaning first (...) to dispense with it and activate a less salient but congruent meaning" (Giora 2003: 168). Of great relevance to the issue at hand is that the alternative script was in fact "possible" from the very beginning. However, it was not primed in the perceiver's mind, given the initial script they had in mind while searching for a relevant interpretation (Yus 2016). Along these lines, Morreall (2009: 15) explores the so-called "aha-moment" of realisation and resolution. He says that the pleasure of humour "is not the enjoyment of incongruity, but the enjoyment of a kind of puzzle solving". The initial incongruity is resolved when the alternative meaning is arrived at, which generates humour¹.

An analogous puzzle is solved in our minds every time we process metaphors. Although we do not pay conscious attention to this process (Fauconnier 1998), "a fully inferential extraction of a relevant connotative (i.e., metaphoric) interpretation" (Yus 2016: 274) nonetheless takes place. It results in a preliminary hypothesis about the relation between the mental spaces involved and thus the intended meaning. The matter of relevance (Gibbs & Tendahl 2006; Tendahl & Gibbs 2008) is crucial here since only selected elements, features, and relations are subject to projection that takes place as a result of conceptual integration, which limits the number of possible solutions as regards the puzzle of meaning. As explained by Turner (2015), "the elements and relations that enter the blend are always partial and selective." The array of information taken into account is governed by the relevant pragmatic context, which helps to establish any sense-making relations (Yus 2016). The problem-solving, relevance-driven, and dynamic dimensions remain fundamental in both humour and metaphor processing. Godioli and Chłopicki (2024: 147) stress that figures of meaning and language alike "are closely related to humor, and can often be vehicles of the latter", as their intrinsic relationship is rooted in the observation that both figurative language and the majority of humorous expressions represent departures from Grice's Cooperative Principle (Raskin & Attardo 1994).² Godioli and Chłopicki (2024: 147) also claim that "both figures and humour entail some irregularity to be recognized on the part of the reader, who is prompted to make sense of said irregularity". Figurative language prompts the recipient to engage in inferential processing; its aim is to pose a question or an interpretive challenge (Meyer 2017: 148), though the extent to which this occurs may vary according to the degree of conventionality of the figure employed. In a comparable manner, humorous communication commonly relies on the resolution of an incongruity perceived (see Larkin-Galiñanes 2017).

Despite marked similarities, Kyratzis (2003) says that humorous and metaphorical conceptualisations vary as regards the profiling of domain boundaries; "whereas metaphors essentially focus on the interdomain connections, suppressing the obvious domain boundaries, humorous stimuli

(un)intentionally emphasize the dissimilarities between domains" (Brône & Feyaerts 2003: 14; cf. Kyratzis 2003). Likewise, with reference to the conceptual structures behind metaphor and humour and the workings of domain boundaries, Krikmann develops a proposition that, "in the case of metaphor, the first (overt, redundant) script 'wins', but in the case of joke, the second (hidden, informative) prevails" (Krikmann 2009: 14). This view is elaborated on by Brône (2017: 257) who also states that the essential difference between the two phenomena lies in the way they treat domain boundaries. While metaphor subdues and blurs these boundaries, humour highlights them by emphasis placed on incongruity and opposition. We therefore deal with the idea of sameness in the case of the former and of difference in the case of the latter. That is because metaphor communicates likeness, sameness, and analogy resulting from less distinct domain boundaries. In other words, A IS B, even if C features, that is, emergent meanings, can be identified. Humour, on the other hand, rests on foregrounding domain boundaries due to the tension that lies at the heart of the opposites' pairing; though A and B are there, we do not see them as one unit. Nonetheless, we acknowledge the basis on which they were brought together. What is more, C features (i.e., emergent meanings) can be identified too.

We may therefore speak of a change of focus dependent on the (c)overt aspect that is given prominence in each of the phenomena discussed. In agreement with Attardo, Chłopicki, and Forabosco (2024), Godioli and Chłopicki (2024), Müller (2015), and Oring (2003), metaphors aim at synthesis and complete conflation of opposed meanings carried by the inputs; on the other hand, humour defies total merger of the concepts involved since it offers a partial resolution so that the idea of opposition is retained. Central to humour is the fulfilment of two fundamental conditions, namely overlapping and opposition. The overlapping condition is satisfied when the interpretations derived are "compatible with more than one reading" (Attardo 1994: 203), as a result of the simultaneous presence of multiple potential meanings. Given the overlap, the scripts "may be seen as belonging to one category, or one continuum, or as sharing certain marked points of resemblance" (Stwora 2022: 178), as happens in the process of metaphor comprehension. However, for humour to emerge, concomitant with overlapping must be the opposing condition. It must supply the perceiver with a point of divergence that leads to conceptual tension, i.e., an incongruity, which pivots on three core, yet not exhaustive, sets of script opposition (abbreviated SO) originally proposed by Raskin (1985: 111) and aptly summarised in Stwora (2025: 214) as follows:

"a. actual/non-actual script opposition:

points of resemblance → the conceptual field of existence, reality

points of divergence → one SO exists in fact and is real, the other is not

b. normal/abnormal script opposition:

points of resemblance → the conceptual field of conventionality, norm

points of divergence → one SO conforms to a standard, is either typical, usual, or expected, while the other diverts from expectations

c. possible/impossible script opposition:

points of resemblance → the conceptual field of probability

points of divergence → one SO is likely to take place, whereas the other is not".

Although the initial set included three basic script oppositions, the pattern facilitates the generation of numerous binary contrasts, such as necessary/unnecessary, much/little, or absence/presence (Chłopicki 1987), among others. As Stwora (2022: 179) notes, humour may operate on multiple levels simultaneously and hence encompass more than one pair of oppositions at once (Chłopicki 2000; 2006; Krikmann 2006). Consequently, the occurrence of a particular SO does not preclude the co-occurrence of others. To echo a pertinent point made by Viana (2010), what is needed to engender humour is asymmetry between the inputs that is evident to the perceiver, owing to lingering cognitive tension as the processes of de-blending (Godioli & Chłopicki 2024; Kyratzis 2003; Libura 2017) and re-drawing the boundaries take place. According to Dynel (2011: 79), although incongruity "is playfully resolved in the blended space, (...) [it] is never dissolved, thanks to which the incongruity and congruity can be duly re-appreciated". Metaphor, in turn, depends on a harmonious picture of two inputs seen as one. It helps to understand and experience "one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5) so that the conveyance of meaning is seamless when a conceptual connection is established. To cite Bullo (2017: 712), on account of conceptual integration, metaphor "entails the ability to combine, or blend, elements from diverse scenarios or mental spaces with shared schematic structures, prompting parallels between them, and to form a new conceptual model". The ways in which the two (dis)similar phenomena covered operate in tandem in a specific discursive context of multimodal advertising will be shown below.

Nevertheless, before this takes place, it should be stressed that metaphor and humour manifest distinct communicative functions within the blending framework that contribute to their nuanced understanding. It is metaphor's purpose to help people understand abstract, intangible concepts in terms of concrete, tangible domains of experience, or to regard them as representative or symbolic of other notions. Meanwhile, humour is geared towards "cognitive reward" (Yus 2016: 305), or "a positive cognitive effect" (Forceville 2020: 131) that results in entertainment. This is achieved through a clash of discrepant cognitions that diverge from the mainstream patterns of thinking set by our prototypical knowledge and are therefore perceived as funny (Stwora 2023). It is the unanticipated recognition of dual meanings that prompts a reconfiguration of the boundaries between mental spaces, which was termed the deautomatisation of metaphor by Kyratzis (2003). Though metaphor used for marketing purposes is said to oscillate "between ostensive and disguised communication" (Wojtaszek

2023: 89), it intends to blur and subdue boundaries automatically, aiming at sameness and wholeness. In contrast, humour disrupts the process because it underlines incongruity (opposition), but, at the same time, acknowledges and actively uses the basis upon which the very opposition is formed (overlap). Specific examples of such processes shall be presented in the lines to follow.

3. Aims, material, and methods

While some exploratory work has already been carried out on the theoretical premises of the workings of (c)overt domain boundaries in metaphor and humour, little research focuses on actual examples subject to qualitative content analysis informed by the cognitive paradigm. In order to investigate the aforementioned issues, based on prior research (Stwora 2023), the presented study shows the operation of the said processes working in tandem in advertising discourse. Analytical frameworks offered by conceptual blending, script opposition, and multimodal content analysis are utilised. The following criteria were applied in terms of material selection. Firstly, only print ads were included (i.e., print originals or digital reproductions of print ads). It was imperative that they pertained to the category of static multimodal artefacts that incorporate both image and text to co-construct meaning. Secondly, each ad was required to feature metaphor and humour at the same time. As regards the operationalisation of metaphor, the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) was utilised, and was further guided by Steen's research (2007; 2016). Humour, on the other hand, was operationalised in line with the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin 1985) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo 1994; Attardo & Raskin 1991). In terms of figurativeness and humorousness, an ad qualified for inclusion if (a) a metaphorical mapping between the source and target domains was present, and (b) humour was displayed. Thirdly, ads were included irrespective of original print date; the collection process took place in 2023 and therefore reflects material accessible by that time, yet no older than 2003. Manual searches combined targeted browsing of advertising databases (e.g., www.adruby.com, www.adforum.com, www.adsoftheworld.com, www.adsarchive.com), systematic readings of numerous magazine and newspaper archives, and keyword searches in Google Images to identify the relevant items. Search terms, if applicable, were centred on keywords such as *humour*, *funny*, and *metaphor*. Candidate ads were first screened for multimodality, then assessed for metaphoricity and humour. The corpus is geographically diverse because ads were sourced from multiple countries and regions to maximise coverage, yet all of them were produced in English, the most spoken language in the world by total speakers, natives and non-natives included.³ No product category was favoured, so ads from diverse product and service sectors were eligible to avoid topical bias and, most importantly, because the paper is intended primarily as a theoretical contribution and the empirical material serves mainly an illustrative function. The corpus was intentionally assembled to illustrate

and test theoretical claims about conceptual blending in multimodal ads that are concurrently metaphorical and humorous; it is therefore designed to reveal mechanistic regularities rather than to estimate any frequencies. The collected purposive corpus consisted of 120 multimodal ads that concurrently exhibited metaphoricity and humorousness. For reasons of space, the analysis offered below is limited to four random examples that foreground the workings of domain boundaries.

3.1 Example 1: Intra_

The first example considered is an ad for Intra_ internet provider. It features a screenshot from the TV series *Breaking Bad* and thus introduces an intertextual reference. The image shows the protagonist, Walter White, visibly distressed, with his hands raised in a defensive gesture, as he is trying to ward off an immediate threat—a gun is pointed at him by an assailant. There is a loading bar at the bottom of the picture and 5% loading progress is shown in the middle of Walter's forehead, as if it was a red dot, which corresponds to the caption *a slow internet can kill your series. Intra_ high speed internet*. The inputs involved in the metaphorical mapping are Mr White (input 1) and Intra_ internet provider (input 2), while the generic is found in the verb *to kill*. Several possible interpretive outcomes can be isolated when it comes to the meanings that emerge from the blend: WALTER WHITE IS THE SHOW, SLOW INTERNET CONNECTION IS A BULLET, SLOW INTERNET CONNECTION IS A KILLER, and INTRA_ IS A WAY TO DODGE THE BULLET. The humorous dimension resides in several concurrent SOs: actual/non-actual (there is no real killing involved), present/absent (internet connection), fast/slow, and dead/alive. The perceiver merges the inputs to understand the metaphor, yet sees the discrepancy introduced by SOs that encourages them to re-evaluate the initial metaphor in search of further humorous meanings. This way, the processes of blending and de-blending take place in one advertisement, owing to the unexpected realisation of the duality of meanings and their simultaneous (in)compatibility that results in (re)drawing the boundary between mental spaces anew.

3.2 Example 2: Ikea

Next is a minimalist ad for Ikea storage solutions that presents three cartoon-like line drawings arranged horizontally: a snake, a stylised figure of Eve from the biblical story of Eden, and an apple, all against a simple white background. The brand's logo is shown at the bottom along with a row of three simple drawings of storage containers. The caption says *some things are better kept separate*, which figuratively suggests that, had the three been kept separate, the original sin resultant from Eve's temptation could have been prevented. The fusion of boundaries between the spaces that enter metaphorical relations (input 1 being storage solutions and input 2 being the story of Eden represented by the pictorial layer) is based on the generic space of choice between keeping things together or storing them separately. The blend illustrates the importance of organization and storage, and hence

gives rise to the mappings KEEPING THINGS TOGETHER IS TROUBLE and STORING THINGS SEPARATELY IS ORDER/PARADISE. It communicates that Ikea may help in preventing the "temptation" of clutter and lead to a more peaceful and less stressful existence. However, the unexpected pairing of concepts engenders a sense of cognitive tension that causes mirth when the perceiver realizes how uncommon the whole metaphor is. It is unusual indeed for the biblical context and a furniture and household store to go hand in hand. Since it is predicated upon the actual/non-actual, sin/no sin, and mess/order SOs, the ad places cognitive emphasis on dissimilarities, which results in disjoining the spaces relevant to metaphor and thus leads to humour.

3.3 Example 3: Bendix brakes

Let us take another example into consideration. The ad for Bendix Brakes uses metaphor and humour through the interplay of the verbal and visual. The caption in the form of an exclamation placed in the upper mid-section says *BEWARE OF NEW BRAKES!* The focus is on a picture of a cheetah stopping running suddenly (as shown by a visible trail of dust left) because its head gets stuck in a deer's anus. The deer appears startled but unharmed. In the lower right corner, there is a small image of Bendix brake pads and a tagline: *Titanium Stripes, No Bedding-In*, followed by small print: *No more slipping. Safety from the first second out of the box.* It elaborates on the metaphor that results from the visual layer and is echoed in the caption, and stresses the immediate effectiveness of these brakes and their stopping power. The said metaphor is founded upon Bendix car brakes as input 1 and the deer as input 2, brought together by the generic spaces of speed and screeching to a halt. The blend is A DEER IS A CAR WITH NEW BENDIX BRAKES and, consequently, A CHEETAH IS A CAR WITH OLD/FAULTY/OTHER BRAKES. Simultaneously, a stark incongruity is detected between the stored prototypical visual referents and the configuration of the images that make up the visual metaphor (Forceville 1996: 115). Humour ensues from the possible/impossible, actual/non-actual, fast/slow, and old/new SOs. Apart from humour based on incongruity resolution, we also deal with more crude slapstick humour, given the unfortunate situation the animals find themselves in, as the image strikes the audience as anomalous, exaggerated for a comic effect, or even absurd (Stwora 2023: 134-135).

3.4 Example 4: Shave Club

The final example discussed is an ad for Dollar Shave Club's Dr. Carver's shave butter that plays on interpretations compatible with the information coded mainly through visuals. It presents a banana flanked by two kiwis, one of which has a noticeable green slash, probably made with a peeler. This image is further strengthened by the tagline that employs wordplay in the idiom *better safe than sorry*. It reads *Butter safe than sorry* and contains a pun based on the homophonic and homographic similarities between the words *butter* and *better*, followed by: *Transparent formula for a smooth and*

gentle shave placed next to Dr. Carver's shave butter that is shown in the lower right corner. It is not difficult to find the figurative meaning intended, given the visual similarity of referents and verbal anchoring. While the visuals present the said fruits (input 1), verbal cues suggest that they actually stand for a penis and testicles (input 2), given the generic space of shaving something delicate or sensitive, as well as implied similarity as regards shape. The blends identified are: A BANANA IS A PENIS, KIWIS ARE TESTICLES, and PEELING IS SHAVING. It (in)directly links the product to the message of preventing irritation and ensuring safe shaving experiences of sensitive areas. The parallelism between inputs produces humour once the perceiver realises the distance between the two juxtaposed concepts, which makes them adjust their reasoning to the "new", "updated" cognitive landscape of emergent meanings. Interdomain connections aiming at the suppression of domain boundaries are evident, yet so is the dissimilarity between them that makes it impossible to reconcile the domains completely. In other words, the cross-domain mapping is founded on resemblance but therein also lies its surprising jocular value. The incongruity is resolved based on the actual/non-actual, clean-shaven/hairy, and pain/no pain SOs.

4. Conclusions

The paper demonstrated the operation of metaphor and humour in tandem as exemplified in selected multimodal press advertisements in English, with particular emphasis on how domain boundaries work. The detection and analysis of the input spaces and opposite scripts involved showed that metaphor relies on the fusion of boundaries, while humour accentuates them. Despite this fundamental difference, the process of (de-)blending should be seen as a linkage between humorousness and metaphoricity. Conceptual integration provides a unified cognitive framework for understanding metaphor and humour alike, for it models how disparate inputs combine to generate emergent meanings. Apart from the input spaces (equivalent to scenarios/scripts), both metaphor and humour necessitate a common schematic structure. What corresponds to the generic level in the case of metaphor may be seen as an overlapping condition in terms of humour. The emergent meanings in the blended space, where meanings outside the source-target frame sprout, are nonetheless treated differently. Metaphor puts emphasis on analogous structuring that purposely blurs any differences, whereas humour, as explained with recourse to the incongruity-resolution theory, highlights the oppositions but simultaneously acknowledges the points of resemblance upon which the pairing was constructed. Conceptual proximity resultant from fuzzy boundaries in metaphor contrasts with distance produced by marking boundaries in the case of humour.⁴ The above account rests on both the theoretical assumptions referred to in the paper and the analysis of examples that may serve as corroboration of the intricate (de)blending processes. The initial decision not to focus on any

particular product type proved justified, since conceptual blending recurred across various product categories, which suggests that the blending mechanisms identified are not category-specific.

Considered in relation to both metaphor and humour, the framework offered by conceptual blending may be seen as a common denominator that underlies their operation as responsible for the creation of emergent meanings. Both construal phenomena involve two (or more) concepts that eventually create new senses and operate on input spaces through their narrowing and/or broadening, thanks to conceptual compression and/or expansion, respectively. They are figures of speech that produce rhetorical effects owing to their creativity and originality. Also, both require the perceiver to establish connections between (at least) two planes of meaning (the literal and symbolic meanings in metaphor, and the congruous and incongruous in humour) with a view to comprehending the message, preferably as intended by the sender. Thus, proper recognition of their (dis)similarities when employed concurrently in specific discourses yields valuable insights. While both humour and metaphor in advertising have long been the objects of separate studies, papers that take a look at their joint operation are still rather scarce. Based on the other pieces of research cited herein, the presented paper attempts to address this gap, in that it highlights the linkage between the humorous and the metaphorical, and therefore illustrates by using specific examples how the mechanisms of (de)blending are applicable to figurative and humorous discourses' construction (and interpretation).

The joint operation of metaphor and humour as essential rhetorical elements of advertising offers a powerful mix whose combined impact is yet to be explored. An examination of the two phenomena through the lens of conceptual integration theory provides ample food for thought, and leads to a sharper understanding of the relationship between two important qualities of figurativeness and funniness. Because the corpus was purposive, the findings are generalisable at the level of mechanism rather than at the level of blending's prevalence or distribution. Although this paper focuses on advertising, the considerations presented might offer insights which are also applicable in other discursive contexts. Its findings may generalise beyond advertising discourse because they showcase conceptual blending as a unified mechanism governed by compression principles (such as (dis)analogy) for dual rhetorical goals. While metaphor furnishes cognitive grounding, humour provides the surprise factor via frame violation and resolution to boost message attractiveness and memorability. Future empirical work could further test these regularities across media and genres that place high demands on audience attention.

Notes

1. For more details concerning the incongruity-resolution pattern and the question of whether incongruity can actually be appreciated without resolution, see Yus (2016: 90-94).
2. See contrasting views on whether such deviations should be seen as fully-fledged violations (Attardo 2017) or as superficial flouting of the Cooperative Principle (Dynel 2018).
3. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the paper's theoretical claims are framed as language-neutral mechanisms. The reason behind the choice of one language, English, enables a clearer focus on blending operations.
4. For a discussion on the cognitive 'distance' as the basis of funniness perception (the more distant the more humorous) see Attardo (2015), Dynel (2009: 27-28), Oring (2003), Pollio (1996), and Godioli and Chłopicki (2024: 153). Also, see Chen and Jiang (2018), Giora (1991), Nerhardt (1976), and Stwora (2023) for the prototype-theoretical perspectives on humour that may account for perceived funniness. As Chen and Jiang (2018: 79) explain with reference to the prototype theory, it is "not only (non)prototypicality of category members, but also family resemblance shared by them and the vague boundaries between categories [that] are capable of generating humour". Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that, "while prototypically *per se* cannot be seen as the sole basis conditioning humour, the possible contribution of the prototype theory to humour research is certainly an appealing prospect" (Stwora 2023: 215).

References


1. Attardo, S. (2006). Cognitive linguistics and humor. In *Humor: International journal of humor research*, 19 (3), p. 341-362.
2. Attardo, S. (2015). Humorous metaphors. In *Cognitive linguistics and humor research*. Brône, G., Feyaerts, K. & Veale, T. (eds.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 91-110.
3. Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic theories of humor*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
4. Attardo, S. (2017). The general theory of verbal humor. In *Routledge handbook of language and humor*. Attardo, S. (ed.). New York: Routledge, p. 126-142.
5. Attardo, S., Chłopicki, W. & Forabosco, G. (2024). The role of incongruity in humorous texts. In *De Gruyter handbook of humor studies*. Ford, T., Chłopicki, W. & Kuipers, G. (eds.). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, p. 105-124.
6. Attardo, S. & Raskin, V. (1991). Script theory revis(it)ed: Joke similarity and joke representation model. In *Humor*, 4, p. 293-347.
7. Bendix. Slippin' • Ads of the World™ | Part of The Clio Network. Advertising Agency: V2Power, Bangkok, Thailand. Available at: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/slippin>
8. Brône, G. (2017). Cognitive linguistics and humor research. In *The Routledge handbook of language and humor*. S. Attardo (ed.). New York: Routledge, p. 250-266.
9. Brône, G. & Feyaerts, K. (2003). *The cognitive linguistics of incongruity resolution: Marked reference-point structures in humor*. Reprint No 205. Leuven: University of Leuven.

10. Bullo, S. (2017). Investigating intertextuality and interdiscursivity in evaluation: The case of conceptual blending. In *Language and cognition*, 9, p. 709-727.
11. Chen, Q. & Jiang, G. (2018). Why are you amused: Unveiling multimodal humour from the prototype theoretical perspective. In *The European journal of humour research*, 6 (1), p. 62-84.
12. Chłopicki, W. (1987). *An application of the script theory of semantics to the analysis of selected Polish humorous short stories*. Unpublished M.A. thesis. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University.
13. Chłopicki, W. (2006). Humour and cognition: Dynamics of characters and events. In *Język a komunikacja. At the crossroads of linguistic sciences* 10. Chruszczewski, P. (ed.). Kraków: Tertium, p. 331-347.
14. Chłopicki, W. (2000). Linguistic analysis of humour in short stories. In *Świat humoru*. Gajda, S. & Brzozowska, D. (eds.). Opole: Drukarnia Wydawnictwa Św. Krzyża w Opolu, p. 513-524.
15. Colston, H. (2018). *Metaphor in discourse and beyond*. An open lecture delivered at the Institute of English, University of Silesia in Sosnowiec, Poland, May 23, 2018.
16. Coulson, S. & Oakley, T. (2000). Blending basics. In *Cognitive linguistics*, 11 (3-4), p. 175-196.
17. Dollar Shave Club. Eggplant, Carrot, Banana • Ads of the World™ | Part of The Clio Network. Advertising Agency: Dollar Shave Club, the United States. Available at: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/eggplant-10b14eac-0392-433a-9687-0bd0a075654b>
18. Dynel, M. (2011). Blending the incongruity-resolution model and the conceptual integration theory: The case of blends in pictorial advertising. In *International review of pragmatics*, 3 (1), p. 59-83.
19. Dynel, M. (2009). Creative metaphor is a birthday cake: Metaphor as the source of humour. In *metaphorik.de 17/2009* – online journal on metaphor and metonymy. Available at: <http://www.metaphorik.de/de/journal/17/creative-metaphor-birthday-cake-metaphor-source-humour.html>
20. Dynel, M. (2018). *Irony, deception and humor: Seeking the truth about overt and covert untruthfulness*. Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
21. Evans, V. & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: an introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
22. Fauconnier, G. (1998). Mental spaces, language modalities, and conceptual integration. In *The new psychology of language: Cognitive and functional approaches to language structure*. Tomasello, M. (ed.). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 251-279.
23. Fauconnier, G. & Turner, M. (1998). Conceptual integration networks. In *Cognitive science*, 22, p. 133-187.
24. Fauconnier, G. & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
25. Forceville, C. (1996). *Pictorial metaphor in advertising*. London – New York: Routledge.
26. Forceville, C. (2020). *Visual and multimodal communication. Applying the relevance principle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
27. Forceville, C. & Urios-Aparisi, E. (2009). Introduction. In *Multimodal metaphor*. Forceville, C. & Urios-Aparisi, E. (eds.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 3-17.
28. Gibbs, R. W. (2015). Metaphor. In *Handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Dąbrowska, E. & Divjak, D. (eds.). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, p. 167-189.
29. Gibbs, R. W. & Tendahl, M. (2006). Cognitive effort and effects in metaphor comprehension: Relevance theory and psycholinguistics. In *Mind & language*, 21, p. 379-403.
30. Giora, R. (2003). *On our mind: Salience, context, and figurative language*. Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press.
31. Giora, R. (1991). On the cognitive aspects of the joke. In *Journal of pragmatics*, 16, p. 465-485.

32. Godioli, A. & Chłopicki, W. (2024). Humor and figurative language. In *De Gruyter handbook of humor studies*. Ford, T., Chłopicki, W. & Kuipers, G. (eds.). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter, p. 145-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110755770-009>
33. Hurley, M. M., Dennett, D. C. & Adams, Jr., R. B. (2017). *Filozofia dowcipu. Humor jako siła napędowa umysłu*. Trans. Śmietana, R. Kraków: Copernicus Center Press.
34. IKEA: Some things are better kept separate | ad Ruby. Advertising Agency: JWT, Warsaw, Poland. Available at: <https://www.adruby.com/ikea/ikea-some-things-are-better-kept-separate>
35. Intra_: Narcos, Breaking Bad • Ads of the World™ | Part of The Clio Network. Advertising Agency: Estúdio Submarine, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Available at: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/narcos-5e969c04-e3b7-484d-a53a-a6747ab62428>
36. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor. A practical introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
37. Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
38. Krikmann, A. (2006). Contemporary linguistic theories of humour. In *Folklore. Electronic journal of folklore*, 33, p. 27-58.
39. Krikmann, A. (2009). On the similarity and distinguishability of humour and figurative speech. In *TRAMES*, 13 (63/58), 1, p. 14-40.
40. Kyratzis, S. (2003). *Laughing metaphorically: Metaphor and humour in discourse*. Paper presented during the 8th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference on July 20-25, 2003, University of La Rioja, Spain. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.132.9689&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
41. Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press.
42. Larkin-Galiñanes, C. (2017). An overview of humor theory. In *Routledge handbook of language and humor*. Attardo, S. (ed.). New York: Routledge, p. 4-16.
43. Libura, A. (2017). Conceptual integration and humor. In *Humorous discourse*. Chłopicki, W. & Brzozowska, D. (eds.). Boston – Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Inc., p. 53-74.
44. Meyer, M. (2017). *What is rhetoric?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
45. Morreall, J. (2009). *Comic relief: A comprehensive philosophy of humor*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
46. Musolff, A. (2006). Metaphor scenarios in public discourse. In *Metaphor and symbol*, 21, p. 23-38.
47. Müller, R. (2015). A metaphorical perspective on humour. In *Cognitive linguistics and humor research*. Brône, G., Feyaerts, K. & Veale, T. (eds.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 111-128.
48. Nerhardt, G. (1976). Operationalization of incongruity in humour research: A critique and suggestions. In *It's a funny thing, humour: Proceedings of the international conference on humour and laughter*. Chapman, A.J. & Foot, H.C. (eds.). Oxford: Pergamon Press, p. 46-51.
49. Oring, E. (2003). *Engaging humor*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
50. Pollio, H. (1996). Boundaries in humor and metaphor. In *Metaphor, implications and applications*. Mio, J. & Katz, A. (eds.). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 231-253.
51. Praggeljaz Group (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically-used words in discourse. In *Metaphor and symbol*, 22, p. 1-40.
52. Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic mechanisms of humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
53. Raskin, V. & Attardo, S. (1994). Non-literality and non-bona-fide in language. In *Pragmatics & cognition*, 2 (1), p. 31-69.
54. Rosch, E. (1978). Principles of categorisation. In *Cognition and categorisation*. Rosch, E. & Lloyd, B.B. (eds.). Hillsdale – New York: Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 27-48.

55. Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
56. Steen, G. (2007). Finding metaphor in discourse: Pragglejaz and beyond. In *Culture, language and representation*, 5, p. 9-25.
57. Steen, G. (2016). Identifying metaphors in language. In *The Routledge handbook of metaphor and language*. Semino, E. & Demjén, Z. (eds.). London and New York: Taylor & Francis, p. 73-87.
58. Stwora, A. (2023). *Synergistic application of metaphorical and humorous elements in Polish and English advertising discourse*. Katowice: University of Silesia Press.
59. Stwora, A. (2022). The intricacies of (debatable) humour in advertising: A cross-cultural standpoint. In *Academic journal of modern philology*, 18, p. 177-190.
60. Stwora, A. (2025). The virtue and shades of aggressive humour in press advertising. In *Journal of language aggression and conflict*, 13 (2), p. 210-239.
61. Tendahl, M. & Gibbs, R. W. (2008). Complementary perspectives on metaphor: Cognitive linguistics and Relevance Theory. In *Journal of pragmatics*, 40, p. 1823-1864.
62. Turner, M. (2015). Blending in language and communication. In *Handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Dąbrowska, E. & Divjak, D. (eds.). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 211-232.
63. Viana, A. (2010). Asymmetry in script opposition. In *Humor*, 23 (4), p. 505-526.
64. Wojtaszek, A. (2023). Does the small print really matter? The influence of explicit exposure to disclaimers on the perception of TV commercials. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*, 8 (2), p. 70-93. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.23.8.2.05>
65. Yule, G. (2011/1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
66. Yus, F. (2016). *Humour and relevance*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Contact data

	<p><i>name:</i></p> <p><i>academic title / rank:</i></p> <p><i>department:</i></p> <p><i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i></p> <p><i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Anna Stwora PhD in Linguistics Assistant Professor Institute of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities University of Silesia in Katowice Grotta-Roweckiego 5, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland anna.stwora@us.edu.pl Linguistic pragmatics, discourse of advertising, humour studies, multimodality, communication studies.</p>
---	---	---

LEGE ARTIS

Language yesterday, today, tomorrow

Vol. XI. No 1 2026

**CONSTRAINTS ON VERBS IN VIETNAMESE SERIAL VERB
CONSTRUCTIONS: A COGNITIVE-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH***Ly Ngoc Toan* *Ho Chi Minh City University of Law**Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam***Received:** 14.10.2025 **Reviewed:** 4.02.2026 and 11.01.2026**Similarity Index:** 0%**Bibliographic description:** Toan, L.N. (2026). Constraints on verb in Vietnamese serial verb constructions: A cognitive-functional approach. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, XI (1), p. 158-174. ISSN 2453-8035 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/lartis.26.11.1.09>**Abstract:** This paper examines Vietnamese serial verb constructions as a macro-event structure. Using attested prose data, it applies a controlled omission test to distinguish anchoring from optional verbs. It proposes a two-level constraint system that combines cognitive constraints on event integration with functional constraints on clause organization. The analysis predicts when serial verbs form mono-clausal serial verb constructions and when they shift toward coordination or multi-event interpretations. The findings clarify the principles that govern Vietnamese serialization and macro-event coherence.**Keywords:** Vietnamese serial verb constructions, macro-event coherence, event integration, controlled omission test, clause chaining, event serialization.**1. Introduction**

Vietnamese is classified as "an isolating language in which grammatical relations are expressed mainly through word order and function words rather than inflectional morphology" (Kim 1940; Lý 1968; Thân 1977; Thompson 1987). From a cognitive-functional perspective, clause patterns are regarded as constructions, that is, "conventional pairings of form and meaning or discourse function" (Goldberg 1995). Accordingly, clause interpretation in Vietnamese is closely tied to how events are packaged and sequenced. Serial verb constructions (SVCs) involve "two or more verbs in sequence without overt markers of coordination or subordination" (Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006; Clark 1978; Foley & Olson 1985; Ji 2024; Lord 1993). Given that meaning is distributed across serial verbs, SVCs continue to pose challenges for theoretical representation and empirical testing (Lovstrand 2020), including empirical diagnostics such as "predicate-like unity tests, object sharing, and clause-scope



properties" (Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006), cross-linguistic generalizations (Haspelmath 2016), and tests such as "object sharing and clause-scope properties" (Baker 1989; Foley 2023; Ji 2024). Vietnamese is a useful case because it can host long serial verbs that encode complex events, sometimes up to "six verbs in a clause" (Đông 2015). Earlier studies have refined terminology, tests, and typologies and have distinguished "serialization" from "verb-construction patterns" (Clark 1978; Đông 2011; Mikami 1981). However, the mechanism that binds serial verbs into a coherent macro-event construal remains insufficiently specified in languages that do not mark clause boundaries morphologically. This study addresses this gap by proposing a constraint-based account of how Vietnamese serial verbs are "bound into a coherent sequence during interpretation" (Foley 2023; Ji 2024).

2. Aim, materials, and methods

This study identifies the binding mechanism through which Vietnamese SVCs are interpreted as coherent macro-events. It examines whether serialization is licensed by linear adjacency or by constraints on verb co-occurrence, ordering, and semantic contribution. The data were drawn from a corpus of short stories by Nam Cao, accessed through the digital edition (Nam Cao 2002) available at <http://sachvui.com>. Serial verbs were extracted from single clauses and filtered according to standard criteria, including the absence of overt coordinators or subordinators, stable participant reference, and a single temporal frame. The analysis is qualitative and applies a controlled omission test to distinguish anchoring verbs from optional verbs. To avoid conflating semantic dependency with clause status, this study validates monoclausality in Vietnamese by examining several indicators, including whether negation and modality apply to the entire clause, whether the verbs share the same arguments, and whether punctuation separates the verbs into distinct clauses.

3. Results and discussion

This section shows that SVCs cannot be identified solely on the basis of linear adjacency. The analysis distinguishes two levels of constraints and predicts that serial verbs form a monoclausal SVC only when speakers can cognitively integrate the events and when the serial verbs function as a single clause. Cognitive event integration requires that at least one verb serve as the event anchor and establishes a macro-event frame, and it further requires that the remaining verbs be licensed as dependent components. The controlled omission test provides supporting evidence for this dependency. For serial verbs to function as a single clause at the discourse level, clausal operators such as negation and modality must apply to the entire serial verb, and the verbs must share the same arguments. When either requirement is not met, serial verbs tend to shift toward coordination or toward a multi-event construal.

3.1 Cognitive constraints on verbs in SVCs

This section describes the cognitive constraints shaping Vietnamese SVCs, "which are constructions" whose interpretation depends on conventional relations among component verbs (Goldberg 1995; Wen 2022). Because Vietnamese relies on word order rather than inflection, the analysis focuses on "event integration", as SVCs require an integrated macro-event rather than a single combination of verb meanings (Talmy 1985; 2000), and integration may involve "projection and compression" (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Four types of constraints are distinguished, namely verbal relation, event closure, coherence, and blend mechanics. Later verbs depend on earlier verbs for an event frame and for their interpretive role within the same event, which is consistent with Vietnamese cognitive linguistic work (CƠ 2010; THẮNG 2005)

3.1.1 Verbal relation constraints

Verbal relation constraints specify directional dependencies between verbs in Vietnamese SVCs and require directional relation to form a coherent macro-event. Directionality distinguishes an anchoring verb that provides the event frame from a dependent verb interpreted relative to that frame. Forward licensing holds when V_1 projects a prospective frame that constrains later verbs, whereas backward licensing holds when a later verb supplies an endpoint, boundary, or result that delimits an earlier verb. Mutual licensing holds when two verbs form a conventional unit and the omission of either verb shifts the overall meaning. These relations specify how co-occurrence and order are licensed at the local verb-to-verb level.

Table 1. Verbal relation constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (following Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006)

Constraint label	Operational description	Serial verb pattern	Examples
Forward-licensing	V_1 licenses V_2	$V_1 \rightarrow V_2 (\rightarrow V_3)$	Định–nhảy–xuống–tắm (intend–jump–descend–bathe)
Backward-licensing	V_2 delimits V_1	$V_1 \leftarrow V_2 (\leftarrow V_3)$	Nhận–ra (recognize–exit)
Mutual-licensing	V_1 interacts with V_2	$V_1 \leftrightarrow V_2 (\leftrightarrow V_3)$	Nghĩ–đến (think–come)

In (1), *định* expresses intention and establishes a goal frame for the clause, and the event type presupposes control by the actor. This frame requires a means component and a goal-fulfilment component within a single event. The serial verb *nhảy xuống* provides the means to achieve the intended result because it encodes a path of motion performed by the same agent. The verb *tắm* provides fulfilment because it specifies the endpoint activity that realizes the intention. Each later verb derives its role from the intention frame that *định* establishes. This frame precedes the means component and the endpoint activity, and a change in order disrupts the intended relations among the components.

- (1) Hấn **định** **nhảy xuống tắm** cho khỏi ngứa. (CPTN09)
 He intend jump descend bathe give stop itch
He intended to jump down to bathe in order to relieve the itch.

In (2), *nhận* can denote a cognitive event that does not entail a clear endpoint in the clause. The verb *ra* contributes a completive value that imposes an endpoint on the event and yields a bounded interpretation. Therefore, the sequence *nhận ra* shifts the event type because *ra* supplies a boundary that *nhận* itself does not specify. The relation is directional because *ra* presupposes an event frame provided by the preceding verb. As a result, the event is construed as bounded once *ra* is added. Because the boundary follows the core act it delimits, reversing the order blocks delimitation. More generally, *ra* requires a prior predicate that can support an endpoint.

- (2) Con chó đã **nhận ra** người chủ cũ. (CMTN12)
 Animal dog PAST recognize exit human master old
The dog recognized its former master.

In (3), the clause encodes a single relation with two core semantic components. The verb *nghĩ* denotes mental activity and activates a domain of possible thought content. The verb *đến* introduces a target concept and profiles it as the focus of that activity. The sequence *nghĩ đến* forms a cohesive unit because *nghĩ* provides the domain and *đến* picks out a specific target in it. Because target selection presupposes an active domain of thought, *đến* depends on *nghĩ* for semantic support. This dependence limits substitution, since this use of *đến* requires a mentally accessible target made available by the mental-activity predicate.

- (3) Nhưng vì **nghĩ đến** sự yên ổn của mình. (CPTN14)
 But because think come peace of self
But because (she) thought of her own peace.

3.1.2 Event-closure constraints

Event-closure constraints determine whether a Vietnamese SVC expresses a bounded event at the construction level, where serial verbs may satisfy verbal-relation constraints yet remain open if no verb supplies an endpoint for the macro-event. Macro-event completion requires a boundary component (endpoint, result, or limit). Using a boundary-removal test, closure holds when the final verb provides the boundary and its omission blocks an event-completion interpretation in the same

context. Table 2 addresses endpoint closure, result closure, directional closure, and intensifier closure. Without closure, the serial verb tends toward an unbounded activity or a multi-event construal.

Table 2. Event-closure constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Talmy 1985)

Constraint label	Operational description	Serial verb pattern	Examples
Event-closure	Endpoint closes event	Setup → core → endpoint	Đi-vào-uống (go-enter-drink)
Result-closure	Result state encoded	Action → result	Đâm-chết (stab-die)
Directional-closure	Endpoint via direction	Action → direction	Lăn-ra (push-exit)
Intensifier-closure	Culmination via escalation	Onset → intensify	Đến-lộn-lên (come-turn-ascend)

In (4), *đi vào* introduces an access frame and profiles entry as an initial event component, but it does not by itself specify a culminating phase for the larger event and therefore leaves the macro-event construal open. The verb *uống* contributes a final-phase activity that provides closure. The serial verb *đi vào uống* forms a single macro-event because *uống* provides the culmination required by the access frame introduced by *đi vào*. The culminating component follows the access frame it completes, and moving the endpoint component elsewhere disrupts this closure. Compatibility also follows from scene continuity, since an access frame selects a subsequent component that can serve as the culmination within the same scene.

- (4) **Hắn đi vào nhà uống nước.** (CPTN16)
 he go enter house drink water
He went into the house to drink water.

In (5), the verb pair *đâm chết* instantiates a resultative configuration that packages cause and outcome as a single macro-event. The verb *đâm* specifies the causal action but leaves the resultant state unresolved at the clause level. The verb *chết* supplies the result state and imposes an outcome boundary that completes the event profile. This ordering follows the direction of causation and limits lexical combinations because the result state encoded in *chết* requires an action that can plausibly give rise to that outcome under stable participant alignment.

- (5) **Bố con thằng Kiến nó đâm chết tôi.** (CPTN18)
 father son that Kiến he stab die me
That Kiến and his son stabbed me to death.

Example (6) illustrates event closure through a directional verb that provides an endpoint for the chain. The verb *lần* profiles sustained effort and does not entail completion, so the event remains unbounded unless another element supplies a boundary. The verb *ra* contributes a directional limit that identifies an exit point and construes the transition as completed. Therefore, the serial verb *lần ra* creates a single macro-event with a determinate endpoint. If *ra* is absent, this serial verb lacks a boundary and supports an activity interpretation that carries no entailment of completion.

- (6) Hấn **lần** ra chỗ thiên thai. (ĐMTN21)
 he grope exit place paradise
He groped his way out to the place called Paradise.

In (7), closure follows from incremental culmination across the series. The verb *đến* denotes an initial transition, and *lộn* specifies reversal as the core change. The verb *lên* adds an upward trajectory on a degree scale that moves toward a peak. The final verb *mất* marks attainment of that peak and prevents further continuation on the same scale, so the serial verbs *đến lộn lên mất* gives rise to a single completed macro-event through a degree boundary. If *mất* is absent, the peak remains unmarked, and the clause permits an ongoing increase in the same discourse context.

- (7) Mộ mà tổ tiên **đến lộn lên** mất. (CPTN22)
 grave ancestor come turn ascend lose
The ancestors' graves almost turned over.

3.1.3 Coherent constraints

Coherent constraints ensure that a Vietnamese SVC is construed as a single constructional event and regulate integration across the serial verb beyond local verb-to-verb relations and event boundedness. The serial verbs are coherent only if later verbs can be interpreted as dependent on earlier verbs in the participant structure, event structure, or grounding structure. Three mechanisms are distinguished: role linking, schema linking, and domain bridging.

Table 3. Coherence constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Goldberg 1995)

Constraint label	Operational description	Serial verb pattern	Examples
Role-linking	Roles map across verbs	Actor: $v_1 \leftrightarrow v_2 \leftrightarrow v_3$	Chạy-về-đòi-ăn (run-return-demand-eat)
Schema-linking	Single schema recoverable	Stance \rightarrow trajectory \rightarrow core	Đám-ra-nói (dare-exit-speak)
Domain-bridging	Domains made compatible	Domain \rightarrow bridge \rightarrow target act	Nghiến-vào-chửi (gnash-enter-curse)

In (8), role linking supports a unified interpretation because a single actor remains constant across predicates and an event frame organizes the sequence. The verb *chạy* establishes the motion frame, and *về* specifies the goal path. The verb *đòi* introduces a request act and assigns the requester role to the same actor that is established in the preceding motion event. The verb *ăn* specifies the requested target and provides an endpoint. Under these conditions, *chạy về đòi ăn* constitutes one macro-event. A multi-event interpretation becomes possible only if actor reference shifts or if *ăn* is absent.

- (8) **Thằng cu bé chạy về đòi ăn.** (NGTN24)
 little boy run return demand eat
The little boy ran home to ask for food.

Schema linking holds when a serial verb activates a recoverable action script and each verb independently fills a required stage. In (9), *dám* encodes a risk-taking stance and projects a socially consequential act. The verb *ra* adds an enablement stage and positions the actor so that execution is possible in context. The verb *nói* performs the intended interactional act and fully completes the script. Accordingly, *dám ra nói* forms a constructional unit because stance, enablement, and execution align along a single trajectory. Without *ra*, the enablement component is missing, weakening the stance–execution link and creating a less unified event construal.

- (9) **Chẳng bà nào dám ra nói với hắn.** (CPTN27)
 no woman any dare exit speak with him
No woman dared to go out and talk to him.

Domain bridging holds when serial verbs span domains, and coherence requires an intermediate linker that grounds the later act in the earlier one. In (10), *nghiến răng* encodes hostility in the affect domain, and *vào* directs it toward engagement by linking affect to outward action. The verb *chửi* adds a speech act whose motivation is licensed by that engagement. Thus, *nghiến răng vào chửi* forms one macro-event, but without *vào*, the speech act does not denote grounding and a two-action inference emerges.

- (10) **Hắn nghiền răng vào mà chửi.** (CPTN28)
 He gnash tooth enter and curse
He gnashed his teeth and cursed.

3.1.4 Blend-mechanism constraints

Blend-mechanism constraints regulate how Vietnamese SVCs license a constructional interpretation through operations of conceptual integration. Serial verbs may evoke distinct micro-scenes, and macro-event coherence depends on whether these scenes integrate into a conventional and interpretable macro-event. The analysis distinguishes three mechanisms: compression, selective projection, and emergence. When these operations do not apply, the serial verbs can be interpreted as independent events.

Table 4. Blend-mechanism constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Fauconnier & Turner 2002)

Constraint label	Operational description	Verb-chain pattern	Examples
Compression	Micro-scenes compressed to macro	Micro ₁ + micro ₂ → macro ₁	Đi-mượn (go-borrow)
Selective-projection	Non-essential detail suppressed	Enabling → goal	Đi-thả (go-release)
Emergence	Novel meaning emerges	Frame → core → effect	Liều-làm (risk-do)

Compression holds when two micro-scenes conflate into one macro-event via a conventional path. In (11), *đi* provides access as an enabling motion scene, while *mượn* provides the transfer goal. Thus, *đi mượn* binds the two components because motion provides the enabling condition for borrowing, while borrowing supplies the goal that licenses the motion event. Without *đi*, borrowing lacks grounding, and without *mượn*, motion cannot encode a goal or achieve pragmatic completion.

- (11) Mà không lẽ **đi mượn** hàng xóm. (CMTN32)
But not possibly go borrow neighbors
But surely one wouldn't go borrow from the neighbors.

Selective projection holds when a series includes an enabling micro-scene, but interpretation profiles the goal act and leaves intermediate structure implicit. In (12), *đi thả* integrates enablement with a goal act within a single event line. The verb *đi* supplies the enabling scene that makes the act feasible, and *thả* provides the goal act that anchors the macro-event, so no explicit path is needed. In blending terms, interpretation selects only the structure supporting the goal act and leaves nonessential detail outside the macro-event profile. Without *đi*, the goal act lacks enablement, and without *thả*, the enabling scene lacks justification, so event unity fails.

- (12) Một anh **đi thả** ống lươn (CPTN33)
 One you go release trap eel

A man went to set eel traps

Under emergence, the effect comes from two verbs forming one conventional unit with a macro meaning that neither verb creates alone. In (13), *liều* encodes a risk stance and sets a value scale, while *làm* supplies the act that the stance evaluates and licenses. Therefore, *liều làm* expresses daring, because the stance frames the act and the act anchors the stance. In blending terms, stance and act are integrated, so evaluation becomes part of the action profile. Without *liều*, the stance frame is not defined, and without *làm*, the construction lacks an action anchor. As a result, the emergent meaning does not arise.

- (13) Hấn không sợ **liều làm** truyện đại dốt (ĐMTN34)
He not fear risk do matter foolish
He does not fear risking to do bad things

3.2 Functional grammar constraints

This section explains how Vietnamese SVCs function as unified clauses in discourse by integrating cognitive linguistics and systemic functional grammar, because "macro-event integration must converge with clause organization and communicative function" (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Likewise, Vietnamese functional descriptions show that "experiential meaning and discourse organization can be realized without extensive inflection through systematic clause structure and process organization" (Hạo 2001; Vân 2005). Functional constraints are defined as clause-level conditions that organize ideational packaging, interpersonal scope, and textual structure in an SVC. Ideationally, the serial verb construes one experiential configuration when later verbs preserve process cohesion and participant structure, including cases where path, manner, and result are realized in one predicate complex. Interpersonally, modality and polarity take clause-wide scope and speech function is realized over the serial verb as a single negotiable unit. Textually, verb order organizes thematic staging and information flow by aligning orientation with earlier verbs and closure with later verbs.

3.2.1 Ideational constraints

Ideational constraints regulate how Vietnamese SVCs construe a single figure with a single process center. A serial verb satisfies these constraints when later verbs elaborate the same process through process inheritance, circumstantial specification, result attribution, or causative embedding, without adding a second center. Later verbs carry ideational roles and block an interpretation of an independent event. Four mechanisms are distinguished: process cohesion, circumstantial

verbalization, result attribution, and causative embedding. These mechanisms are expected in serializing languages, though lexical realization is language specific.

Table 5. Ideational constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Halliday & Matthiessen 2014)

Constraint label	Operational description	Verb-chain formula	Examples
Process-cohesion	One event figure	MAT(A=x) → MAT(A=x)	Làm-nuôi (work-feed)
Circumstantial-verbalization	Path/manner as verb	MOT/PATH → MAT (core)	Mò-sang (creep-across)
Resultative-attribution	V ₂ = result of V ₁	MAT → RES (result)	Đâm-chết (stab-die)
Causative-embedding	<i>Cho</i> marks causation	MAT (cause) → CAUS (<i>cho</i>) → MAT (result)	Vận động-cho-vào (lobby-CAUS-enter)

Abbreviations: MAT = material action; MOT = motion; PATH = path; RES = result; CAUS = causative; A=x = same Actor across verbs.

The examples show how an SVC maintains one ideational configuration with a single process center. In (14), process cohesion links *làm* and *nuôi* within one material process domain. The verb *làm* establishes the event and introduces the experiential figure, and *nuôi* inherits that figure while this verb still specifies its maintaining function. As a result, *làm nuôi* preserves one process center and gives rise to a unified configuration. If *nuôi* is construed as an independent event, the clause shifts toward coordination and no longer realizes one experiential figure.

- (14) Bọn dân hiền lành chỉ ề cổ **làm nuôi** bọn lý hào. (CPCN29)
 They people meek only strain-neck work support group village officials
The meek common people only strain themselves to work and support the village officials.

In (15), circumstantial verbalization keeps one motion event as the single process center. The verb *mò* introduces the core motion process and specifies manner, while *sang* is restricted to expressing path as a circumstantial element in the same event. This division of labor ensures one experiential figure because *sang* does not create an independent process center. As a result, *mò sang* encodes one crossing event with manner and path integrated in one ideational configuration. If *sang* is read as a separate process, the clause becomes a sequential narration of two motion steps, and the crossing construal weakens, confirming *sang* as circumstantial specification rather than a new center.

- (15) Hàng xóm cũng **mò sang**. (CPCN30)
 Neighbors also grope over
The neighbors also came over.

In (16), resultative attribution assigns *chết* as the result state in the same experiential configuration that *đâm* establishes. The verb *đâm* introduces the action process and serves as the process center of the clause. The verb *chết* does not create a new center, it functions as an attributed result specifying the outcome of the action. This attribution closes the figure by fixing an endpoint and completion point. Hence, *đâm chết* encodes one material figure: action plus resultant state. Without *chết*, the ideational structure leaves the outcome open, which gives rise to an uncompleted action description.

- (16) **Bố con thằng Kiên nó đâm chết tôi!** (CPTN38)
 Father son guy Kien he stab kill me
That father and son, Kien's family, stabbed me to death!

In (17), the clause encodes causation as ideational dependency, and *cho* organizes the series as one experiential configuration. The serial verb *vận động* introduces the initiating process and identifies the causer role. The verb *cho* signals that what follows is not an independent-event center, but a caused outcome under the initiating process. The verb *vào* specifies that outcome and remains embedded in the same figure. Accordingly, *vận động cho vào* realizes one causative figure with an initiator and an embedded outcome. Without this constraint, the clause tends toward two separate processes and weaker ideational integration.

- (17) **Lý Kiên ngấm ngầm vận động cho vào tù.** (CPCN33)
 Village Kien secretly maneuver give enter prison
Ly Kien secretly maneuvered to have someone put in prison.

3.2.2 Interpersonal constraints

Interpersonal constraints are clause-level conditions that construe a Vietnamese SVC as a single speech act realized as a single negotiable proposition, rather than multiple predications. In systemic functional grammar, interpersonal meaning is organized through mood, modality, polarity, and operator scope, so unity holds when an interpersonal operator takes scopes over the entire serial verb and the serial verb can be targeted as one unit by interrogation, negation, or command. These constraints are non-optional because scope relations bind the verbs into one interpersonal domain; without them, the chain aligns with coordination or separate propositions. The analysis distinguishes modal scope, polarity scope, imperative licensing, and mood tagging. These scope effects are expected cross-linguistically, though operator forms are language specific.

Table 6. Interpersonal constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Halliday & Matthiessen 2014)

Constraint label	Operational description	Verb-chain formula	Examples
Modal scope	One modal for whole chain	MODAL ▷ {V ₁ →V ₂ ...}	phải-chết (must-die)
Polarity scope	One negation for whole chain	NEG ▷ {V ₁ →V ₂ ...}	(không) sợ-đi (tù) ((not) fear-go (to jail))
Imperative licensing	Imperative licenses V-V	IMP (op) ▷ {V ₁ →V ₂ }	thử-hỏi (try-ask)
Mood tag	Final tag fixes mood	{V ₁ →V ₂ ...} + TAG	kêu-toáng-lên (shout-loud-up)

Abbreviations: MODAL = modal operator; NEG = negation; IMP = imperative operator; TAG = clause-final mood tag; ▷ = scopes over the verb chain.

The binding operation is shown in the examples via operator scope across the clause. In (18), *phải chết* illustrates modal scope. The modal operator *phải* assigns necessity to the clause as a whole and scopes over the following event content. The verb *chết* provides the main predicate that supplies the propositional content of the clause. Therefore, *phải chết* functions as a single interactional necessity claim because necessity targets the entire event core, not just one verb. If necessity is confined to a single lexical process, the clause loses the same clausal force.

- (18) Ai làm gì anh mà anh **phải chết**? (CPCN34)
 Who work what you then you must die
Who did what to you that you have to die?

In (19), polarity scope is shown by *không sợ đi tù*. The negative operator *không* scopes over the proposition headed by *sợ*, setting negative polarity for the stance as a whole. The serial verb *đi tù* specifies the projected event that functions as the fear complement in the same proposition, so the clause construes one stance toward one projected outcome. In this case, negation targets the interpersonal value of the fear claim, not a lexical verb in isolation. If negation is repeated or embedded inside *đi tù*, the clause tends toward contrastive focus or a split structure that weakens clausal unity.

- (19) Con không **sợ đi** tù. (CPCN35)
 I not fear go prison
I am not afraid of going to prison.

In (20), imperative licensing appears in *thử hỏi*, which configures the clause as a directive move. The verb *thử* contributes a challenge stance that frames the directive, rather than an asserted event of trying. The verb *hỏi* provides the demanded action nucleus, and *cả làng* specifies its target in the same directive. Thus, *Mày thử hỏi cả làng* functions as one interpersonal move because directive

force takes scope over *hỏi* and its complement. Without *thử*, the challenge stance disappears, and the clause shifts toward a plain command or a neutral request.

- (20) Máy **thử hỏi** cả làng. (CPCN36)
 You try ask all village
Just try asking the whole village.

In (21), a clause-final mood tag anchors interpersonal mood for the whole serial configuration. The verb *kêu* establishes the core vocal process, *toáng* specifies intensity or manner, and *lên* adds rising escalation in the same configuration. Then, the mood tag assigns directive force and targets the interlocutor, so *kêu toáng lên* serves as the experiential base for one directive move. Without this tag, the action remains but mood anchoring is lost, which shifts the clause-level interpersonal stance.

- (21) Lại **kêu toáng lên** xem nào. (CPCN37)
 Again shout loudly up see please
Again, start shouting loudly and see!

3.2.3 Textual constraints

Textual constraints construe a Vietnamese SVC as a single discourse message by packaging the chain through Theme–Rheme organization and Given–New distribution. Textually, a serial verb is unified when the clause provides a point of departure and later verbs are interpreted as staged components in one progression, which blocks list-like interpretation and restricts reorderability. The analysis distinguishes thematic staging, New-at-closure, iconic ordering, and posture Theme. These patterns reflect general discourse principles of Theme choice and information flow.

Table 7. Textual constraints. Source: Author's own compilation (based on Halliday & Matthiessen 2014)

Constraint label	Operational description	Verb-chain formula	Examples
Thematic-staging	Early V sets scene	Theme [Vstage] ^ Rheme [Vcore→Vend]	Đi-lấy-về (go-get-return)
New-at-closure	Final V carries New	Given (V ₁ , V ₂) → New(V ₃)	Bế-bước-vào (carry-step-enter)
Iconic-ordering	Chronological verb order	Vprep < Vact	Kéo-lên-quệt (pull-ascend-wipe)
Posture-Theme	Posture V as Theme	Theme [Vposture] ^ Rheme [Vperception]	Đứng-nhìn (stand-watch)

Abbreviations: **Theme/Rheme** = information structure; **Given/New** = information status; ^ = Theme–Rheme boundary; → = sequencing in the chain; < = precedes (iconic temporal order); **Vstage/Vcore/Vend** = staging/core/closure verbs; **Vprep/Vact** = preparatory/action verbs; **Vposture/Vperception** = posture/perception verbs.

In (22), thematic staging packages the serial verb *đi-lấy-về* as a single message progression. The verb *đi* functions as Theme and establishes a departure frame, *lấy* develops the Rheme as the core retrieval act, and *về* provides closure by resolving the trajectory and by supplying an endpoint. Therefore, this serial verb moves from orientation to focal action and then to resolution, thereby supporting discourse coherence. If *đi* is omitted or displaced from initial position, the clause loses (or marks) its thematic staging that weakens message orientation.

- (22) Chiều nay ông **đi lấy về**. (CPCN38)
 Afternoon this I go get back
This afternoon, you go and get it back.

In (23), information structure links the series by placing the main update clause-final, so the serial verb functions as one message. The verb *bé* introduces the carrying action and its participant configuration; *bước* adds motion as preparatory material in the same configuration. The final verb *vào* supplies the entry transition and delivers the discourse update that advances the message. Hence, *bé bước vào* treats earlier material as Given and reserves New information for clause closure. Without *vào*, the entry payoff is missing, so the message lacks completion in context, and this supports a constraint that aligns New information with the position of final clause in the series.

- (23) Chị **bé** con rón rón **bước vào** chỗ chồng nằm. (NGCN39)
 She carry child quietly step into place husband lie
She carried her child and quietly stepped into the place where her husband lay.

In (24), textual progression is constrained by iconic order. The serial verb *kéo lên* introduces a preparatory enabling stage that makes a later effect possible. The verb *quệt* encodes the effect stage and presupposes that the enabling stage is available in the same message line. Hence, *kéo lên quệt* mirrors the relation of prerequisite effect and supports coherent message development within the clause. Reversing the order presents the effect before the prerequisite, which disrupts procedural coherence. This contrast supports ordering as a textual constraint on the verb series.

- (24) Mụ vừa **kéo** vạt áo **lên quệt** nước mũi. (CPCN40)
 woman just pull shirt flap ascend wipe water nose
The woman had just pulled up the hem of her shirt to wipe her nose.

In (25), a posture verb sets the message point of departure and anchors an embodied viewpoint. The verb *đứng* provides a marked Theme by placing the actor in a stable stance that is regarded as a given

orientation. The verb *nhìn* supplies the perceptual act as the Rheme nucleus, and *ra* adds outward direction for attention in the same message line. As a result, *đứng nhìn ra* packages posture as orientation, perception as the main update, and direction as final specification. Without *đứng*, embodied grounding is lost and message unity is reduced in the same discourse context.

- (25) **Đứng nhìn mà cười nhạt** (CPCN41)
 Stand look and smile faintly
Standing there, he/she looked on and gave a faint, cold smile.

4. Conclusion

This study addresses an explanatory gap in research on Vietnamese SVCs by specifying what binds multiple verbs into a coherent macro-event in a non-inflectional language. It shows that acceptable serialization is not determined by adjacency alone but by a two-level constraint system that integrates cognitive event binding with functional clause licensing. Cognitively, directional licensing provides the core binding mechanism, with boundedness and chain-wide coherence constraining when a verb series produces a macro-event rather than coordination or a multi-event construal. Functionally, event integration is not sufficient unless the verb chain also converges on unified predication in discourse, with clause-level organization enforcing a single experiential configuration and clause-wide interpersonal scope while regulating textual staging. Overall, the account explains why some verbs anchor macro-event coherence while others contribute secondary elaboration, and it offers a principled basis for analyzing Vietnamese SVCs and for applied work where event packaging matters.

Abbreviations


CMCN:	Con Mục Chức Năng (Con Mục Functional)
CMTN:	Con Mục Tri Nhận (Con Mục Cognitive)
CPCN:	Chí Phèo Chức Năng (Chí Phèo Functional)
CPTN:	Chi Phèo Tri Nhận (Chi Phèo Cognitive)
ĐMCN:	Đui Mù Tri Nhận (Đui Mù Cognitive)
ĐMCN:	Đui Mù Chức Năng (Đui Mù Functional)
NGTN:	Nghèo Tri Nhận (Nghèo Cognitive)
NGCN:	Nghèo Chức Năng (Ghèo Functional)
SVC(s):	Serial verb construction(s)

References

1. Aikhenvald, A.Y. & Dixon, R.M.W. (2006). *Serial verb constructions: A cross-linguistic typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Baker, M.C. (1989). Object sharing and projection in serial verb constructions. In *Linguistic inquiry*, 20 (4), p. 513-553.
3. Cao, N. (2002). *A collection of short stories*. Hanoi: Literary publisher. Available at: <https://sachvui.com.vn/>
4. Clark, M. (1978). *Co-verbs and case in Vietnamese*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
5. Cờ, T.V. (2010). *Dictionary of cognitive linguistics: Explanation and comparison*. Ho Chi Minh city: Phương Đông Publishing House.
6. Đông, L.Q. (2011). Some relevant terms in the study of Vietnamese serial verb constructions. In *VNU journal of social sciences and humanities*, 27 (5E), p.1-8.
7. Đông, L.Q. (2015). Translation of Vietnamese serial verb constructions and/or multi-verb constructions into English. In *VNU journal of science: Foreign studies*, 31 (4), p.1-10.
9. Fauconnier, G. & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
10. Foley, W.A. & Olson, M. (1985). Clausehood and verb serialization. In *Grammar inside and outside the clause: Some approaches to theory from the field*, Nichols, J. & Woodbury, A.C. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.17-60.
11. Goldberg, A.E. (1995). *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
12. Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar*. London: Routledge.
13. Hạo, C.X. (2006). *Vietnamese: An outline of functional grammar* (3rd ed.). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
14. Haspelmath, M. (2016). The serial verb construction: Comparative concept and cross-linguistic generalizations. In *Language and linguistics compass*, 10 (9), p. 473-490.
15. Ji, J. (2024). Serial verb constructions as double-headed syntactic structures: Evidence from Igbo. In *International journal of language and linguistics*, 12 (5), p. 187-193.
16. Kim, T.T. (1940). *Vietnamese grammar*. Hanoi: Lê Thăng Publishing House.
17. Lord, C. (1993). *Historical change in serial verb constructions*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
18. Lovstrand, J. (2020). Serial verb constructions: In *Annual review of linguistics*, 7 (1), p. 1-22.
19. Lý, L.V. (1968). *A preliminary study of Vietnamese grammar*. Hanoi: Educational Materials Center.
20. Mikami, N. (1981). Serial verb construction in Vietnamese and Cambodian. In *Journal of the linguistic society of Japan*, 79, p. 55-118.
21. Talmy, L. (1985). Lexicalization patterns: Semantic structure in lexical forms. In *Language typology and syntactic description, vol. 3: Grammatical categories and the lexicon*. Shopen, T. (ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 57-149.
22. Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a cognitive semantics, vol. I: Concept structuring systems*. London: MIT Press.
23. Thân, N.K. (1977). *Verbs in Vietnamese*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
24. Thăng, L.T. (2005). *Cognitive linguistics: From general theory to Vietnamese language practice*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
25. Thompson, L. C. (1987). *A Vietnamese reference grammar*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

26. Toàn, L.N. (2025a). A linguistic study of Ho Chi Minh's political writing style. In *Journal of language*, (2), p. 52-65.
27. Toàn, L.N. (2025b). Enhancing administrative texts through cohesive devices and narrative elements. In *Jurnal arbitrer*, 12 (2), p. 210-226.
28. Toàn, L.N. (2022c). Expressions of caused motion in Vietnamese: A perspective from cognitive linguistics. In *Journal of the southeast Asian linguistics society*, 15 (1), p. 51-78.
29. Văn, H.V. (2005). *Experiential grammar of Vietnamese: A description from a systemic functional perspective*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
30. Wen, X. (2022). Construction pragmatics: A brief sketch. In *Lege artis. Language yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Trnava: University of SS Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, VII (1), p. 249-266.

Contact data

	<p><i>name:</i></p> <p><i>academic title:</i></p> <p><i>department:</i></p> <p><i>institution:</i></p> <p><i>e-mail:</i></p> <p><i>fields of interest:</i></p>	<p>Lý Ngọc Toàn PhD in Linguistics Department of Legal English Ho Chi Minh City University of Law, Vietnam No. 2, Nguyen Tat Thanh Stress, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam lintoan@hcmulaw.edu.vn Cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, forensic linguistics.</p>
--	--	---