

LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH VISUAL ADJECTIVES IN LITERARY TEXTS: A COGNITIVE-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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This paper explores the linguistic functions of English visual adjectives (e.g., dark, bright, clear, golden) in literary texts from a cognitive-stylistic perspective. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, embodied-cognitive linguistics, and foregrounding theory, it argues that visual adjectives not only denote visual properties but also systematically map onto non-visual domains such as emotion, evaluation, and cognition. Through analysis of authentic literary examples, the study identifies three major functions: (1) ideational – constructing imagery and scene; (2) interpersonal – conveying emotional valence and evaluation; (3) stylistic – achieving foregrounding effects via deviation or over-regularity. The findings suggest that visual adjectives serve as crucial bridges between perception and meaning-making in literary narrative.

Key words: visual adjectives; conceptual metaphor; foregrounding; literary stylistics; linguistic functions; English literature

1. Introduction. Adjectives of visual perception – dark, bright, clear, golden, pale, glittering – occur frequently in literary texts. Traditionally, they are treated as descriptive modifiers that add visual detail. However, a closer examination reveals that many uses of visual adjectives go beyond mere sensory depiction. For instance, when a character experiences a dark mood or a bright future, the adjectives dark and bright do not refer to visual properties but to emotional states or abstract evaluations. Such metaphorical transfers are systematic and productive, suggesting that visual adjectives are deeply involved in the construction of meaning across domains.

This paper investigates the linguistic functions of English visual adjectives in literary texts, adopting an integrated cognitive-stylistic framework. Specifically, it asks: (1) How do visual adjectives contribute to ideational meaning (imagery and scene construction)? (2) How do they perform interpersonal functions (expressing emotions and evaluations)? (3) How can their stylistic effects be explained through foregrounding theory? By answering these questions, the paper aims to demonstrate that visual adjectives are not merely decorative but functionally rich resources for literary meaning-making.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis draws on three complementary theories.

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

According to conceptual metaphor theory, human cognition is fundamentally metaphorical. Abstract domains (e.g., emotion, time, morality) are understood via concrete domains (e.g., space, perception, the body). Visual adjectives, grounded in the source domain of sight, frequently map onto target domains such as knowledge (CLEAR IS UNDERSTANDABLE), emotion (DARK IS SAD), and evaluation (BRIGHT IS GOOD). These mappings are not random but reflect embodied experience.

2.2. Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (Winter, 2019)

Winter's embodied lexicon hypothesis argues that language structure reflects perceptual experience. Visual adjectives exhibit high "modality exclusivity" (Lynott & Connell, 2009), meaning they are strongly associated with the visual sense. Yet they also show systematic cross-modal and cross-domain extensions. The principle of "perceptual

salience” explains why vision – the dominant human sense – provides the most productive source domain for metaphorical mappings.

2.3. Foregrounding Theory (Leech & Short, 2007; Shen, 2010)

In literary stylistics, foregrounding refers to linguistic devices that attract the reader’s attention through deviation from a norm or through parallelism. Visual adjectives can be foregrounded in two ways: (a) deviation – unconventional collocations (e.g., loud color, cold blue) that create synesthetic or novel effects; (b) over-regularity – dense repetition of adjectives from a specific visual subcategory (e.g., repeated dark, gloomy, shadowy in a gothic scene) that builds a dominant atmospheric quality.

3. Data and Method. The data for this study come from a small purposive sample of 19th- and 20th-century English literary texts, including F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), and selected short stories by James Joyce (early 20th century). Visual adjectives were identified based on their primary denotation of visual properties (color, luminance, or visual state). For each example, the adjective was analyzed for its literal vs. metaphorical/synesthetic use, its emotional valence (positive, negative, neutral), and its role in foregrounding.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Ideational Function: Constructing Imagery

At the most basic level, visual adjectives create vivid mental images. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald writes: “a golden and lavender mist hung over the water.” Here golden and lavender are purely visual, anchoring the scene in specific colors. Such uses contribute to the story’s aesthetic texture and help readers visualize the luxurious, dream-like atmosphere of West Egg.

4.2. Interpersonal Function: Emotional Valence

Beyond imagery, visual adjectives carry strong evaluative and emotional meanings. Consider the following contrast:

a bright, sunny morning (positive valence)

a dark, dreary landscape (negative valence)

In *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist describes a “cold, pale moon” – both adjectives (cold as synesthetic, pale as visual) evoke loneliness and emotional distance. Thus visual adjectives serve an interpersonal function by signaling the narrator’s or character’s attitude toward the scene.

4.3. Metaphorical Extensions to Abstract Domains

Following conceptual metaphor theory, visual adjectives frequently map onto non-visual domains. For example:

DARK (source: visual darkness) maps onto target domains such as sadness or evil, as in dark thoughts.

BRIGHT maps onto intelligence or hope, as in a bright mind.

CLEAR maps onto understandability, as in clear explanation.

GOLDEN maps onto positive or ideal qualities, as in golden memories.

In literature, such metaphors are often creatively extended. For instance, in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the protagonist recalls “the dark consciousness of his own nature” – here dark fuses visual darkness with moral and psychological obscurity.

4.4. Synesthetic Uses

Synesthesia occurs when a visual adjective modifies a noun from another sensory domain (e.g., sound, touch). Examples include loud colors, cold blue, sweet light. Although Winter (2019) argues that such uses may be literal for some adjectives (due to

cross-modal semantic potential), in literary texts they are often stylistically marked. For instance, “a piercing red” combines visual and tactile/auditory sensations, creating an intensified, defamiliarizing effect.

4.5. Foregrounding Effects

Visual adjectives can become foregrounded in two patterns.

Deviation: In *The Great Gatsby*, the famous “blue gardens” – gardens are not typically blue; the deviation creates an surreal, dreamlike quality.

Over-regularity: In Poe’s gothic tales, clusters of dark visual adjectives (gloomy, shadowy, black, dim) recur so frequently that they build a dominant atmosphere (foregrounding by high frequency).

Both patterns draw the reader’s attention to the language itself, making visual adjectives function as carriers of thematic and aesthetic meaning.

5. Conclusion. This paper has examined the linguistic functions of English visual adjectives in literary texts through a cognitive-stylistic lens. The analysis shows that these adjectives perform three primary functions: ideational (imagery construction), interpersonal (emotional/evaluative expression), and stylistic (foregrounding). Their ability to map from the visual domain to abstract domains (emotion, cognition, evaluation) is grounded in embodied experience and conceptual metaphor. Future research could extend the analysis to diachronic changes in the use of visual adjectives or compare different literary genres.

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ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ФУНКЦИИ АНГЛИЙСКИХ ВИЗУАЛЬНЫХ ПРИЛАГАТЕЛЬНЫХ В ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ ТЕКСТАХ: КОГНИТИВНО-СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

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В данной статье исследуются лингвистические функции английских визуальных прилагательных (например, *dark, bright, clear, golden*) в художественных текстах с когнитивно-стилистической точки зрения. Опираясь на теорию концептуальной метафоры, воплощенно-когнитивную лингвистику и теорию выдвижения на первый план, она утверждает, что визуальные прилагательные не только обозначают визуальные свойства, но и систематически соотносятся с не визуальными областями, такими как эмоции, оценка и познание. На основе анализа аутентичных литературных примеров в исследовании выделяются три основные функции: (1) идейная – создание образов и сцен; (2) межличностные – передают эмоциональную окраску и оценку; (3) стилистические – создают эффект подчеркивания с помощью отклонений или чрезмерной регулярности. Результаты исследования показывают, что визуальные прилагательные служат важными связующими звеньями между восприятием и созданием смысла в литературном повествовании.

Ключевые слова: визуальные прилагательные; концептуальная метафора; акцентирование внимания; литературная стилистика; лингвистические функции; английская литература.