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MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF PEOPLE POURING IN: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRANTS' REPRESENTATION AND THE ANTI-MIGRANT POSTURE IN TRUMP'S SPEECH

Abstract: This study offers a critical and multimodal discourse analysis of Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric during the final weeks of the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign. Drawing on a corpus of 135 annotated video clips totalling 180 minutes and primarily sourced from the X platforms *TheWarRoom* and *The Blaze*n – the analysis investigates how discursive, rhetorical, and gestural strategies construct a consistent anti-migrant posture. The study reveals that Trump deploys a combination of dehumanizing metaphors, militarized language, and emotionally charged narrative elements to frame migrants as existential threats. Through repetition, hyperbole, and generalization, his discourse reinforces ideological polarization and normalizes extreme political responses. Migrants are systematically portrayed as criminals, invaders, and carriers of disease, while Trump's use of gesture – particularly beats, deictic pointing, and eyebrow raises—further intensifies the rhetorical impact of his claims. The conflation of terms such as "asylum seekers", "illegal immigrants", and "criminals" adds to a climate of confusion and fear, amplified by selective references to statistical data. The study concludes that Trump's multimodal discourse contributes not only to legitimizing harsh immigration policies but also to shaping public affect and political identity through the strategic mobilization of fear. This research thus illustrates the rhetorical power of populist discourse in constructing socially divisive narratives under the guise of national defense.

Key-words: Trump, anti-immigration stance, corpus, 2024 campaign, political speech

1. Introduction

In 2024, Trump's anti-immigration stance remained a central theme in his speeches. This study aims, from a critical and multimodal discourse analysis perspective, to examine the discursive strategies and methods used by the Republican candidate. It focuses on the various linguistic and discursive tools that

reinforce the recurring themes and imagery employed by Trump and analyzes how these elements contribute to constructing his anti-migrant posture.

The speeches analyzed are those delivered by the candidate himself, exclusively addressing the theme of immigration. The analysis covers the period from October 1, 2024, to the day of the presidential election, corresponding to the final weeks of the campaign. The dataset consists of 135 video clips totalling 180 minutes. These clips are primarily sourced from the social media platform X. The two accounts involved are *TheWarRoom*, which is explicitly pro-Trump, and *The Blaze*, which presents itself as a more neutral news and media platform.[1] Every day, each video that was published on the two accounts was watched and only those dealing with the topic of immigration were selected for the corpus. The speeches were then manually annotated so as to provide both a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

I will first examine the different ways migrants are named and represented in Trump's speeches, before discussing the rhetorical strategies employed by the candidate at the time to promote his anti-immigration stance.

2. The naming and representation of migrants

2.1. Metaphors and images

Trump's rhetoric on immigration is marked by strong associations between migrants and various threats – some of which rely on well-established tropes, while others are more novel. A key example is the link he draws between migrants and crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism, which serves to portray them as inherently dangerous individuals.

(1) She's imported *an army of illegal alien gang members and migrant criminals* from the dungeons of the Third World, they come from the dungeons of the Third World. Many many are *prisoners*, many are—some had *death sentences*, they were gonna be executed for *murder*.[2] (10/13)

(2) Today I make you this promise I will liberate Wisconsin and our entire nation from this *mass migration invasion of murderers, child predators, drug dealers, gang members and thugs*. (10/6)

Similarly, he frames immigration as an epidemic threat that might echo the COVID period:

(3) I will bring back Title 42, *medical rejections* – people come in, they're *very sick, very sick* they'll come into our country, they're *very very very sick* with *highly contagious disease*, and they let into our country to *infect* our country. And they're coming in numbers nobody's ever seen before. (10/11)

(4) And the corrupt media is outraged that I keep talking about migrant crime and *the migrant crime epidemic*. (10/1)

Beyond criminality and disease, Trump also employs dehumanizing language, likening migrants to animals and violent predators:

(5) Once again, this *animal* had arrived at our border and was released into the United States by Kamala Harris. (10/11)

(6) To expedite the removal of these *savage gangs*, and I will invoke the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, think of that. (10/11)

(7) She's resettled them into your communities, congratulations! And, they can now *prey on* innocent Americans for a while. (10/13)

(8) These are *animals*. (10/13)

(9) Three days ago, I was in the small town of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin where an illegal alien member of a savage Venezuelan Prison gang from Kamala who let them in to the country *and this vicious and savage* was arrested this month. (10/1)

(10) I'm outraged that Kamala released into America the *predator* who murdered Laken-Riley; […] I'm outraged that she let in the *savage* who raped and murdered Rachel Morin. (10/1)

Comparing migrants to animals serves as a dehumanizing strategy used to justify the anti-immigration posture as well as the political response.

Trump also uses the image of an overwhelming, uncontrollable influx of migrants, which is further reinforced through metaphors of flooding, contagion, and invasion:

(11) Now let me tell you what is happening at the border because it's a fact and you, probably more than anybody else, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, people are *pouring in* and taking your jobs. (10/12)

(12) When I win on November 5th, the *migrant invasion* ends, and the restoration of our country begins. (10/12)

(13) We're gonna stop *the people from pouring into our border*. (10/2)

(14) With four more years for Kamala, *she'd flood every Michigan's small town and midwestern city with illegal migrants* from the most dangerous places on Earth. (10/3)

(15) They're just releasing them in, *like water coming into the country*. I wish it was just water. (10/4)

It is interesting to note that though this image of flooding is not new, it fits Trump's construction of his anti-immigration posture – as Ahmed (2014, p.46) states, "[w]ords like 'flood' and 'swamped' are used, which create associations between asylum and the loss of control and hence work by mobilising fear, or the anxiety of being overwhelmed by the actual or potential proximity of others".

2.2. The mental health question

On a different level, Trump repeatedly conflates two distinct meanings of the word asylum: one referring to the legal protection granted to individuals fleeing persecution, and the other to mental health institutions. This rhetorical slippage assimilates asylum seekers with individuals confined to psychiatric facilities, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes, and contributes to a broader climate of anxiety and hostility surrounding immigration.

Trump thus establishes a controversial and stigmatizing association by employing language that links immigration to mental instability. He goes so far as to claim that foreign governments are deliberately sending individuals with mental health issues to the United States, asserting, for example, that:

> (16) For four straight years, she's imported an army of illegal alien gang members and migrant criminals from the dungeons all over the world. Not, not South America, all over the world they come. From prisons and jails, *insane asylums, mental institutions*. (10/13)

Trump frames asylum seekers not as vulnerable individuals in need of protection, but as mentally unwell people, thereby delegitimizing their claims to asylum. By merging the figure of the asylum seeker with that of the mentally ill, he constructs a narrative that undermines humanitarian obligations.

According to Time,[3] this narrative may be rooted in a longer history of American political discourse, dating back to the 1980s Mariel boatlift,[4] during which Cuban refugees were similarly portrayed as mentally ill and criminal. However, it was later proven that only a portion of them fit those descriptions.[5] Referring to the *Marielitos* also serves as a means of gaining public support for Trump's portrayal of migrants, since at the time a vast majority of U.S. citizens disapproved of the Cuban settlement.

A recurring reference in Trump's rhetoric is Hannibal Lecter, the fictional, mentally unstable serial killer created by Thomas Harris – further implying that he equates migrants with individuals suffering from severe mental illness:

> (17) She has […] unleashed an army of gangs and criminal migrants from prisons and jails, from *insane asylums, and mental institutions*. You know who comes from *the insane asylums*? You know who it is, right? They always give me a hard time. *Hannibal Lecter, the great Hannibal Lecter*… you know the press to show you how bad they are… I'm talking about *insane asylums*, and then I'm talking about *Hannibal Lecter* – a little lighthearted humor about an unfunny subject. And they always go "He always brings up *Hannibal Lecter*. What does that have to do?" It has to do with the fact that these are the kind of people coming into our country from *insane asylums*! (11/2)
>
> (18) So, they're coming in, many are coming in from jails and prisons and *mental institutions, insane asylums, that's like, you know, a step above, right, insane asylum*. And whenever I go, *Hannibal Lecter*, you know what I'm talking about. […] They're here, you say "*Hannibal Lecter*, why would he mention-" well, you know why? Because *he was a sick puppy, and we have sick puppies coming into our country*. (10/15)

Hart (2010,p. 58) states that "[a]ctionyms like 'asylum-seekers' and anthroponyms like 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' […] distinguish[ing] the 'non-native' from the 'native' population". Such discursive strategies serve not only

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[3] https://time.com/7006684/trump-asylum-mariel-history/

[4] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mariel-boatlift

[5] "Although Castro sent some who were criminals or mentally ill, most of the Marielitos were seeking relief from political repression and a stagnating economy" https://time.com/4888381/immigration-act-mariel-boatlift-history/

to delegitimize migrants but also to evoke fear among Trump's supporters, encouraging them to perceive migration as a threat to national security and social order. Indeed, these strategies of de-spatialisation and dissimilation (Hart, 2010, p. 58) present immigrants as "different from or unfamiliar to the in-group", therefore becoming a common enemy.

2.3. A common enemy

By framing immigrants as invaders against whom insiders must mobilize, Trump portrays the United States as a besieged homeland under attack from outsiders. He constructs a common enemy as the primary threat through the use of war-related language and the dehumanization of migrants, ultimately presenting deportation as the only viable solution.

A central feature of Trump's immigration discourse is the construction of a stark binary opposition between "us" and "them". This division serves both to consolidate in-group identity and to dehumanize the out-group, stripping it of individuality and moral standing. This strategy is especially evident in his repeated use of personal pronouns to delineate belonging:

> (19) He's looking for interpreters because they don't speak the language of... you and you and everybody in this room (10/11)

In this example, "you and you and everybody in this room" are portrayed as the legitimate, unified American public, in contrast to the nameless and faceless outsiders who "don't speak the language." As Ahmed (2014, p. 2) states, "the 'you' implicitly evokes a 'we', a group of subjects who can identify themselves with the injured nation." Hart (2010, pp. 56-57) explains that "the construction of an out-group presupposes the construction of an in-group", even if the latter "is often left implicit for the text-consumer to infer". In the following example, the two groups are explicitly identified:

> (20) They came from mental institutions and insane asylums, and they came from terrorists' camps where they train them to come into the United States. And they come into the United States, many many terrorists. We have more terrorists coming into the United States in the last three years than we have had in the last thirty years. And these are the real terrorists, these are the real ones. We have no idea who they are. They let them come in. (10/1)

This use of pronouns emphasizes social division and exclusion while reinforcing an idealized, homogeneous national "we". Migrants, by contrast, are routinely referred to as an undifferentiated mass – "they"[6] – and are stripped of individual identities. Trump states:

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[6] "Third person plural pronouns 'they' and 'them' are exclusive of both speaker and addressee. They therefore construct an out-group relative to the discourse participants, who are further inferred as belonging to the same social in-group" (Hart, 2010, p. 59).

(21) They have no idea who these people are, where they come from, where they're going. (10/4)

The erasure of migrant subjectivity is central to constructing them as legitimate targets of state-led security actions and to reinforcing the moral righteousness of the in-group's protective stance.

Depersonalization of the enemy is a common right-wing strategy: creating an anonymous, unidentified, and non-identifiable enemy fosters the belief that this disembodied threat is everywhere and could strike at any time (Mannoni, 2024, p. 95).

Trump's immigration rhetoric is also steeped in the language of war, mobilizing his audience around the image of a common enemy and framing migrants as hostile invaders who threaten to destabilize the nation. Through repeated use of martial and militarized vocabulary, he constructs a narrative in which the U.S. is portrayed as an endangered country that must be defended and liberated—and presents himself as the only person capable of doing so:

> (22) We will close the border, we will stop the invasion of illegals into our country. We will *defend our territory, we will not be conquered, we will not be conquered! We will reclaim our sovereignty* and Colorado will vote for Trump as a protest and signal to the world that we are not going to take it anymore! We're not gonna take it anymore. I will *liberate* Colorado » (10/11)
>
> (23) And anyone who would import criminal gangs to occupy America – we're not gonna be *occupied* by anybody, cannot ask to be president of this country. Anyone who orchestrated an invasion of America cannot lead America. (10/13)
>
> (24) And we will call it *"Operation Aurora"* that's what we're going to – in honor of the people that have suffered in Aurora, at hands of this horrible gang, Operation Aurora. (10/13)

Here the noun phrase "Operation Aurora" is used to evoke a military operation, such as Operation Enduring Freedom for example.

> (25) So I will rescue Arizona, and every town across America that has been *invaded* and *conquered*, they've been *conquered*, they're conquering the towns (10/13)
>
> (26) I will send in federal law enforcement to *liberate every Midwestern town* that has been taken over by migrant gangs and criminal alien thugs. (10/1)
>
> (27) And we're not allowing these people to *invade* us, to *conquer* us. (10/6)
>
> (28) The United States is now an *occupied country*. But on November 5th, 2024, that'll be *liberation day* in America, *liberation day*. (10/16)

These statements frame immigration as an act of war and position Trump as a military leader in charge of rescuing the nation.

> (29) So for the sake of our families, for the sake of our children, we will keep on going and as the expression goes, I mean, I'm a little embarrassed to say it to be honest with you, but we're gonna say it because a lot of people do said, *we will fight! Fight! Fight! In a fight for our country. We're gonna fight for our country*. (10/6)

By employing phrases like the one in (29), Trump transforms civic participation into a form of combat, appealing to patriotism and encouraging his supporters to

see themselves as soldiers in a struggle for national survival. As Musolff (2024) states, war metaphors "typically justify drastic political measures, invite strong emotional identification and loyalty in an 'us-vs.-them' schema." In Trump's rhetoric, immigration is not merely framed as a policy issue, but as an urgent security crisis that legitimizes aggressive responses under the guise of national defense and patriotic duty. Indeed, he evokes apocalyptic imagery to heighten the sense of crisis:

(30) But they are illegal immigrants as far as I'm concerned. *They're destroying the town, they're destroying the whole, they'll end up destroying the state*. We cannot let this happen. (10/9)

He then presents the response to immigration as a large-scale national security operation:

(31) On that same day we will begin *the task of finding and deporting every single illegal alien gang member from our country, we'll get them out*. (10/11).
(32) We will send elite squads of I.C.E, border patrol and federal law enforcement officers to *hunt down, arrest and deport every last illegal alien gang member* until there is not a single one left in this country. (10/11)
(33) And we will begin *the largest deportation operation* in the history of the United States. (10/11)

Through this warlike rhetoric, Trump constructs migration as an existential threat to American society, justifying extreme measures in response. It intensifies fear and polarization, and fosters an "us versus them" mentality that aligns with populist[7] strategies of constructing a unified national identity against an external, vilified threat.

3. Discursive and rhetorical strategies to construct an anti-migrant position

3.1. Repetitions, hyperboles and exaggeration

Repetition plays a central stylistic and strategic role in Trump's immigration rhetoric—just as it does in his overall discourse. As Scafalni (2024, p. 3) explains, "Trump's extensive use of repetition has been described as a substitute for substantive explanations." In the context of immigration, repetition is particularly effective in constructing migrants as threats and amplifying a sense of crisis.

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[7] Populism is here defined as being "organised around a horizontal axis and a vertical axis with the concept of 'the people' at the centre (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). On the horizontal axis, 'the people' are distinguished from Others who are not of 'the people' (e.g. foreigners) and who pose a threat to 'the people'. On the vertical axis, 'the people' are distinguished from an elite and supposedly corrupt political class who fail to put the interests of 'the people' first and who have failed in dealing with the threat posed by the Others." (Hart and Strudwick, 2025)

In political discourse more broadly, repetition serves not only a rhetorical, but also a cognitive function: it reinforces ideological framing and facilitates the internalization of dominant narratives. Trump's repeated phrases illustrate how iteration can naturalize claims, embed them in public consciousness, and privilege emotional over rational engagement.

> (34) They're being threatened every single day, *they're gonna be out soon. They're gonna be out*. They don't have to be out, I would say, if they can hold out, you know in January 20th it's too long, you better get out of there, it's too unsafe, but January 20th, *those guys are gonna be out of their houses and they're gonna be out of this country. They're gonna be out of this country*. (10/11)
>
> (35) You know where they gave the money? To illegal immigrants coming in, *many of whom* are killers. *Many of whom* are drug dealers. *Many of whom* are gang members. And *many of whom* came out of prisons from all over the world. (10/9)

This aligns with the rhetorical device of anaphora, in which the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses dramatizes urgency and emotional intensity (Charteris-Black, 2011). Alongside repetition, hyperbole features prominently in Trump's discourse. As Wodak (2009) notes, hyperbole is a common element of right-wing populist rhetoric, used to generate fear and construct a polarized "us versus them" narrative. Likewise, van Dijk (1993, p. 258) argues that

> specific rhetorical figures, such as hyperboles or metaphors, preferentially affect the organization of models or the formation of opinions embodied in such models. Similarly, semantic moves may directly facilitate the formation or change of social attitudes, or they may do so indirectly, that is, through the generalization or decontextualization of personal models (including opinions) of specific events.

Amplification, intensification, and exaggeration are used to signal an extreme level of threat and danger posed to U.S. citizens. These effects are achieved through rhetorical devices such as noun-of-noun structures (examples 36 to 39), superlative forms, and hyperbole—arguably the most effective figure of speech for conveying exaggeration (examples 40 to 43).

> (36) The only thing they didn't do though, they didn't stop the flights that were pouring in with *thousands and thousands* on actually the course of a couple of years, *hundreds of thousands of people* flying over our borders. (10/10)
>
> (37) They don't want *millions of people* coming through our border, they don't want militaries pushing us around. They don't want crime in the middle of our streets, they don't want *hundreds of thousands of migrant criminals, criminals*! (10/10)
>
> (38) You have *hundreds of thousands of people* being flown in over […] you'd now have *hundreds of millions of people* coming in here" (10/11)
>
> (39) We have *thousands of thousands and thousands of people all over the streets*. And they're rough people'. (10/1)
>
> (40) They come from the Congo in Africa, they come from all over the Middle East, *some of the most hostile countries to us*. (10/1)
>
> (41) No these people are amongst *the worst in the world*. (10/2)

(42) I mean how would you like to live with, like they're living where *thousands and thousands of criminals* are put into your towns or your city. (10/3 oct)

(43) And when you vote on Tuesday, remember this: Kamala Harris is importing illegal alien rapists and murderers, draconian monsters who are killing *our children, our brothers, our sisters, our parents, our friends*… they're willing to kill *anyone*… willing to kill *anyone*, these people, they are true evil. (11/4)

Repetition, hyperbole, and emotionally charged phrasing work together to bypass deliberative debate and instead mobilize affective responses. As Lakoff (2008, p. 8) notes, "emotion is both central and legitimate in political persuasion," enabling political actors to present themselves as protectors of a threatened community.

3.2. Generalization of the threat

Exaggeration operates alongside the strategies of globalization and universalization, which generalize the perceived threat and frame it as a matter of national urgency affecting the entire country:

(44) We're fighting on the border' and then we found out that big Boeing airplanes are flying over with hundreds of thousands of people; and dumping them into *towns and little cities and states all over the mid-west and all over our country*. (10/1)

(45) *Little cities and towns all over the country* are being invaded, but the ones that aren't, they're just as scared because they know it's gonna happen. (10/10)

(46) No, you have to move them out, you have to move them out, you can't do this to our country. And this is happening *all over our country, all over, all over our country*. (11/2)

Trump either uses vague references to migrants' countries of origin or repeatedly emphasizes the same ones. He frequently targets Venezuela (in connection with the *Tren de Aragua* gang), El Salvador (referencing MS-13), Congo, and Yemen – thereby reinforcing a perception of the threat as either ambiguous or multifaceted, as if danger is emerging from "all over the world," a phrase he repeats often. This again reflects a strategy of globalization. Notably, Congo is mentioned 19 times in the corpus and Venezuela 41 times across the 135 analyzed videos.

(47) From prisons and jails, they came; from unsane asylums and mental institutions, *from all over the world. From Venezuela to the Congo* – I think a lot come from the *Congo*, I don't know what's happening in the Congo. We can almost tell the worst areas because if there's a run on the *Congo*, we know *Congo's* not doing well. But they come *from all over the world* » (10/13)

(48) For four straight years, she's imported an army of illegal alien gang members and migrant criminals *from the dungeons all over the world*. Not, not south America, all over the world they come. From prisons and jails, unsane asylums, mental institutions. From Venezuela, from the Congo, all over. (10/13)

(49) *Caracas, Venezuela*, crime is down seventy-two percent. They're down because they're taking all the criminals and putting them here. (10/1)

(50) We have thousands of terrorists now coming in from *Yemen, from all over the world*, they're coming in. Not just South America, they're coming in *from all over the world*. (10/3)

3.3. Fear-mongering and emotional persuasion

Another rhetorical device employed by Trump is the manipulation of numerical data to persuade his audience and/or evoke fear. He frequently cites statistics, as numbers tend to lend legitimacy to his discourse – "the use of statistical data […] is perceived by viewers as facts which influence their logic and rational perception" (Krysanova, 2024, p. 130). Two of the most frequently repeated figures are "thirteen thousand and ninety-nine murderers" – a strikingly precise number mentioned in 21 videos – and "twenty-one million people", referring to the number of undocumented migrants, cited in 16 videos.

While numbers are supposed to be neutral, exact, and objective features in speech – giving the speaker a rigorous and serious image – they can also be used to appeal to emotions and indignation (Bacot, Desmarchelier & Rémi-Giraud, 2012, p. 11),[8] especially when combined with dramatizing effects (e.g., "outraged," "horrible" in the following examples):

(51) And under Kamala Harris, *thirteen thousand and ninety-nine illegal alien convicted murderers* are roaming free in the United-States and four hundred and *twenty-five thousand convicted migrant criminals* are right now into the United-States. But of them, think of this, of them, of them *thirteen thousand and ninety-nine* are murderers. (10/13)

(52) When you let *twenty-one million people* in our country, and let me tell you, if she's here for four years, she'll have *two hundred million people* in our country. And they'll likewise, they will likewise come from prisons and mental institutions. So, I'm outraged that over *thirteen thousand -- the exact number is 13 099, convicted illegal alien murderers* are now on the loose. They allowed to come in over *thirteen thousand murderers*. Many of them murdering many more than one person. They're murderers. […]. So think of it, *thirteen thousand. It's two hundred and forty thousand very serious*, but it's actually *six hundred and forty-four thousand major criminals* came in with *the twenty-one million people*. […] We've got *thirteen thousand people* that are worse than any criminal we've been looking for, for a long time. (10/1)

(53) *425,000 convicted criminal aliens*, according to ICE's newly published data, are now free to roam the United States, they're roaming all over the country. (10/1)

(54) Perhaps, worse of all, Kamala's mass migrant invasion will destroy our economy, importing *tens of millions* of, I mean think of it, more illegal aliens than we've ever thought about taking in. […]. She did a horrible job. She allowed *21 million plus people* to come in. (10/2)

(55) Again, you had *thirteen thousand, more than thirteen thousand, to be exact 13 099*. And these are murderers. (10/2)

As can be seen in the examples, these figures are most often employed in conjunction with the rhetorical strategies of repetition and hyperbole to reinforce the threat that migrants embody. In metaphorical or hyperbolic contexts, numbers

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[8] "Le chiffre, expression d'une froide rationalité, devient le véhicule privilégié de l'émotion. C'est donc plus le pathos (et l'ethos) que le logos, plus le sentiment que la raison, qui sont les destinataires de l'argument par le nombre" (Bacot, Desmarchelier & Rémi-Giraud, 2012, p. 11) ["The figure, an expression of cold rationality, becomes the privileged vehicle of emotion. Thus, it is more pathos (and ethos) than logos – more feeling than reason – that constitutes the target of the argument by numbers" – author's translation].

shift from representing exact values to conveying maximization and exaggeration, thereby generating fear. Furthermore, this process of desubjectification – reducing individuals to statistics or abstract threats – serves a dehumanizing function, reinforcing the perception of migrants as anonymous dangers rather than as human beings with individual stories and lived experiences. As Mannoni (2024, p. 91) notes, the rhetorical strategy consists in provoking fear or indignation by exaggerating isolated incidents or selectively referencing statistics that support a pre-established narrative.[9]

3.4. A multimodal approach

Trump's co-speech gestures[10] also play a significant role in reinforcing his anti-immigration stance. One particularly frequent gesture is the beat, which McNeill defines as "a simple flick of the hand or fingers up and down; or back and forth" (1992, 15) describes as "the politician's gesture par excellence" (ibid., p. 16). He explains that the beat "indexes the word or phrase it accompanies as being significant – not for its own semantic content, but for its discourse-pragmatic content" (ibid., p. 15).

> (56) So, | all of the | agony, | all of the suffering, | all of the | inflation and | the border and the | criminals coming into our country.[11] (10/09)

In (56), the hyperbolic and repetitive context is enhanced with beats[12] on three noun phrases to emphasize the exaggeration.

Pointing as a deictic gesture is also commonly used. As Hart (2024, p. 3) puts it, pointing "is used simultaneously to draw attention to a specific stretch of discourse, to signal that the point being made in that stretch of discourse is a particularly "sharp" or effective one, and potentially to brand oneself as an argumentatively sharp or effective speaker. " This is what happens in (57):

> (57) But many are dead, most are dead, | many are in | sex slavery, | many are in | slavery. But they're | many dead. Three hundred and twenty-five thousand young kids[13] (10/09)

In this example, the precision grip – "a discourse-focus marking device, indicating in gestural space where a point in rhetorical space is being made" (Scalfani, 2024, p. 61) – occurs in the underlined part and highlights the number,

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[9] Original text in French: "semer la peur, susciter l'indignation, surjouer le moindre incident, exploiter la moindre statistique trafiquée".

[10] Hart and Strudwick (2025) define co-speech gestures as hand or body movements that co-exist with the message in the communicative act and therefore "collaborate with speech in the expression of meaning."

[11] https://x.com/TrumpWarRoom/status/1844109295090008110 (4'54''-5'0'')

[12] Beats are marked here with the symbol |.

[13] https://x.com/TrumpWarRoom/status/1844109295090008110 (0'56''-1'07'')

while in the first part of the speech, he is holding his hand vertically, slightly beating to mark all the occurrences of "many" as well as "sex" and "slavery". Hart (2024, p. 20) states that thanks to pointing gestures "Trump is able to entertain his audience, engage directly with them, steer their attention, and align himself with his audience as a man of the people."

Pointing is also used to denounce the threat immigrants represent in a discursive strategy aiming to attracting the audience's attention as well as legitimizing the speech, such as in the following example:

> (58) And I used to talk about this, said "if they don't get it right, you'll have Venezuela on steroids. Do you remember?[14] (10/11)

Here, there is a succession of gestures: a wide index-pointing on Trump's right-hand side on "if they don't get it right", followed by a precision grip, when he uses his thumb and other fingers to mimic a pinching gesture, on "Venezuela on steroids" accompanied by a vertical beat and eventually a wide open-palm gesture on his right again at the end of the sentence.

Another gesture Trump used to create focalization is shrugging accompanied with eyebrow raises:

> (59) Immediately upon taking the oath of office I'll launch the largest deportation program in American history. Have to… have to do it.[15] (10/16)

Here, "have to" is marked twice thanks to the shrug and the eyebrow rise. As Ferré puts it (2019, p. 156), the latter is linked to focalization. Most of the time, eyebrow-raising accompanies intensifiers, exaggeration or hyperbolic speech. It therefore underlines the inevitable obligation of putting the "deportation program" in place. Hart and Strudwick (2025) explain that Trump's use of shrugging has to be understood as a modal gesture to express "the speaker's stance toward the proposition communicated". It is therefore a "stance-taking act" since shrugs are "epistemic-evidential markers relating to the gesturer's degree of knowledge of, and commitment to, a state of affairs". Hart and Strudwick (2025) state that shrugs may "be used to convey the obviousness of a state of affairs, based on facts observable to everybody or general knowledge and doxic[16] beliefs." Considering the fact that in (59) the shrug accompanies the modal marker "have to", it underlines his commitment. In their study, Hart and Strudwick (2025) explain that Trump's shrug gestures express common ground and obviousness, and reinforce the alignment between him and his audience. They add that "Trump uses shrugs in argument sequences to present proposed political changes as clear and obvious responses to current circumstances."

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[14] https://x.com/theblaze/status/1844842072131707298 (1'07"-1'13")

[15] https://x.com/TrumpWarRoom/status/1846369316108726425 (0'00"-0'18")

[16] Doxic beliefs are to be understood as beliefs that are taken for granted as self-evident or natural within a particular social group or society.

The last example stands out for its originality:

(60) If you take a look at Springfield Ohio, How 'bout that? They have, they have about fifty thousand people. No crime, beautiful community, everything nice, schools, everything nice. They dropped in thirty-two thousand people that are really illegal, you know they did it in such a way that they can make the case, you know. They said they did it through probation what's probation? They took 'em in, they took 'em in through probation, so I assume they assumed they're like prisoners or something. And therefore, they're illegal.[17] (10/11)

In (60), what is particularly noteworthy is the creation of a fictional space through Trump's use of circular gestures and vertical beats. These gestures construct an imagined virtual community – Springfield – into which undocumented migrants are being introduced. The looping gesture accompanying "they took 'em in," directed inward toward his own body, visually delineates the inside/outside features of this fictional space. In contrast, when Trump refers to "they", the gesture's amplitude widens, implying that "they" originate outside the initially constructed space. This contrast reinforces a binary spatial opposition between insiders and outsiders. Here, the metaphoric gesture (McNeill, 1992, p. 15) visually enacts the imagery of invasion. Trump thus builds a gestural world that viewers can populate with their own mental representations and associations. The persuasive power of this strategy lies in its ambiguity and adaptability: it resonates with a wide range of preexisting fears and representations of migrant "invasion", making the argument more emotionally and cognitively impactful.

4. Conclusion

Trump's populist discourse lies on both classic and innovative representations of migrants: the recurring themes of dehumanization, existential crisis, and the call for authoritarian intervention. References to mass deportations, for instance, may resonate with notions of ethnic or political purges, or with ideologies of national restoration. By portraying migrants as animals and carriers of disease, Trump reduces marginalized groups to subhuman or parasitic entities perceived as threats to national purity. The use of invasion metaphors further reinforces the idea of an internal enemy whose presence ostensibly justifies militarized responses.

Trump's rhetoric also relies on effective discursive strategies. His messages are frequently reiterated and accompanied by emotionally charged devices such as repetition, hyperbole, and exaggeration. The enemy is presented as an indistinct, depersonalized mass – its contours blurred by appeals to globalization and generalization. It is also worth noting that Trump very often conflates immigration and illegal immigration. He also uses shortcuts between asylum seekers,

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[17] https://x.com/theblaze/status/1844842072131707298 (1'39''-2'14'')

illegal immigrants and criminals, creating confusion and a climate of anxiety. The audience is further persuaded through the strategic manipulation of data, references to miscellaneous news items, and selective use of statistics, all aimed at legitimizing the message. Finally, an examination of the multimodal dimension highlights how these rhetorical techniques collectively support an anti-immigration stance in the lead-up to the American presidential election, which was poised to see Trump assume office as the 47th President of the United States. His rhetoric thus efficiently functions not only to instil fear but also to normalize extreme measures as rational and inevitable responses to a manufactured crisis.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 21ST CENTURY NARCISSISTIC CULTURE

Abstract: This paper delves into the influence social media exerts in fulfilling individuals' need for recognition and individuality in the 21st-century. The study focuses on the growing concern with narcissism, a term often defined as an excessive preoccupation with oneself, including one's appearance and public image. The paper argues that this phenomenon may have stemmed from a shift away from collective social needs in earlier societies toward a stronger emphasis on the individual's desire for recognition. Such a shift appears to have contributed to the development of narcissistic values and standards that shape contemporary social behaviour. Additionally, the paper discusses how individuals, increasingly aware of their roles within society, have become active participants in negotiating and redefining societal norms. Social media platforms provide an unprecedented avenue for self-presentation, offering tools to create an idealised version of oneself. The paper examines existing research and reported statistics to illustrate the increasing reliance on social media platforms.   than presenting new empirical data, it synthesises findings from prior studies to explore how the growth of these platforms has been discussed in relation to narcissistic tendencies. Therefore, this is not a meta-analysis but a conceptual synthesis of existing literature. The paper examines the complex interplay between digital technologies and modern identity formation, as well as the broader implications of these patterns for societal dynamics and values.

Keywords: mass media, society, narcissistic behaviour, individualism

1. Human nature – The narcissistic spectrum

In the words of Thomas Erikson, "our behaviour is a function of *personality* and *surrounding factors*" (Erikson, 2019, p. 11). Therefore, according to the author, as much as personality traits are inherited, the influence of the surrounding environment on shaping our behaviour is substantial and difficult to dismiss.

Recent scholarship, such as the Narcissism Spectrum Model (Krizan & Herlache, 2017), synthesises clinical, social-psychological, and personality research

to show that narcissistic traits manifest along a continuum shaped by interactions between individuals and their social environments. From the earliest childhood, we create a self-image that supports our self-concept and endorses our feelings from within. This image comprises our opinions and beliefs, how we perceive the world and what we value most. While building this image, we emphasise our positive qualities and explain our flaws and weaknesses. "With our energy turned inward, we become the centre of our attention. We no longer depend on others for attention and recognition. We have self-esteem." (Greene, 2018, p. 43). However, those who lack this coherent sense of self may develop narcissistic traits. Greene explains, "Narcissists have a sharp break in this early development, and so they never quite construct a consistent and realistic feeling of a self" (Greene, 2018, p. 44).

Greene continues, indicating that narcissists see others as "instruments for attention and validation." (Greene, 2018, p. 45). Therefore, if other people are just instruments and reality is just a reflection of their needs, relentless attention-seeking is a primary means of coping. This, in turn, as Greene points out, creates a problem, "In trying to satisfy our hunger for attention, we face an inevitable problem: there is only so much of it to go around."(Greene, 2018, p. 43). Constantly seeking attention and validity, individuals turn to social media to find new audiences to whom they can present themselves. The statement is supported by Vaknin who states that it is a popular misconception that narcissists love themselves, as in reality they are in love with their reflection (Vaknin, 2014).

In today's digital environment, maintaining a presence on social media and being recognised by other users is both accessible and demanding. Research into average correlations between grandiose narcissism and common measures of social media use, reported by McCain and Campbell in 2016,[1] indicates that grandiose narcissism shows a modest positive association with the size of one's social network on digital platforms (approximately $r = .20$ number of links, friends, and connections on social media). A smaller correlation has also been observed between narcissism and the amount of time individuals spend on social media ($r = .11$). In addition, grandiose narcissism has been found to predict how frequently users post status updates ($r = .18$) as well as the number of selfies they share online ($r = .14$) (Campbell et al., 2017). Another study into the relationship between social networking site use and narcissistic personality traits, conducted by Gnambs and Appel and reported in *Narcissism and Social Networking Behavior: A Meta-Analysis,* presented comparable results (this reference is to an existing meta-analysis; the present paper does not conduct one). The meta-analysis reported a small-to-moderate overall effect indicating that the link between grandiose narcissism and social networking site use was consistent across platforms, participant characteristics, and time periods. Further analyses highlighted clear cultural differences, with stronger associations observed in high power-distance societies. In addition, behaviours focused on self-presentation and the size of one's social network showed stronger effects than the duration of social media use (Gnambs & Appel, 2018).

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[1] Image available online at https://osf.io/aycx9/, (McCain & Campbell, 2017).

However, the challenge of self-presentation lies in the fact that while anyone can post images or comments on a wide range of topics, the sheer volume of content raises the question of whose contributions are actually noticed. Unfortunately, as 'the ordinary' has already been done, most attention is paid to the most extreme post, the most unusual image, the most provocative comment and the most unpredictable outcome. An individual's desire for recognition can at times become so strong that it overrides considerations of moral behaviour, social values, and ethical standards. At one time, journals and registers were used to convey important news, scientific facts and data. However, owing to the Internet, anyone can be an author or a creator of any narrative, only with such a significant number of authors wanting their creations to be noticed, it is not a surprise that society's values and standards are shifting. Different cultures chose different routes to success. While some emphasised self-criticism and improving weaknesses, others (America) adopted the lifestyle of self-admiration, which in consequence, has created a social environment that promotes self-focus. (Hall, 2011, p. 190).

2. The portrait of the 21st-century digital society

Greene declares that narcissistic traits and tendencies are not confined to a select few but are, in fact, to some extent and to some degree, present within the human psyche. Such a perspective aligns with contemporary psychological discourse, which suggests that narcissism exists along a spectrum, encompassing a broad range of behaviours and attitudes.[2] This notion challenges the view of narcissism as a pathological condition exclusive to clinical diagnoses, instead highlighting its prevalent role in everyday social interactions and individual self-perception. Greene claims "We must be honest about our nature and not deny it. We are all narcissists. In a conversation, we are all champing at the bit to talk, tell our stories, and give our opinion. We like people who share our ideas – they reflect our good taste to us. We are all prone to flattery because of our self-love." (Greene, 2018, p. 47). However, at what point did our self-validation become a fascination with ourselves? Being a part of a collective has changed meaning in contemporary society. Once it reflected undertaking various tasks, assignments and duties, working together for the benefit of a collective. Everyone would be a part of that achievement, and this knowledge was enough gratification. However, these days being a part of a collective somehow regards only our social interactions; furthermore, it is used as a ladder to stand out from the crowd. It is the Internet and social media that provides that ladder. As Greene remarks:

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[2] Narcyzm (narcystyczne zaburzenie osobowości) – objawy i leczenie, (2023), dr n. med. Aleksandra Walczak-Tręda, Psycholog: https://www.medicover.pl/zdrowie/psychiczne/narcyzm/, date of access: 01.10.2024.

Our brains were built for continual social interaction; the complexity of this interaction is one of the main factors that drastically increased our intelligence as a species. At a certain point, involving ourselves less with others has a net negative effects on the brain itself and atrophies our social muscle. To make matters worse, our culture tends to emphasise the supreme value of the individual and individual rights, encouraging greater self-involvement. We find more and more people who cannot imagine that others have a different perspective, that we are all not exactly the same in what we desire or think. (Greene, 2018, p. 49).

In so much as there is a correlation between the growth of narcissism and the new media, it is still debatable whether media only reflects the tendencies among contemporary young generation or these tendencies are created by the new media since "online platforms are the perfect breeding ground for vanity and self-obsession". (Derhally, 2022, p. 4). Moreover, as stated by Campbell and McCain, there could be a third option: "It could be that narcissism causes social media use, so that increasing narcissism would increase social media use; it could be that social media use causes narcissism, so that increasing social media use would increase narcissism; or it could be a reciprocal or bi-directional effect. And there could even be a third factor like cultural individualism that causes both."(Campbell et al., 2017).

At a certain point in time presented news and information were often perceived as more factual, scientific, and objective. Nowadays, mass media platforms present a broad range of content. The gossip column in online news, at times, is more emphasised and commented on than the factual news item. The Internet brought instant news (i.e. newspapers online) where the news items are updated throughout the day in order to encourage the reader and make them want to return frequently during the day. That need for something new to report on is so great that a wide variety of information is presented to the recipient. Since factual, authentic news regarding politics or the economy very rarely needs hourly updating and can only be so much embellished and elaborated on, something new must be presented to the public. Therefore, scandals, celebrity gossip, hearsay and subjective information frequently occupy space in media coverage. News content is often supplemented with less substantive information, updated hourly to encourage continued audience engagement. Media narratives frequently emphasize who holds prominence, who excels or fails in various domains, who possesses substantial wealth or has recently faced financial ruin. Essentially, information regarding individuals' statuses, achievements, and misfortunes. The reporters interview people and publish their stories no matter how minor they are. However, exposure to large amounts of everyday, non-essential information may encourage individuals to feel that they, too, have something to share or display. According to *Statista.com* social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2024, over five billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to over six billion in 2028.[3] Social media provided us with a means to

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[3] Statista.com 2024: Number of worldwide social network users. https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/, date of access: 01.10.2024.

have our views expressed. Brailovskaia et al., also share this opinion declaring that, with the emergence of social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, people obtained new opportunities to engage in numerous forms of online interactions and self-presentation (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). Moreover, the authors state that these interactions can be precisely planned and controlled since they are not conducted face-to-face. Having more time to create an idealised image of oneself increases the chance to gain positive feedback online from a greater audience and consequently to enhance one's self-esteem. This is consistent with the narcissistic tendencies and adds to the assumption that social network sites could be desirable for the individuals displaying narcissistic characteristics.

The table below presents an overall growing tendency to spend more time on social media platforms. The data was collected for the period of 2012 to 2024. In 2024 there was a minor drop in daily time spent on social networking, however the cut-off point for the data collected for the survey was in the middle of the year.
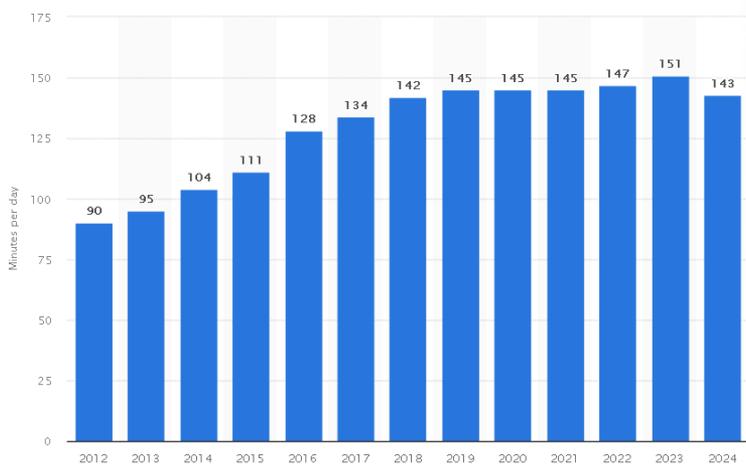
Figure 1. Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2024 s(in minutes)[4]

Considering the results of the above-mentioned survey, a pertinent subsequent inquiry involves identifying which social networking sites are the most popular. Answering the question is important since the most popular sites, i.e. Facebook and YouTube, are also those that offer the most opportunities for an individual to 'present' themselves to the world.

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[4] Statista.com 2024: Daily social media usage worldwide. https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/, date of access: 01.10.2024.
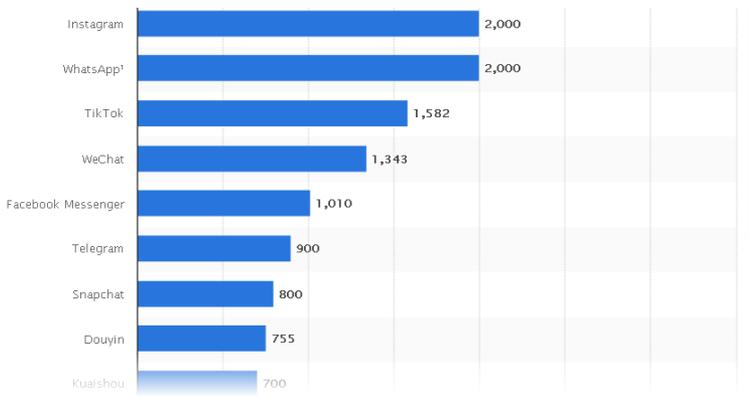
Figure 2. Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024,
by number of monthly active users (in millions)[5]

3. Social Media Narcissism

According to the 2008 research conducted by the Newport Institute, a health organisation dealing with various mental disorders, 10 per cent of young people suffer from subclinical narcissism. In their opinion, social media contribute to the problem. Getting a 'like' on social media is associated with activation of the brain's reward cycle. This good feeling is due to a dopamine rush in the brain's reward centre.[6] The two key reasons for the increase in narcissistic behaviour, according to the research, were a greater focus on building self-esteem in recent years, and the social media encouraging individuals to focus primarily on themselves and their public image. Furthermore, in a 2020 study The Newport Institute stated that narcissists are more likely to develop an addiction to Facebook as a coping mechanism for anxiety (research conducted among 327 Facebook users of an average age of 23). The study concluded that higher levels of narcissism were associated with greater anxiety symptoms, which in turn were linked to an increased likelihood of developing addictive tendencies.

The data gathered in the table below reveals the growing number of Facebook users between 2008 and 2023. With approximately three billion monthly active users in 2023, Facebook is the most widely used online social network worldwide.

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[5] Statista.com 2024: Global social networks ranked by number of users. https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/, date of access: 01.10.2024.

[6] Newport Institute, Social media narcissism: Are the apps creating narcissists? https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/social-media-narcissism/, date of access: 11.07.2023.
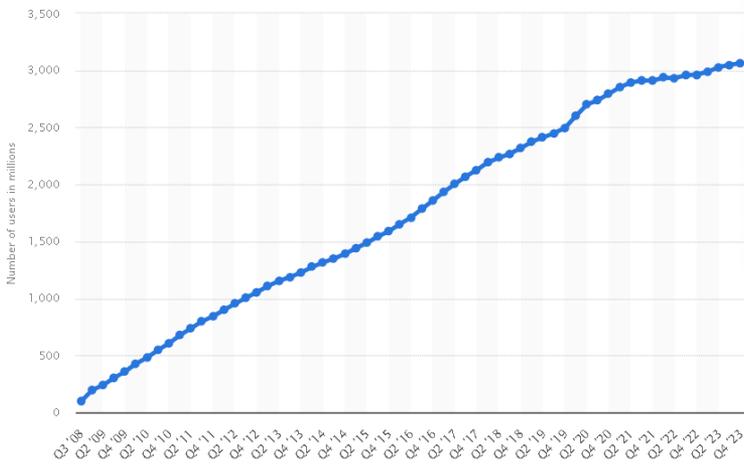
Figure 3. Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2023 (in millions)[7]

Since the main focus of social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, is on sharing one's image and opinions, individuals using these platforms may exhibit a predisposition toward narcissistic tendencies.
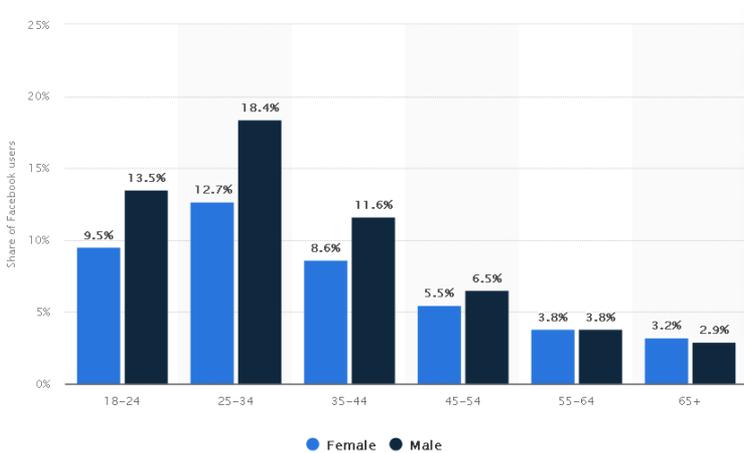
Figure 4. Distribution of Facebook users worldwide as of April 2024, by age and gender[8]

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[7] Statista.com 2024: Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide. https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/, date of access: 01.10.2024.

[8] Statista.com 2024: *Facebook global user age distribution*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/, date of access: 01.10.2024.

As of April 2024, it was found that men between the ages of 25 and 34 years made up Facebook's largest audience, accounting for 18.4 per cent of global users.

Research into *The Link between Social Media and Narcissism in Young Adults,* 2018, showed that greater social media use predict higher levels of grandiose narcissism. This included the time spent on social media, the frequency of posts and tweets, the number of followers and how often participants posted pictures of themselves on the platforms. The 2018 research followed 74 participants over four months. The conclusion was that the individuals posting large numbers of photos and selfies showed a 25 per cent increase in narcissistic traits, especially those who used Facebook and other platforms that focused more on images than words. Reports from the Newport Institute suggest that behaviours sometimes described as "social media narcissism" may share characteristics with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), though this remains a speculative claim and is not formally recognised in diagnostic frameworks. Fully understanding the danger it may evoke, some social platforms are trying to shift toward self-worth building without emphasising an idealised appearance (i.e. 2019, Instagram and the National Eating Disorders Association launched the *#ComeAsYouAre* campaign. The campaign encouraged young people to share their stories of accepting their bodies just as they are, which is crucial in treating eating disorders).

Furthermore, Instagram, in 2019, began hiding 'likes' on its stories. Therefore, individuals can see who likes their posts but cannot compare their likes with others. Consequently, their experience of posting on Instagram shifts towards their expression rather than social comparison or perceived popularity.

4. Mass media's contribution to the rise in the desire for uniqueness

Over the years, for some, the need for recognition and approval has turned into obsession with self, with creating self-image, and finally, in some cases, the craving for establishing a brand.[9] Scholarly research indicates that social media encourages self-branding behaviours, where individuals consciously construct and manage their online identities to gain visibility and approval (Labrecque et al., 2011). In line with these findings, Derhally (2022) warns that over-investment in personal branding can trap individuals in cycles of exaggerated self-importance. The development of social media and the addictive character of 'likes' and 'follows' seem to contribute to the reinforcement of narcissistic culture. In the words of Derhally: "By putting much energy and focus into personal brand and convincing others to follow us, we can fall into a trap of becoming overly dedicated to our self-importance." (Derhally, 2022, p. 7). Social media platforms accommodate all these development stages since the public here can be both the audience and content creators. The first step,

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[9] The case of Kardashians.

however, was mass media, where the public functioned solely as the audience. The sudden, considerable increase in superhero-type movies from the film industry, with instant all-day access to it, i.e. Netflix, gives the young audience aspirations to emulate them (as the statistics for 2023 show Generation Z makes up the majority of Netflix subscribers).[10] Hall states that the images predominant on television are now considered role models. Moreover, the author adds that the children are encouraged to imitate them (Hall, 2011, p. 196). TV documentaries featuring the lives of celebrities and reality shows dominate prime-time schedules and attract young audiences who may attempt to model their lives on the figures portrayed. Newspapers increasingly prioritise reporting on scandals, rumours, and gossip, often at the expense of more objective and informative coverage.

Radio stations increasingly attract listeners with frequent phone-in contests, often unrelated to knowledge or content, where prizes are awarded simply for being the first to call. Furthermore, children who were praised in the past for being seen, not heard, now take lead roles on television, portraying overtly performative behaviour (Hall, 2011, p. 196). Adolescents are exposed to peers portraying characters engaged in risky or antisocial behaviours, often associated with the pursuit of material possessions as a means of social acceptance. Media portrayals of the rich and famous on television have made wealth far more visible and prominent than in the past. Hall observes that media producers, writers, and editors often deny responsibility for amplifying such trends, arguing instead that they merely reflect behaviours already present in society. He argues that the images displayed on most reality shows may have a devastating effect on our culture. The young generation uses reality TV shows to establish values and standards. Hall finishes by stating that such behaviour does not build character or encourage achieving good education or learning skills.

Some studies suggest that many young people perceive power and money as solutions to life's challenges and as markers of uniqueness and status. Such attitudes may contribute to the reinforcement of narcissistic tendencies. Hall's statement referring to reality shows and their effects on our culture can be underpinned by research into the mechanism of association – priming.[11] Priming extends beyond concepts and language; even actions and emotions may be influenced by events occurring outside of one's awareness (Kahneman, 2011, p. 53). Empirical research demonstrates that subtle reminders of money can influence social behaviour, often

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[10] According to the data collected by Statista.com, as of October 2024, the most popular English-language Netflix TV show of all time was the first season of the comedy horror TV show "Wednesday," with over 252 million views in the show's first 91 days on the platform. The second most watched on the streaming platform was the fourth season of the American science-fiction series "Stranger Things," counting around 141 million views. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1283935/most-viewed-netflix-show-english/, date of access: 01.11.2024.

[11] Priming reveals the subtle but significant ways our environment shapes our cognitive and behavioural responses. It highlights how prior experiences can shape perceptions, thoughts, and actions without the individual being fully aware of the connection

leading individuals to display greater self-focus, independence, and reduced prosocial tendencies (Vohs et al., 2006). Building on such findings, Kahneman (2011) argues that money-priming effects can extend into many areas of life. His research shows that money-primed people are more independent, selfish and display greater preference for being alone, all the characteristics connected to narcissism (Kahneman, 2011, p. 55). The author finishes by declaring "living in a culture that surrounds us with reminders of money may shape our behaviour and our attitudes in ways that we do not know about and of which we may not be proud". (Kahneman, 2011, p. 56).

To illustrate the growing influence of television, Netflix serves as a notable example. This subscription-based streaming service lets its members watch TV shows and movies on Internet-connected devices. In 2011 the number of Netflix annual subscribers was 21.5 million; in 2022, this number had grown to 220.6 million.[12] The statistics for other streaming platforms, such as Amazon or HBO, also show a significant increase in the number of subscribers.[13] Among the most popular series on Netflix, according to the statistics for 2023, were: *Wednesday*, *Stranger Things* and *Lucifer*.[14] All of these shows feature the paranormal and supernatural. Moreover, the main characters in the first two are adolescent. The audience is drawn to the characters with supernatural traits of uniqueness and extraordinary abilities. As stated by Erikson, in *Surrounded by Narcissists*, among common characteristics of narcissism are: unrealistic, grandiose self-image; feeling special and unique; valuing power and fame, thinking the rules do not apply; incredibly self-centred; speaking only about themselves; arrogance and superiority; quick to criticise and judge others; highly sensitive to criticism; constant self-promotion; feeling entailed to the best of everything, demand constant acknowledgement; respond with aggression when questioned; deceitful and manipulative. (Erikson, 2022). Some of these traits are reinforced in series like *Wednesday*, *Lucifer* or *Stranger things*. And when one considers the concept of social proof examined by Dobelli, it is clear what underlying factors guide young people to imitate their peers and engage with similar television content.

> Social proof, sometimes roughly termed the 'herd instinct', dictates that individuals feel they are behaving correctly when they act the s@ame as other people. In other words, the more people who follow a certain idea, the better (truer) we deem the idea to be. And the more people who display a certain behaviour, the more appropriate this behaviour is judged by others (Dobelli, 2013, p. 10).

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[12] Business of Apps. (2023). *Netflix statistics*.
https://www.businessofapps.com/data/netflix-statistics/, date of access: 01.07.2024.

[13] Statista.com 2024: *Quarterly number of Netflix streaming subscribers worldwide*.
https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/, 01.11.2024.

[14] Statista.com 2024: *Most viewed Netflix show (English)*.
https://www.statista.com/statistics/1283935/most-viewed-netflix-show-english/, date of access: 01.11.2024.

As stated by Manne, 'The Narcissism Epidemic' presents an argument highlighting the increasing prevalence of narcissism among younger generations. This trend has notably intensified, particularly after the year 2000 (Manne, 2014). After Generation Y – the Millennials, the emergence of Generation Z – the Zoomers – was the next stage in demographic and cultural development. While the Millennials craved their individuality in any shape and form to be acknowledged and recognised ('Snowflakes Society'), the digitally inclined Generation Z further it by creating self-images and presenting them to the world. Parker and Igielnik (2020) claim "Members of Gen Z are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet. They are also digital natives who have little or no memory of the world as it existed before smartphones". As noted in *The Dark Side of Social Media,* 50 per cent of Gen Z users are on Instagram, while 70 per cent of Millennials access Facebook and 63 per cent use YouTube (Sheldon et al., 2019, p. 25). However, 64 per cent of Millennials stated that Instagram is a medium for communicating existing narcissistic tendencies rather than a platform that inspires extreme narcissistic behaviour. Moreover, narcissists who post selfies on Instagram are more likely to follow attention-seeking users reflecting reciprocity (Sheldon et al., 2019, p. 33).

5. Limitations and Future Research

While concerns about the role of social media in fostering narcissistic tendencies are well acknowledged, it is important to recognise research that highlights potential benefits. Studies have shown that social media can provide opportunities for community building and upholding long-distance relationships. For some users, these platforms serve as valuable tools for social support, particularly for individuals who may feel marginalised in real life. Moreover, the ability to shape one's self-presentation sometimes can be a form of positive self-affirmation rather than merely narcissistic self-promotion. Recognising all these perspectives provides a more balanced understanding of the complex relationship between social media and personality development (Andreassen et al., 2017).

While this review offers a comprehensive overview of literature on the relationship between social media and narcissistic tendencies, it is not without its limitations. The analysis is based primarily on English-language sources, which limits the inclusion of perspectives from non-English-speaking contexts. Furthermore, the work relies heavily on previously published research rather than original empirical examination, which may restrict the scope. Also, the literature reviewed spans a specific time frame and may not fully capture the most recent developments in digital communication and social media behaviour.

Future studies could build on the findings of this review by adopting a more systematic approach to analysing the relationship between social media use and

narcissistic traits. Long-term research would be particularly valuable in assessing how online behavioural patterns evolve over time and in what way they influence personality traits. Cross-cultural investigations could help identify the extent to which the observed associations are shaped by cultural norms and values, moving beyond the predominantly Western focus. In addition, greater emphasis on empirical, peer-reviewed psychological research would strengthen the evidence base, while exploring potential positive aspects of social media use such as community building and identity exploration which in turn could help provide a more balanced understanding of the topic.

6. Conclusions

How appropriate is the name if one considers its origins? Narcissus from Greek mythology, famous for his beauty, rejected everyone and fell in love with his own reflection. In a different version of the myth, he starved himself to death as he sat by the pond gazing at his image in the water (Erikson, 2022, introduction). Narcissism has long been recognised in human behaviour, but just like most things, it has evolved. Narcissus may have been sitting by the water admiring his reflection. These days, however, through social media platforms, individuals focused on self-presentation sitting in front of their computers can upload their images, show them to the world and wait for the approval in the form of the 'likes'. Hence, this new image of narcissism can be seen as a transposition of the old myth, an archetypal image adjusted to the projection of a self in the postmodern world in which truth and reality are often interpreted as subjective and shaped by cultural, social, and individual perspectives. In the digital world which we now inhabit, personal value is often quantified by the number of 'likes' and 'followers.' An increased focus on self-presentation can make us preoccupied with creating and presenting our brand on social platforms, affects our images of self-creation and self-representation, as well as disconnects us from the social reality we function in.

Research into the field of narcissism has been continuously expanding, and continues to develop across multiple disciplines. Studying the origins and effects of narcissism remains important for a better understanding of the contemporary world.

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THE STATE-OF-THE-NATION NOVEL AS LIFE WRITING: JONATHAN COE'S *BOURNVILLE*

Abstract: Jonathan Coe is a renown English author of fifteen novels, three biographies, two books for children and a regular contributor to various publications. He has been critically acclaimed and awarded particularly for his state-of-the-nation novels, a category currently being closely examined in academia (Borrego, 2021; 2025). *Bournville* (2022) is his last piece in this line to date. The narrative combines the fictional story of Mary Lamb, a character partly modelled on Coe's mother, and her family over seventy years. The main events in British history from 1945 to 2020 are unfolded in seven chapters, including two VE Days, a World Cup Final and four ceremonies in the Royal Family. In portraying such a varied array of factual events and fictional plotlines, the novel works as clear form of Life Writing (Hann, 2014; Kadar, 2014) and of the liminal space it shares with literary biographies as conceptualised by Michael Benton (2011). In this paper, I will explore Jonathan Coe's authorial strategies in building a solid state-of-the-nation novel evincing a post-pandemic zeitgeist of sadness, confusion and frustration, working as a consoling and stimulating book for his contemporary reading audience, and as an informative cultural text for future reference.

Keywords: *Bournville,* Jonathan Coe, Life Writing, State-of-the-nation novel

1. Introduction

Jonathan Coe is a renowned English writer widely acclaimed for his state-of-the-nation novels, a line he adopted with *What a Carve Up!* (1994), a satirical critique on the impact of Thatcherism in Britain. *The Rotter's Club* (2001), *The Closed Circle* (2004) and *Middle England* (2018), his following pieces in the category, exude a milder tone. Working as a trilogy, they are mainly set between his native Birmingham and London, presenting a common set of characters such as Benjamin Trotter, who shares his author's inclination for writing and musical interests: "(a regular concern with Coe) the interpenetration of narrative and music"

(Moseley, 2016, p. 86). His fiction is largely connected to our times and evinces a keen concern for contemporary national and international politics intertwined with individual fictive lives. The zeitgeist he grew up with in the Midlands, being "the site of repeated conflicts between unions and management, probably fuelled his political imagination" (Guignery, 2015, p. 161). Despite being ethically compelled to write about the current status quo in Britain and Europe, Coe avoids portraying tendentious opinions which may be identified as his own. In this sense, he admits a watershed in his career, since "as a writer, I worry about writing partisan books... I've done that in the past, particularly with *What A Carve Up!*... I'd much rather readers disliked my books for artistic or aesthetic reasons than political ones" (Duerden, 2022). Precisely to avoid biasing his reading public, he finds that comedy "can be a very welcoming space, a communal space, a place where different classes, different strands of moral and political thought come together and are reconciled" (Guignery, 2016). His style combines acute criticism with a fine sense of humour, and he is considered as a "comic novelist and chronicler of Englishness" (Allardice, 2022). He prefers to create easy-to-read books as well as appealing for clarity in them.

Bournville (2022), his fourteenth novel, is another of his state-of-the nation pieces. It starts with a prologue at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The diegetic timespan portrays the main episodes of British national history from 1945 to 2020 in seven chapters, including two VE Days, a World Cup Final and four ceremonies in the Royal Family, most of them watched by different gatherings of relatives and friends over the years. A constant attendant to all of them is Mary Lamb, a character partly based on Coe's mother, Janet. We meet the protagonist at the age of 11 and see her die at 84. The stories of her birth family, her marriage and children coexist with those fictionalised events. Mary, and her three sons —Jack, Martin and Peter— present distinct approaches towards the Crown, the remnants of imperial supremacy, UK and EU relations, particularly with Germany, and the transformation from a predominantly white to an increasingly multiracial and multicultural society. With the recurrent motif *Everything changes, and everything stays the same*, Coe broadly reassesses multiple aspects of national collective memory and cultural imagery. He builds a critical narrative endowed with his sharp eye and fine sense of humour. *Bournville* has received a largely positive reception home and abroad, being translated into Dutch, French, Greek, Italian and Spanish, among others. It is praised for deeply reflecting "on the past (and its role in shaping the present), to rehearse and re-rehearse foundation myths both personal and national" (Preston, 2022). The book bears witness to Coe's patterns of continuity as a solid novelist: "*Bournville* is written with Coe's mix of gentle nostalgia and astute social observation, and fans will recognise characters from previous novels (nearly all his characters are connected in some way)" (Allardice, 2022). His blending of the factual, the biographical and the fictitious was not his initial design for the book:

I was planning a more typical state-of-the-nation novel, starting in 1945 and coming up to the present day, when my mum died. It was a very sudden death, and knocked me for six months emotionally and creatively. Then my brother and I began clearing out her house and found boxes full of diaries from the 1940s and 50s – nothing revelatory, but they did bring me into a kind of closeness with her that I didn't have when she was alive, so immediately I wanted to write about her and use this material. The novel became the story of her life and the story of Britain during those 75 years. It is both highly personal and quite political but in a way that I haven't attempted before. (Anderson, 2023)

Coe underscores that this is not an entirely biographical work, and that only certain features of his mother's life modelled Mary Lamb (Coe, 2022, p. 353). We know, for instance, that both were music and PE teachers (Moseley, 2016, p. 2). In alignment with avoiding any prejudiced approach, he concatenated a myriad of plotlines from a sincere and honest stance: "To combine a national story with a family story…The strength of a novel for me, or the kind of novel I want to write is its capacity for polyphony and for combining many different voices, perspectives and attitudes and presenting them to the readers as faithfully, truthfully and generously as you can" (Biles, 2022). Another authorial aim in incorporating this material is to build a narrative which may show future generations the varied historical events engendering the way we think and behave today, in other words, to present his novel as a cultural archive for future reference.

2. *Bournville* as a State-of-the-nation Novel

The state-of-the-nation novel in Britain is rooted in the works of authors such as Dickens, Gaskell, Disraeli and Trollope, which depict the desolate "Condition of England" denounced by Carlyle in "Chartism" (1839). The struggles of the working classes and the devastation of extreme poverty were in a nutshell their main concern and continue being examined today (Borrego, 2021; 2025). This originally industrial essence would pave the way for a new form reflecting a wider diversity of social inequalities and increasingly related to politics. When explaining the national well-known penchant for the state-of-the-nation novel, Coe advocates in it for "something more dynamic than the passive contemplation of a political reality reflected back at the reader, however truthfully", presenting us with a realistic portrayal of the current zeitgeist which "could even make us want to change it" (Coe, 2012).

Alice Borrego regards the entwining of credible fictional stories with actual historical events, recognized by readers, as an authorial strategy particularly relevant in this category: "If the metonymic structure of state-of-the-nation novels shows that the private sphere is a reflection of the public one, authors of the genre have also elected to depict the operation of local and national government so as to reveal the depth of their society's ethical corruption" (2021, p. 30). For her, the subgenre is also

viewed "as the locus of an "overlap" of cultural differences" (p. 34). In explaining their purpose, she defends that "As they rely on the use of metonymy to illustrate "the way we live now," they aim at debunking the inherited traditions of class division, ethnocentrism and male-dominated narratives" (p. 38). That metonymy is achieved by the inclusion of family ties connecting individuals from divided contexts, or of children of similar bonds: "The happy union or the hopeful child fail to question the status quo that led to the class struggle in the first place. Like nationalism, Condition-of-England novels rely heavily on metonymy: a marriage or a birth within the closed family circle represents the possible, hopeful future of the nation altogether" (Borrego, 2025). These fictional relationships are definitely representing the broad and diverse reality of the country, bearing witness to the fact that antagonisms exist and we need to examine them if we wish things to change. The contrast between the public/private and the collective/individual is "what allows state-of-the-nation novels to diagnose and critique the English nation" (Borrego, 2025).

All of these ingredients concur in *Bournville,* with the mingling of diverse cultural backgrounds emanating from two marriages. One if them is that of Mary and Geoffrey, whose grandfather, Carl Schmidt, had moved to Birmingham from Leipzig in the 1890s (p. 21). Although he eventually became a naturalised English citizen, he would be attacked because of his German origin (pp.56-57). This parentage would trigger various familial confrontations working as a metonymic instance of the controversial recent history of Anglo-German relations. Such is the case when some distant relatives visit the Lambs and Mary's children confront their cousin Lothar on the grounds that *Cadbury* would be better than *Milka*. Under the guise of this hilarious childlike clash, Jack, Mary's ardently patriotic son, defends an inherited prejudice: "You Germans are always trying to poison the English" (p. 120). Lothar responds with a persuasive "I'm not a Nazi" (p. 120) evincing Coe's appeal to clarify any similar misleading interpretation. The adults would likewise face some controversies: "Perhaps the danger of winning a war is that it gives you a sense of triumph and achievement – quite rightly – which makes you think you can afford to take things easy for a while" (p. 115). This remark questions the long prevailing British supremacist mindset, recently at stake over Brexit. However much Geoffrey would avoid a debate with a "Not politics, at the family dinner table" (p. 115), the country has recently been compelled to proceed contrariwise.

Another intercultural couple is that of Martin, Mary's temperate Europhile child, and Bridget, a Glaswegian congenial woman. A set of ensuing family issues would not be related to her Scottishness, but to her being black. Their diverse reactions when first seeing her in a picture would likewise mirror parallel collective divides:

'What a pretty girl,' She said at last. And then, turning to Martin:
'I thought you said she was from Scotland.'
'She is. Glasgow.'
Mary passed the picture to Geoffrey … His face was a mask, unmoving and expressionless.
Doll held the photo up close to her eyes …

'Goodness, she's as black as the ace of spades,' …
Do you treat her the same?' Doll wanted to know. 'I mean … do you treat her the same as you would any other girl?'' …
He was more worried about his father's response. Geoffrey had still not uttered a word. (pp. 205-206)

Mary supports her son and accepts Bridget, whereas her older mother is naturally astonished and curious. Martin's father would contrariwise show no sign of welcoming her. Mary had perceived signs of his racism at the early stages of their relationship, but always hoped he would change (p. 75). Geoffrey would even set up a blind date for his son, so that he and his girlfriend would split up (pp. 222-223). Bridget never felt she was fully accepted and speaks up for herself after Mary dies:

Thirty-two years, he and I knew each other. *Thirty-two years.* And in all that time, do you know what? He never once —not *once* — looked me in the eye. He couldn't do that. He couldn't bring himself to it […] but you *knew.* You could see it. *All* of you. And you never did a damn thing about it. Not a damn, fucking thing. You closed ranks. You never said a word to him and do you know what that means? It means you *took* his side. So it's got nothing to do with whom you voted … All for the quiet life. All so the sacred family could be preserved, as if there was nothing underneath that stank. Stank to high heaven. (pp. 346-347)

Bridget's complaint in a private family circle is yet another situation echoing a wider realm. Readers are encouraged to consider the novel as a mirror and as a means of individual and collective self-criticism. The English nation is thus a metonymy representing similar divisions worldwide. Jonathan Coe is not only criticising racism, but remapping British society as increasingly multicultural and struggling to come to terms with that heterogeneous status quo. As an illustrative instance of this transformation, we read him, a white solid male English author, acknowledging in his novel another noted national writer, a black female one: "All she wanted to do was to sit in the sun by herself and read a book for a few hours. Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* was just out in paperback, and having bought a copy (from an enterprising local bookshop which was offering click and collect) she was keen to get started" (p. 318). This revisionary purpose as a means to invite readers to reflect about the changes they may participate in is inherent to the literary category that *Bournville* represents: "State-of-the-nation novels have the particularity of being written during or in the wake of historical events. However, contrary to nationalist discourses, which use the event as a catalyst for unification, this genre allows for a reflection on the actual rifts that exist between the nation and the individual" (Borrego, 2025).

3. *Bournville* as Life Writing

In portraying the social milieu, experiences and feelings of a particular citizenship over a specific period, the state-of-the-nation novel is inherently a form of Life Writing. Its definition has changed over the past decades. Donald

J. Winslow considers it to be synonymous with biography and autobiography, and that simply "Some writers may prefer the Anglo-Saxon rooted phrase, *life-writing*, to those Latin and Greek based words" (1978b, p. 66).

More recently, we bear witness to other detailed and contextualised approaches:

> Growing out of several developments in the 1970s and 1980s, Life Writing emerged in the 1990s as a research field that gave a central place to the investigation of personal documents: autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, travel accounts, and autobiographical novels. Even though Life Writing as a label for a specific research direction was first conceived in the English-speaking academic world, it has since been adopted by scholars worldwide. Those involved in Life Writing research are largely grounded in literary theory, Cultural Studies and research approaches that focus on identity, linguistics and memory, and on groups that have long been neglected by the scholarly canon and can now be examined from the perspectives of gender and postcolonial studies. (Hann, 2014, p. 177)

The category is then intrinsically connected to the novel, inasmuch as it is one of its forms: "Without wanting to deny Literature, Life Writing allows us to see it, too, as only one possible category of special writing" (Kadar, 2014, p. 205). In the same vein, The Oxford Centre for Life Writing openly includes literature as one of its instances:

> Life-writing includes every possible way of telling a life-story, from biography and autobiography, through letters and memoir, to bio-fiction, blogs, and social media such as Tweets and Instagram stories. Writers and researchers are increasingly recognizing how much of writing is life-writing, including poetry and fiction. Through life-writing we can find out more about each other and we also understand ourselves better in relation to the past. (OCLW, 2020)

Life Writing and biography are thus intertwined in a liminal space, which is also connected to the novel. Literary theorist Michael Benton remarks that the three categories intersect as they all entail "the temporal meeting point of memory and imagination. Receptivity, and the facility to translate such experiences into scenes and stories, show the narrational process in action, but it is essentially a literary process" (2011, p. 75). He further contends that "whereas the novelist *constructs* a narrative of imagined events, the biographer and historian aim to *reconstruct* a narrative from real-life past events" (2011, p. 69). In *Bournville*, Coe is acting as a biographer/historian in fictionalising/reconstructing recent key episodes in British history together with a few traces of his mother's life, while obviously presenting fictive stories. In contemplating his novel as a potential informative material of the present era for ensuing generations, he further acts as novelist/biographer fusing another distinction underscored by Benton: "The novelist looks forward and projects us into the future of a fiction that will reveal the past; the biographer looks back and projects us into the past of a history that will unfold to disclose its future" (2011, p. 69). The fictional narrative is indeed interspersed with fragments of real historical and cultural documents such as Winston Churchill's (pp. 36-38) and King George VI's (pp. 48-49) speeches over the end of WWII,

the television broadcast of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation ceremony (pp. 83-87), or the words of a British *Daily Mail* journalist on the day of the 1966 World Cup Final between England and West Germany (p. 122). The factual and the fictitious also merge when the Lambs watch together the advert of the new Austin Metro in 1980 (pp. 176-180). Jack is thrilled with the patriotic slogan announcing a British car "TO BEAT THE WORLD", whereas Martin considers it conveys "a weird sort of mentality. Us against them". Interestingly enough, the Lambs' middle child chooses the middle ground approach on a regular basis both professionally, working to defend Cadbury's British interests in an economically hostile Europe, and personally, marrying a Scottish black woman in an escalating multicultural yet questionably tolerant society. The author intentionally endows him with this particular quality: "If Martin had a credo, it was moderation in all things" (p. 172). He acts accordingly when joining the SDP in 1981 as he regards them as the balanced alternative to both Tories and Labour (p.196). In the same vein, he firmly believes that dialogue and harmony should prevail over Brexit divides: "I voted leave, you all voted to stay. Fine. We can have a civilized disagreement about it… Maybe it'll turn out to be a mistake. That's not the point. The point is that we made a choice. We made a choice and we just have to stick with it and see what happens. And in the meantime we can still be friends" (p. 345). Martin's moderation and dialogical stance are clearly in alignment with the milder line Coe opted for after *What a Carve Up!* in order to avoid politicising his literature and biasing his readership. Curiously enough, there is another character in the novel, David Foley, a childhood friend of the Lamb's boys, defending the same principle: "my credo as a writer has always been to tell the truth as directly as possible" (p. 140). This defence of truth and honesty in writing is likewise reminiscent of Coe's literary art. The author is then openly impregnating some of his protagonists with traits of his own, thus orchestrating his novel as a liminal space between literature and Life Writing.

Jonathan Coe also dotes Mary Lamb with a conciliatory and flexible nature. Despite initially sharing many of her husband's conservative principles, she would willingly accept ensuing changes. We see her at first judging gay men as the "lowest of the low" in front of her children (p. 109). Thirty years later, when her youngest son Peter, a sensitive musician who comes out at a mature age, reminds her of those words, she openly admits that back then "*Ignorant*, is what we were" (p. 271). He is indeed his mother's child, an ideologist who discusses his concerns and claims his rights, even if it is assumed that homosexuality is generally accepted. He is portrayed as a cultivated anti-monarchical individual, isolating himself at the traditional family gatherings to watch royal events by reading and listening to music (p. 198), also rejecting any collective reverence to the Crown (p. 215; p. 224). The different positions of the Lamb brothers with respect to the Royal Family bears witness to Coe's appeal for a non-judgemental fiction. In alignment with this principle, we appreciate Mary's open-mindedness when admiring

Martin's mixed-race children's "lovely colour", genuinely longing for a racial colour-blind milieu as the antidote to racism: "just imagine if everyone in the world was that colour. That would solve all the problems, wouldn't it?" (p. 233). She firmly believes that accepting the new is the only strategy for a successful society to evolve: "*Everybody changes, don't they? Even if it happens slowly. If you don't change I don't see how you can survive*" (p. 226). She articulates the tolerance that Coe obviously defends himself by portraying a happy interracial marriage and celebrating Bernardine Evaristo, the first black British woman ever to be awarded the Booker Prize.

More recent events fictionalised in the novel portray confused characters buying ridiculous amounts of toilet rolls at the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic (p. 6). Exerting his fine sense of humour, Coe quotes several of the arbitrary lockdown rules that British citizens, and millions worldwide, were obliged to follow (pp. 312-317). On a less comic note, Peter announces that his mother died alone during the night, one of the many well-known "cruelties" of the pandemic he further details (pp. 340-41) and that thousands likewise underwent globally. Jonathan Coe describes his own experience in a final authorial comment: "it still saddens and angers me that my mother died alone, without pain relief, and that members of her family were allowed no personal contact with her as it happened. But then, like thousands of families up and down the country – and unlike the occupiers of 10 Downing Street at the time – we were following the rules" (p. 354). *Bournville* stands thus as a consoling life writing piece for the witnesses of recent traumatising worldwide issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as well as an informative and truth-revealing document for prospective readers. The possibility of considering it as a fictionalised biography of a society is opened since in "a well-written biography, poetic truth and literal truth are interdependent" (Benton, 2011, p. 85). The combination of truth and fiction is certainly not new as "the mixture of fact and fiction is as old in life-writing as it is in history", whether we call it "biographical novel" or "novelized biography" (Winslow, 1978a, pp. 65-66). That balance is clearly present in *Bournville*, as Coe's intended to create a cultural informative text for future generations interested in our current experiences and thoughts, in our contemporary life and zeitgeist. As a matter of fact, some researchers have recently approached life-writing:

> from the critical perspective of cultural memory studies. Fictional and factual varieties of "afterlives," such scholarship argues, feed into the same notional archive of collective remembrance on which societies draw when imagining their past and, through it, establish their cultural identity. Biography, autobiography, and biographical fiction can in this sense be seen to perform the same cultural work. (Novak, 2017, p. 11)

In this sense, his novel is experimental inasmuch as it its fusing Jonathan Coe's threefold role as a novelist, a life writer and biographer. Including real events in the novel may problematise its fictionality as well as the reliability of the evoked events and documents. Readers are thus encouraged to develop a particular hermeneutic

agency to appreciate "clear signals" to tell the "factional from the fictional" by means of a "pact" with the author "which determines the reception of a text" (Novak, 2017, p. 13). Nowadays this understanding is settled before the actual reading starts, as average readers carefully select their choices. In the words of Coe "there is an implicit agreement between you and the reader, before she even starts reading, that everything you are about to tell her is a lie – then really, nobody is being dishonest at all, are they?" (Coe, 2017). Whether Coe's regulars or neophytes in his oeuvre, it is a clearly curious public that will respond to his literary invitation.

4. Conclusion

Bournville is certainly not an entirely biographical novel, as Coe has explicitly remarked. It is partly a revision of British recent collective memory through a display of varied historical and cultural documents. The authorial intention in incorporating this material in his fictionalising of history is partly to provide informed grounds to encourage contemporary readers to question the validity of certain pervading master narratives, in a contemporary context of shared vulnerability and multiple crises. One of them is the British glorious superiority over Germany and, by extension, over Europe. We read how, fortunately, there are signs of change: Jack's son, Julian, is horrified when seeing how his father had painted Hitler moustaches on photographs of German football players as a child (pp. 134-135), thus showing that younger generations tend to be tolerant and respectful. Likewise, the narrative depicts an increasingly multicultural citizenship struggling to leave behind the image of a predominantly white and male-dominated scenario. This gradual metamorphosis is evinced by Bridget, a black Scottish woman with a legal expertise who considers standing for the European Parliament (p. 288), and her young mixed-race English daughter Lorna, who pursues her music career at the outset of the novel and reads Bernardine Evaristo, a widely acclaimed author in contemporary black British literature. Undeniable signs showing that things have changed, although others remain the same. Coe intertwines both tendencies enticing his readership to carry on transforming their milieu and, in so doing, the world.

The Lambs' private story told on par with public significant events of British recent history turns *Bournville* into a clear instance of a state-of-the-nation novel and consequently of Life-Writing. Jonathan Coe has managed to create a broad-minded milieu in his fiction by providing a polyphonic array of intergenerational and culturally heterogeneous characters. Regardless of their multifarious views on diverse identity issues, their believable experiences turn them into authentic and attractive protagonists, since what humanises them "is not their possible errors in judgement but their essential—if imperfect— goodness" (Prieto-Arranz, 2025, 20). Coe achieves a degree of complicity between his characters and his readership by interlacing accurate historical texts with traces of his personal family life and the

intimate conflicts of Mary Lamb and her household. He definitely achieves his writing principle: "I've tried not to make it a judgemental book … we are a very various and mysterious body of people in some ways … I just want to present these various manifestations of human behaviour as faithfully as I can" (Biles, 2022). Just as "good writing – whether it's a novel or a poem, journalism or science – can transcend time, and gender, and age, and ethnicity, and communicate thoughts and emotions across all of these divides, in a way that almost, when you think about it, seems supernatural" (Coe, 2017), *Bournville* stands as a life-writing manifesto in contemporary literature as well as a cultural archive for future reference.

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METAPHORICAL PROJECTIONS IN PISTOL SHOOTING INSTRUCTIONS

Abstract: Extensive research has been conducted within the cognitive semantics theoretical framework to investigate the metaphorical conceptualisation of abstract domains in terms of concrete ones. This body of research lends support to the embodiment paradigm adopted in cognitive science, which emphasises the role of sensorimotor experience in shaping cognition. Meanwhile, the potential application of cross-domain mappings in the conceptualisation and expression of sensorimotor experience has received little attention. This paper attempts to address this issue through an analysis of the linguistic data contained in tips for inexperienced amateur shooters that have been shared by expert shooters on internet blogs and YouTube videos. The study revealed that instructors intentionally and creatively prompt their listeners to activate familiar domains of physical activity and to make projections onto the physical activity of trigger pull, i.e. the skill they are learning. The paper argues that, in the analysed discourse, metaphorical cross-domain mappings can help instructors overcome the challenge of communicating concrete, physical information that cannot be demonstrated and is largely instructors' internal, private sensorimotor sensation. The paper also compares the cross-domain mappings between concrete domains identified in the data with typical conceptual metaphors, and briefly addresses the question of how such mappings relate to the embodiment paradigm.

Key words: sensorimotor experience, cross-domain projections, embodiment paradigm, shooting instructions

1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the use of conceptual metaphors in communicating aspects of the sensorimotor experience. Metaphor, as a cognitive mechanism, has been the focus of cognitive semantics, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory,

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for the last forty-five years. However, much more attention has been given to the role of metaphors in talking about abstract concepts and (presumably) in abstract thinking, which is a logical consequence of adopting the embodied cognition thesis or paradigm, than to the use of metaphorical projections in contexts, in which both target and source domain are concrete. I believe that that the latter topic deserves more attention. In this paper, I will argue that concrete sensorimotor experience that is private — in the sense that it is not easily visible or directly accessible to listeners — can be made public by means of cross-domain mappings between two different concrete domains. These mappings can be realised linguistically as analogies, comparisons, and metaphors. A communicative situation that could provide data for investigating this topic needs to meet the flowing criterion: the speaker wants to share an experience or a skill that cannot be presented directly by a demonstration, the assumption being that if the skill is physically demonstrable then no additional communicative effort is required. For reasons I explain later, the skill of shooting a pistol and instructions how to do it properly provide ideal context and data.

The paper is structured as follows: First, Section 2 provides a brief presentation of the embodied cognition paradigm, followed by a definition of the conceptual metaphor. Next, Section 3 begins with an explanation why shooting instructions offer unique data for studying the use of conceptual metaphors in communication of sensorimotor experience. Section 4 presents and analyses examples from internet blogs and YouTube videos in which instructors or expert shooters provide tips for inexperienced shooters. The discussion of the observations drawn from this analysis is provided at the end.

2. Theoretical background and methodology

The embodied cognition paradigm adopted in cognitive science assumes that 'sensorimotor interactions with the world shape cognition" (Varela et al., [1991] 2016 p. xxv) or, in other words, "the body plays a constitutive role in cognition, that is, cognition depends directly on the body as a functional whole and not just the brain" (Varela et al., [1991] 2016) p. xxvi). Following this paradigm:

> the concepts we have access to and the nature of the 'reality' we think and talk about are a function of our embodiment: we can only talk about what we can perceive and conceive, and the things that we can perceive and conceive derive from embodied experience. From this point of view, the human mind must bear the imprint of embodied experience. (Evans and Green 2006 p. 46)

The embodied cognition paradigm has been embraced by cognitive semantics as one of the guiding principles from the very beginning (Evans, 2007, p. 66) and it determined its research on figurative language to a large extent. If cognition is embodied, then how we think about abstract concepts must be shaped by sensorimotor experience. As Lakoff (1987, 1990, 1993) and Johnson (1987) have

argued, embodied experience can be systematically extended or projected onto more abstract concepts and conceptual domains, providing them with structure (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 46). In turn, language, that is how we talk about abstract domains, can provide data for empirical research.

The idea of projections between domains lies at the core of the notion of conceptual metaphor, the central construct of cognitive semantic studies. Conceptual metaphor is typically defined as "understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain", with the conceptual domain being defined as "any coherent organization of experience" (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4), or as "[a] form of conceptual projection involving mappings or correspondences holding between distinct conceptual domains" (Evans, 2007, p. 136). Well-known examples of conceptual metaphors involve THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, ARGUMENT IS WAR or LOVE IS A JOURNEY[2]. In each of these metaphors, there is a target domain, that is "the domain we try to understand" (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4), and the source domain, which provides structure and linguistic expressions for the target domain (Evans, 2007, p. 200). If we look at the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY in more detail (cf. Kövecses, 2002, p. 6-7), we can see that the conventional scenario of JOURNEY or TRAVEL is used as a source domain to conceptualize the target domain of LOVE. In this metaphor, the elements of the domain of JOURNEY are mapped onto elements of the domain of LOVE, for example, the tavellers correspond to lovers, obstacles on the way correspond to difficulties experienced in a relationship, the vehicle to the relationship itself, etc.

Conceptual metaphors, which in the first place are the way we think about a certain concept, such as LOVE, can manifest in language as metaphorical linguistic expressions, for instance, *It's been a bumpy road*, refers to difficulties experienced by lovers, and *The relationship is foundering,* means that the relationship is likely to fail. However, metaphors can also have visual, gestural or multimodal manifestations as demonstrated by substantial research (see, for example Forceville 2009; Forceville 2017; Forceville/Urios-Aparisi 2009 for visual and multimodal metaphor studies, and Cienki, 2009; Cienki, 2017; Cienki and Müller, 2008; Mittelberg and Waugh; 2009 for research on gestural metaphors).

An important consequence of conceptualizing one conceptual domain in terms of another is that the rich experiential knowledge we have about the source domain can be used to create inferences or metaphorical entailments about the target domain (cf. Evans, 2007, p. 138-139). Thus, our experience with travelling tells us that journeys are a purposeful activity, that they have a destination that travellers may or may not reach, that longer journeys have stages, etc. When LOVE is conceptualized as a JOURNEY, all knowledge and reasoning that is part of the source domain is available to structure our reasoning about the target domain,

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[2] It is a typographical convention in cognitive linguistics to use small capital letters for metaphor labels or concepts.

which is why partners who embrace such a metaphorical conceptualization of their relationship may expect it to have some stages and to develop in a certain direction.

The metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, used here to illustrate the notions of source and target domain, mappings and entailments, is at the same time an example of embodied cognition, as the domain of LOVE is understood in terms of a more concrete and physically experienced domain of JOURNEY. There is extensive research in support of embodied cognition, and it has been partially realized as studies of how concrete domains can structure abstract thinking and manifest in language. It covers such areas as philosophy (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), science (e.g. Brown, 2003; Drogosz, 2019; Fojt, 2009; Zawisławska, 2011), mathematics (e.g. Lakoff & Núñez, 2000), music (e.g. Zbikowski, 2008), politics (e.g. Lakoff, 1991; Lakoff, 1996; Sandikcioglu, 2001), value systems (Krzeszowski, 1997) or emotions (e.g. Fussell, 2002; Kövecses, 1986). On the other hand, investigations into projections between concrete, sensorimotor domains are limited, for example Łozińska (2021), who analyses metaphoricity of names for yoga positions, and Müller & Ladevig (2013), who analyse metaphoric expressions of balance in dance lessons. It is the latter study that explicitly argues for the value of studying how people talk about body movements and the sensorimotor experiences for the study of conceptual metaphor (Müller & Ladevig, 2013, p. 296). This paper hopes to contribute to this line of research.

3. Study rationale and methodology

There are several features which potentially make shooting instructions a unique and valuable material for studying functions of metaphors of concrete, sensorimotor sensations. Firstly, shooting a firearm is undoubtedly a physical activity which demands a skill acquired through practice. What is more, its elements can be reduced to very basic physical activities, for example, holding an object in two hands (i.e. pistol grip) or moving the index finger (i.e. trigger pull). Secondly, the most important aspects of shooting (e.g. the trigger pull) cannot be observed when an expert is performing them and learned by imitation: not only is the movement of the shooter's trigger finger very subtle and quick (3-5 seconds), but also it is significantly obscured by the trigger guard. All this makes shooting a private experience of a shooter. What is more, even though the activities of holding an object and moving a finger are physically simple, there are many aspects of how they should be performed in the context of shooting that are counterintuitive, which is discussed later in detail. This makes shooting difficult to learn through trial and error, as any unguided practice is likely to perpetuate mistakes rather than lead to improvement, as some instructors have pointed out in personal communication. Consequently, shooting instructions are not only indispensable in learning how to shoot accurately, but also provide ideal material for studying how a sensorimotor

experience can be communicated, as the only way the expert shooter can share their experience is by (multimodal) communication. Because direct observation and imitation are almost impossible, the instructors verbally and gesturally prompt the learners to create mental images. Such mental images can serve as models for practice, helping to overcome natural tendencies and form new habits. We can say that while instructors cannot directly influence a learner's body to optimize their performance, they can attempt to influence their minds.

The data for this study were collected from Internet blogs and YouTube videos, but a lot of inspiration came from unrecorded personal communication with expert shooters and instructors, as well as informal observations at a shooting range. The material covered three blogs (7,450 words total length) and sixteen YouTube videos (107.68 minutes in total length), out of which three were selected as a source of examples, as they displayed the greatest number of analogies and metaphorical expressions. The list of sources is provided in the Appendix together with abbreviations used to identify the source of examples in the upcoming analysis. The authors of these blogs and videos are experienced shooters, such as sport shooters, ex-military personnel and professional shooting instructors, all native speakers of American English, who share their expertise with amateur shooters. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to the former as "instructors" and the latter as "learners" or "inexperienced shooters". I decided to draw data from both blogs (written language) and videos (spoken language, gestures and visual aids) to make certain that instructors rely on metaphors irrespective of the medium of communication, and even if gestural demonstrations are possible.

There are lots of tips for amateur shooters on the internet, which is why the data needed careful selection. Firstly, I narrowed it down to instructions for pistol shooting because it is more difficult to achieve aiming accuracy with a pistol than with firearms that have a longer sight radius (the longer the sight radius, the easier it is to align the front and rear sights). Secondly, I focused solely on trigger pull, as this is the factor that usually determines accuracy, and it is also the most difficult aspect to teach and learn. Thirdly, I focused on verbal metaphors, although it should be noted that co-verbal gestures play a significant role in shooting instructions and deserve a separate in-depth study.

In the following section I analyse how instructors intentionally create correspondences between some aspect of the trigger pull (target domain) and a supposedly familiar sensorimotor activity (source domain).

4. Analysis

What an inexperienced shooter feels when pulling the trigger with their index finger (i.e. trigger finger) is little resistance from the trigger at the beginning, more resistance later, and a sudden release when the pistol fires. For many people this

experience is initially overwhelming, especially since it involves an explosion very close to their face, and everything is happening too quickly for a conscious analysis, which is why it is a common practice that instructors break down the process of trigger movement into components. The most popular way to do it is to describe the trigger motion in terms of travel with distinct stages, i.e. via the metaphor TRIGGER MOVEMENT IS TRAVEL WITH STAGES. Let us take a closer look at the names of the stages listed in one of the blogs and consider what they technically stand for and entail as instantiations of the metaphor:

(1)   The nine trigger positions of a handgun are identified as: Rest (1), Slack (2), Wall (3), Creep (4), Break (5), Overtravel (6), Pin (7), Reverse Travel (8) and Reset (9). (Tarani)

The first stage is Rest. This is the initial, starting position, during which the shooter puts the finger onto the trigger but does not yet exert any pressure and the trigger does not move. The name suggests, however, that the trigger has already done some work or travel, and this is indeed the case if more shots have been broken. Then this is the position reached by the trigger once the motion has been completed.

The second stage is Slack or Take-up which is explained as "any 'positive' movement of the trigger that does not cause the sear to move and does not engage the mainspring" (Hyve). At this stage, the shooter starts pulling the trigger but feels minimal resistance and from their perspective nothing is happening. The name of this stage draws on the maritime source domain of pulling a rope. The correspondence is made between the minimal effort that is needed to move the trigger at this stage and taking up the slack of a rope before it becomes tight and anything can be pulled. This correspondence highlights the ease of the movement but also the fact that it is not the proper pull yet but just a necessary preparation before the real action is done.

The next stage was called Wall by Rob Leatham, a multi-time world champion and Master level instructor (Tarani). This is the point "where the trigger action first engages the resistance of the sear" (Hyve) and the shooter feels that now far more pressure is needed to keep moving the trigger. Within the travel scenario, the name activates the experience of an encounter with an obstacle that renders movement difficult: the moving entity hits a wall.

The name of the fifth stage (Creep) is attributed to leading competitive shooter Travis McCamish (Tarani). Technically, it is "any 'positive' movement of the trigger that does cause the sear to move and does engage the mainspring" (Hyve). At this stage the shooter continues to pull the trigger trying to overcome its resistance. Calling this stage of trigger movement Creep not only highlights the effort involved in this stage of the pull (creeping demands more effort than walking or even running), but also entails that this movement is slow and careful, as in expectation of something unexpected to happen.

The next stage, Break, is "the point of the trigger action where the sear releases the hammer (or the striker, depending on the type of action)" (Hyve). The shooter

experiences a sudden release of the trigger and the gun fires. This stage of sudden release of the trigger is conceptualized in terms of breaking an object, e.g. a stick. What the name Break highlights is the fact that the release is sudden, giving the effect of surprise or even being startled.

After the Break comes Overtravel, which is "any 'positive' movement of the trigger after the break" (Hyve). This is the movement of the trigger after the resistance is overcome up to the point when it cannot move any further to the rear. The reuse of the word "travel" in the name reinforces the conceptualization of the trigger movement in terms of a structured JOURNEY. Overtravel is followed by Pin, which is not discussed here because this stage, as an enforced stop, is not part of a natural movement of the trigger, and many instructors are even against practicing it.

Finally, there is Reverse travel and Reset, which is "the 'negative' movement […] of the trigger to the point that the trigger re-engages the sear (or the striker, depending on the type of action), and the gun can be fired again" (Hyve). In other words, the trigger moves away from the shooter to assume the position from which another shot is possible.

I want to argue that the conceptualization and description of trigger movement as TRAVEL with stages has important positive consequences for the learner. Firstly, it entails regularity and predictability of the movement, which usually reduces stress. If stages are well defined and always occur in the same sequence, then we know what and when to expect. The whole process of trigger pull becomes more controlled. Secondly, this description lists more stages than an inexperienced shooter is able to identify themselves, which can stimulate their sensitivity to what their index finger can feel while pulling the trigger. Thirdly, some of the names of the stages can function as verbal prompts to create mental images that recreate a familiar sensorimotor experience, such as taking up slack of a rope, hitting a wall, creeping or breaking an object.

The description of trigger movement discussed above appears to be well established among instructors. Some instructors may conflate two or three stages into one, or omit one of the stages, but the general conceptualisation and names remain the same. What is more, in the studied blogs and videos, I found little creativity in the description of this aspect of trigger pull, as the instructions recorded turned out to be rather uniform. This is probably because the characteristics of the trigger movement, including its stages, result from the specifics of mechanical construction of the pistol and are independent of the shooter. However, this is not the case with other aspects of the trigger pull: the direction of the pull, the speed of the movement, and energy involved in the pull. Not only is their optimal execution fully dependent on the shooter, but it is also often counterintuitive and goes against physiological habits. Consequently, this is the area in which novice shooters tend to make many mistakes, and in which instructors encourage them to activate sensorimotor sensations connected with a situation they are familiar with, project these sensations onto an aspect of trigger pull, and thus improve their performance.

The first typical mistake relates to the direction in which pressure is applied to the trigger. Although the trigger itself cannot be pushed to the right or left as it can only move towards or away from the shooter, applying pressure in the wrong direction can cause the entire pistol to move and negatively affect accuracy. Instructors emphasise that the movement must be "straight back", and imagining touching one's own nose can help to establish the correct direction:

(2) So, the second principle of the trigger control is the direction of the press. What's the answer? Straight back. […] How are we going to control that straight back feeling? It's more mental and the best visual analogy, a mental analogy that I will recommend you do, imagine that you want to simply **touch your nose with your finger**. (Pro)

The next group of problems derives from the stages of the trigger pull discussed earlier. The difference in the resistance of the trigger between Pre-travel and Wall requires the shooter to increase the pressure on the trigger to overcome Wall. One common suboptimal reaction is to apply too much pressure. In (3), the instructor uses the analogy of operating a computer mouse or keyboard to evoke the sensation of gently but firmly applying force.

(3) The challenging part is that you need to have a stiff and firm grip, but your trigger manipulations should be gentle – **similar to the effort used to click a mouse or type on a keyboard.** (Hyve)

Another typical mistake is the sudden, instinctive increase in the speed of finger movement, together with increased pressure, which is known as "jerking the trigger". The challenge, then, is to learn how to increase the pressure applied by the finger without speeding up its movement. Instructors draw on domains of experience that can provide a reference model of smooth, constant and consistent movement. On the one hand, they can evoke situations in which the successful use of some device requires a constant speed, such as when PULLING A ZIPPER (4), PRESSING A CAMERA BUTTON (5), or USING A SQUIRT GUN (6). On the other hand, they can make reference to situations involving physical interaction with other people, in which controlled movement is necessary, either because sudden movement can be harmful, such as when picking up a child (7), or because it is socially unacceptable, such as when shaking hands (8).

(4) Constant speed is a must if you want to be successful with rolling–this is why I like to refer to this trigger manipulation as **the zipper pull**, too. When you zip something open or closed, you will typically maintain **the same controlled speed** while doing so. (Hyve)
(5) 'Steady press' is moving through each of the positions with continuous motion akin to that of **using a squirt gun where you maintain continual water pressure**. If you stop anywhere along the way on either path (break or reset) then you increase the probability of altering alignment. (Tarani)
(6) There's a tendency that as soon as the sights are aligned exactly how we want them, we want **to snap that shot** really fast, and in doing so we're **exerting wonky pressures** that are going to misalign the sights. To use the **camera analogy.** It's like you took all this time to get the subject perfectly framed and in focus, and at the last minute **instead of smoothly pressing the button on the camera you smash it really hard**, and it just throws everything out of whack. (ColdBore)

(7) […] let's use the **analogy of picking up a child or a toddler**: if I reach down under the armpits, do I go from zero to a hundred really quick? jerking? giving them whiplash? Or do I start applying pressure and roll into it? So the exact same concept. (Pike)

(8) Another analogy: **is just like a handshake**. Do I come in and grab the hand really hard and try to crush it or do I go to zero percent and apply pressure? (Pike)

In the studied data, instructors also used such source domains as handling of a soft, elastic object, i.e. a rubber ball (Pew), using a car clutch (Pike), the movement of the piston of a car engine (Hyve) or milking a cow (ColdBore). Table 1 summarises the mappings between a familiar domain of experience (source domain) and the target domain of the newly learnt experience, specifying the aspect of the source domain that is projected.

Table 1. Projections of sensorimotor sensations from a source domain to the domain of trigger pull.

The source domain (familiar experience)	The target domain (new experience)
the direction of the index finger when one wants to touch their nose	the direction of the index finger pulling the trigger
the speed of movement of the finger or the hand in operating a familiar device (pulling a zipper, pressing a button on a camera, using a squirt gun)	the speed of moving the finger during trigger pull
the speed of movement of the hand or the whole body involved in physical interaction with other people (picking up a child, giving a handshake)	the speed of moving the finger during trigger pull
the controlled movement of handling a delicate, elastic object	the controlled movement of the finger during trigger pull

5. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this paper was to investigate the potential reliance on conceptual metaphors in communication of sensorimotor experience. Shooting tips on how to improve one's trigger pull were used as a source of data. The analysed examples showed that instructors indeed frequently, creatively and intentionally made correspondences between familiar experiential domains and the less familiar domain of trigger pull to communicate their expertise. It is interesting in itself that cross-domain projections were found in this discourse, and that even a simple physical activity such as bending a finger can be described by activating other experiential domains. At the same time, this observation raises a number of questions.

The first question is whether the analysed examples meet the definition of conceptual metaphor adopted in cognitive semantics. In the case of the description of trigger movement as travel with stages in (1) there is no doubt that it is

metaphorical in this sense. This is an example of a canonical structural metaphor with transparent mappings (e.g. trigger movement corresponds to travel, trigger corresponds to traveller, and obstacles on the way are mapped onto stronger resistance of the sear), which entails predictability. It can be said that the target domain of trigger movement is understood in terms of travel with stages and hence it was labelled TRIGGER MOVEMENT IS TRAVEL WITH STAGES. However, in the case of how instructors describe the private sensorimotor experience of the trigger pull the answer is less obvious. On the one hand, all analysed examples in (2–7) involve a projection of sensorimotor experience associated with a known activity (source domain) onto an aspect of trigger pull, which is an unfamiliar activity to be learned (target domain), so in that respect they meet the definition. On the other hand, the "understanding" component of the metaphor definition is difficult to identify. It should be noted that these projections do not reveal how trigger pull is conceptualised in shooting discourse, or how shooters think about it. In other words, such analogies and comparisons do not feature in the regular discourse of expert shooters. Instead, these projections were created solely for the benefit of learners, to share the sensorimotor experience of instructors and to provide a reference for learners. By activating these projections during training, learners can build optimal muscle activity, but once the skill is acquired, these projections, together with their linguistic representations, are no longer used. Thus, during training, learners are encouraged to conceptualise the motor activity of pulling the trigger in terms of pressing a camera button, for example. However, there is no evidence that this conceptualisation extends beyond the training environment. Therefore, it could be said that, while projections from the source domain constitute the target domain in the case of the metaphorization of abstract domains on both the mental and linguistic levels, in the case of projections between sensorimotor domains, they serve as temporary scaffolding that is removed once the physical skill has been mastered. This observation, however, deserves more attention and studies using more diverse data.

The second question the analysis raises pertains to the function of cross-domain projections in the context of communication of a motor skill. At least in the case of trigger pull instructions, the main reason why instructors intentionally and creatively rely on these projections is to communicate something that cannot be seen or accessed in any other way by a listener. As was explained, technical obstacles make it impossible to observe the actions of an experienced shooter. More importantly, sensorimotor sensations, such as the amount of effort exerted or resistance felt, are private and inaccessible to others. The cross-domain mappings inherent in the conceptual metaphor make it an indispensable means of communicating private states, which has been demonstrated extensively for emotions, and seems equally important for sensorimotor sensations. In the analysed examples, the analogies with familiar activities, frequently reinforced by directions to "imagine" or to "use the analogy", function as prompts to activate memories of sensorimotor sensations

and to project them onto the new, learned experience. In this way, the private sensorimotor sensations required for the successful manipulation of physical objects are made public through reference to the sensorimotor sensations involved in other motor activities. It can be concluded that, in the case of shooting instructions at least, metaphor allows access to mental imagery and thus circumvents the lack of direct observation.

The last issue worth addressing is how the observations drawn from this analysis of communication of concrete experience relate to the embodiment paradigm. Four decades of research in the realm of cognitive semantics (i.e. empirical studies of how people speak and reason about abstract concepts) provided ample evidence that abstract thought is structured by sensorimotor experience. What about projections between two concrete domains? I believe that using the mechanism of creating cross-domain correspondences even for concrete domains also supports the embodiment paradigm although in a different way. While the study of conceptualizations of abstract domains in terms of concrete, bodily domains has revealed the role of the physical experience in shaping mental experience, this study has championed the role of mental imagery to build a sensorimotor sensation and develop a motor skill. Consequently, not only does the body shape cognition, but also cognition can directly participate in shaping physical performance. Although this is common knowledge for any sport psychologist, studying concrete-to-concrete mappings has gained little attention of cognitive linguistics. This paper could make a modest contribution towards filling this gap.

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Appendix: Sources of data quoted in the paper

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(Pew) – PewPewTactical – trigger discipline, pull, and control (beginner's guide) https://www.pewpewtactical.com/trigger-discipline-control-guide/ (1700 words) DOA 16.07.2025

(Hyve) – Hyve – Ultimate guide to trigger discipline and trigger control https://tacticalhyve.com/ultimate-guide-to-trigger-discipline-and-trigger-control/ (4630 words) DOA 19.07.2025

(Tarani) – Trigger Fundamentals. Steve Tarani details handgun trigger-control fundamentals https://www.shootingillustrated.com/content/handgun-trigger-fundamentals/ (1120 words) DOA 03.07.2025

YouTube videos:
(Pike) – FrogMan Tactical. Navy SEAL Training. Handgun Trigger Control. Jason Pike https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zodCgUHRSk (length 10.55 minutes) 18.07.2025
(Pro) – Tactical Performance Center. Pull the Trigger like a Pro! Master the Skills of Shooting a Handgun. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6QeVSFLSrU (length 6.52 minutes), DOA 21.07.2025
(ColdBore) – ColdBore Tactical, LLC, TRIGGER CONTROL (Master Class & Training Tips) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vdck4w0TBc (length 14.03 minutes), DOA 22.07.2025

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FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION: EYE-TRACKING METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES

Abstract: Metacognitive reading strategies are central to improving reading behaviour and comprehension, particularly for students reading in a second language (Grabe, 2009; Haukås et al., 2018). However, students' self-reported awareness of these strategies does not always translate into effective use during reading tasks (Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). This study is an attempt to shift from awareness to action by implementing explicit metacognitive reading instruction. A group of first-year international students (N = 32) at a Hungarian university participated in a metacognitive reading intervention supported by eye-tracking technology. Participants completed the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory–Revised (MARSI-R; Mokhtari et al., 2018) and took part in pre- and post-instruction eye-tracking experiments and a reading comprehension exam (Cambridge Reading Test, B1). The instruction comprised 10 × 90-minute sessions, during which metacognitive reading strategies were introduced and practised. The initial eye-tracking experiment revealed a clear gap between students' perceived strategy awareness and their observable reading behaviours. Following instruction, heatmaps and fixation data showed more purposeful, structured reading patterns, reduced fixation durations, and increased attention to task-relevant features. The findings show the potential of explicit metacognitive reading instruction in transforming reading behaviours, highlighting its essential role in second-language academic reading development.

Keywords: Metacognition, Academic Reading, Reading Strategies, Eye-tracking, MARSI-R

1. Introduction

Academic reading is foundational to higher education. It forms the cornerstone through which students engage with the ideas, methods, and debates of their discipline. Through reading, students evaluate and synthesize information, advance their analytical skills, and thus produce knowledge. Ultimately, academic reading is both a tool for learning and a medium for intellectual participation in the academic community (Afdal et al., 2023). Nonetheless, it is often underrated and overlooked in higher education, despite its centrality to academic success. It is frequently

treated as a previously acquired skill, not as a complex academic proficiency that must be continuously learned and explicitly taught. The assumption that reading is a previously acquired skill appears particularly problematic in English-medium instruction (EMI) degrees, which are rapidly going global (Owen et al., 2021).

What makes this issue more relevant is that more and more countries are now offering entire degrees in English as a way to cater to foreign students and to align their educational systems with global standards (Bezborodova & Radjabzade, 2022). Globally, Chinese learners represent the largest and most rapidly growing population enrolled in university-level English-language programmes (Wang et al., 2024). This trend reflects broader patterns of global mobility, the internationalisation of higher education, and the increasing value placed on English-medium instruction. In the Hungarian context, Chinese students have become a prominent presence in the university sector. By 2016, they ranked third among all international students in Hungary and were the largest non-European group, comprising up to 20% of the international student body at the University of Debrecen and 18% at Corvinus University of Budapest (Xueyan, 2020). Their motivations for choosing Hungary include affordable tuition, access to European qualifications, and improved employment prospects, often shaped by parental expectations and aspirations for upward mobility (Li & Primecz, 2023). More recent data show that Chinese students continue to account for approximately 7% of all international students in Hungary, with an estimated 3,500 to 4,000 Chinese nationals enrolled across Hungarian universities in 2022–2023 (Tempus Public Foundation, 2023). Medicine remains a particularly attractive field, as demonstrated by Semmelweis University's international medical cohort, where Chinese students are estimated to number in the hundreds (Semmelweis University, 2024). However, this sustained growth also highlights the academic and cultural challenges these learners face. Li (2020) asserts that students often struggle not only with communication but also with specific academic skills, such as academic reading, partly due to differences in the education system in China.

One promising approach to addressing these reading challenges is metacognitive reading strategy instruction, which has been identified as effective in stimulating reading development. Metacognition refers to the ability to regulate one's own learning through planning, tracking, and evaluating comprehension while reading (Haukås et al., 2018; Klimovich et al., 2023). Extensive research on metacognitive reading has been conducted; however, most studies have utilised self-report questionnaires as their main instrument (Csíkos, 2022; Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). Csíkos (2022) asserts that such instruments do not necessarily reflect learners' reading experience in practice, as they might rely on memory, not real-time behaviours, which might be biased and not reflect their actual reading behaviours (Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). Although research is calling for online methods, very few studies have used a strategy instruction approach to compare students' reading behaviours before and after instruction, and even fewer have used

eye-tracking technology to assess metacognitive reading behaviour, especially with international university students.

Ultimately, this paper aims to answer the following question:

How does explicit metacognitive reading instruction affect the reading behaviour of second language (L2) learners at the university level, as shown by eye-tracking data?

The findings of this study highlight the potential of explicit metacognitive reading instruction in enhancing reading comprehension and promoting a more effective academic reading experience at tertiary education.

2. Literature Review

Academic reading is a high-order cognitive task at the heart of knowledge construction, critical thinking, and tertiary-level academic success (Grabe, 2009; Afdal et al., 2023). However, defining reading comprehension has been a daunting task for researchers. Duke and Cartwright (2021) note that reading comprehension is founded on the interaction of several mutually connected abilities, including word recognition, language comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, background knowledge, executive control, and metacognitive control. Researchers regularly highlight these factors as among the chief mechanisms defining reading comprehension outcomes (Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025).

This paper focuses on metacognitive control, as it has been identified as central to reading proficiency, specifically in academic contexts (Haukås et al., 2018). Metacognition is widely defined in theoretical models as comprising two interrelated components: first, knowledge of cognition, and second, regulation of cognition (Flavell, 1979). The former involves an individual's awareness of themselves as learners, their understanding of various task demands, and familiarity with learning strategies (Schraw et al., 2006). The latter, on the other hand, investigates how learners engage in the reading process. In other words, how they approach tasks, monitor their comprehension and strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies (Schraw et al., 2006). In investigating awareness, Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) devised an inventory to assess what strategies readers deploy to regulate their reading. MARSI-R comprises global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support reading strategies (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). MARSI-R has been widely used since then, which gave rise to a large number of studies of reading strategy use, beginning with awareness questionnaire studies, instruction studies, or a mixture of both (Mokhtari et al., 2018). Initially, research has shown which different metacognitive reading strategies stronger readers utilise. Alturjman (2024) found that, for example in Hungary, stronger students often made use of problem-solving strategies such as "re-reading to make sure I understand what I'm reading" and "guessing the meaning of unknown words or phrases" rather

than global reading strategies like "checking to see if the content of the text fits my purpose for reading."

Although MARSI-R was widely used across many countries and in different contexts, it has received some critiques. Research has raised concern about its reliability given that it is mainly based on respondents' beliefs (Csíkos, 2022; Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). Csíkos (2022) found that respondents of such self-report questionnaires might base their answers on memory, rather than actual strategy use. They also tend to overestimate or underestimate their strategy use (Veenman, 2016). What is more is that the list of strategies might remind students of strategies they do not actually use while reading (Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). As a result, research started taking a shift toward utilising instruction-based studies to investigate metacognitive strategy use. Explicit instruction is encouraged as it involves clearly modelling and guiding students through metacognitive reading strategies, through a series of sessions (Kan et al., 2024). While most studies have incorporated standardized reading tests to measure students' reading improvements (Muhid et al., 2020; Urban et al., 2023), others have used interviews to gain deeper insights into students' personal perspectives (Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023; İncirkuş & Beyreli, 2020). Although these studies have yielded valuable results, they primarily focused on students' outputs rather than on the reading process itself. In response, some researchers have proposed the use of eye-tracking techniques. Eye-tracking, in particular, has emerged as a powerful method for capturing real-time cognitive and metacognitive activity during reading (Godfroid & Hui, 2025). Recent findings indicate that eye-movement indicators such as regressions, fixation durations, and saccade patterns can serve as reliable markers of monitoring and re-evaluation processes (Mézière et al., 2023), offering insights that self-report instruments alone cannot provide.

Although quite a few intervention studies were conducted, most of them have primarily examined domestic learners, leaving a gap in understanding how international students adapt to European academic expectations. This study focuses on Chinese students specializing in medicine as (1) they comprise one of the largest non-European student populations in Hungary, and (2) because medical studies, in particular, demand advanced reading comprehension, involving discipline-specific terminology, dense informational texts, and high levels of retention and reasoning (Alhumsi, 2021). Given these challenges, it remains unclear how metacognitive strategy instruction can support such learners in managing the heavy reading load characteristic of medical programmes.

By combining self-report data, eye-tracking measures, and explicit metacognitive instruction, the present study contributes to the literature by offering a multi-method perspective on how strategy training influences both perceived and observable reading behaviour. It thus addresses a regional gap (international students in Hungary), a disciplinary gap (medical academic reading), and a methodological gap (integrating eye-tracking into intervention research).

Given these insights, the present study aims to explore the overarching question: How does explicit metacognitive reading instruction influence observed reading behaviour among international students in Hungary?

3. Method

The intervention involved 32 Chinese learners, all aged 18, enrolled in a preparatory medical studies year (medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy) at a Budapest-based university. The sample included 32 first-year medical students, comprising 18 females and 14 males. Among them, 20 were enrolled in the medicine track, 8 in dentistry, and 4 in pharmacy. Participants were recruited through an in-class announcement, followed by an email invitation distributed to all first-year students in the medical program. Participation was fully voluntary, and students were clearly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any impact on their academic standing.

To determine learners' initial knowledge of their metacognitive reading strategies, a revised version of the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI-R; Mokhtari et al., 2018) was administered. This is a 15-item tool scored on a 5-point Likert scale and measures three key strategy types: Global Reading Strategies (GRS), Problem-Solving Strategies (PSS), and Support Reading Strategies (SRS). Internal consistency for this tool was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of .808. The inventory was administered in a supervised classroom setting to ensure standardised conditions and to minimise response bias. The MARSI-R was used solely to establish an initial baseline of students' self-reported metacognitive strategy awareness; its scores were not included in the statistical analyses, as the primary focus of the study was on observable behavioural changes captured through eye-tracking.

Following MARSI-R, respondents sat for the B1 Cambridge English Reading Test, a standardised test assessing reading comprehension at the CEFR B1 level. The test includes tasks such as identifying main ideas, understanding specific details, and inferring word meanings from context (Appendix C). Students completed the test under exam-like conditions with a fixed time limit (60 minutes), following official Cambridge administration guidelines to ensure consistency across participants.

An eye-tracking study was then conducted using a Tobii Pro Lab eye-tracker (Appendix B). Eye-tracking has been pinpointed as a powerful and non-intrusive method of garnering information on real-time reading behaviour and cognitive activity. Eye-tracking records a variety of measures, such as fixations, saccades, and regression, which reflect cognitive processing and reading comprehension efficacy (Latimer, 2018; Latimer & Chan, 2022). A fixation is when the eye stops

on a word or phrase for around 100–500 milliseconds which can suggest active processing of an area of interest. A saccade is rapid eye movement between fixations. Regressions are backward saccades, and they show what readers revisit, often due to confusion or reanalysis. Eye-tracking is not only descriptive of what readers do, but also diagnostic and instructional in the context of reading and metacognition. To elaborate, eye-tracking enables researchers to identify metacognitive lapses during reading by revealing where, when, and how long a reader fixates, skips, or regresses on text (Juřík et al., 2025). De-la-Peña (2024) exemplified this by noting that increased regressions and prolonged fixations can indicate comprehension difficulty or active strategy use, for instance, rereading and inferencing. Lu et al. (2022) also asserted that students trained on metacognitive reading displayed more strategic eye movements, namely longer fixations on headings and increased regressions to core content which correlated with higher comprehension scores. Eye-tracking data were recorded at a sampling rate of 60 Hz. A 24-inch monitor was used and a distance of 65 cm for respondents was ensured. A 9-point calibration was used to ensure accurate gaze tracking. A chinrest was also employed to minimize head movements and guarantee calibration accuracy.

In the experiment, four AI-designed texts aimed at assessing a range of reading behaviours and comprehension traits were read by a respondent (Appendix B). To ensure content validity and appropriate difficulty, the four AI-generated texts were reviewed by two experienced English-language instructors who were familiar with CEFR-level reading requirements. These texts served as specific reading assignments: main idea identification, inferring the meaning of words, tracking attention, and information extraction. Three texts were followed by comprehension questions, while the fourth ended with a humorous, nonsensical sentence designed to provoke attention and comprehension tracking. This task aimed to identify variations in reading behaviour between question-relevant and question-irrelevant text regions. In preparation, Areas of Interest (AOIs) were defined to encompass headings, comprehension questions, bolded and plain words, and target text regions.

Following the initial test, learners were given a ten-session intervention in which explicit instruction and practice in using metacognitive reading strategies were given using real reading texts, handouts, and PowerPoint slides. Each session was approximately 90 minutes long. All instructional sessions were delivered by the researcher using a standardised set of lesson materials to ensure procedural consistency. Following the intervention, both the eye-tracking test and the reading comprehension test were administered a second time to detect changes in reading behaviour. Post-tests were administered under the same conditions as the pre-tests to maintain comparability.

As for the data analysis, the first stage of analysis involved examining heatmaps generated by Tobii Pro Lab. Heatmaps were used to provide a visual, qualitative comparison of students' attentional patterns before and after instruction.

These maps illustrated fixation distribution across the texts, with warmer colours indicating greater fixation frequency or longer gaze durations. Following the heatmap analysis, Areas of Interest (AOIs) were used to extract quantitative eye-tracking measures. AOIs included headings, bolded and plain words, multiple-choice questions, and text regions relevant or irrelevant to the comprehension questions. Metrics extracted from these AOIs included fixation count, fixation duration, time to first fixation, first fixation duration, regressions, and fixation measures on more advanced (B2+) vocabulary.

To evaluate statistically such changes, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test in SPSS was used. Being a non-parametric test, it was appropriate because eye-tracking and test data were ordinal, and sample size (N = 32) did not meet normal distributional assumptions. It allowed comparison of post- and pre-instructional scores on a range of measures that reflect key metacognitive strategies operationalized in the MARSI-R framework. Ethical clearance to conduct the research was granted by Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) (Appendix D).

4. Results

The paper analysed what insights can be derived from eye-tracking data about students' metacognitive reading strategy behaviour before and after instruction, and how these insights align with students' self-reported responses. Heatmaps were generated from the eye-tracking data. Heatmaps provide insights into participants' reading behaviour while reading. They depict fixation distributions through colour-coded visualizations, in which warmer colours like red and orange show higher fixation frequencies and longer gaze durations, and cooler colours show minimal attention (Niehorster et al., 2025). These heatmaps show which segments of the text were mostly prioritised by the participants, which by implication, indicate their cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies (Měkota, 2024)

Each of the two experiments comprised of four texts in total. AI was used to regenerate similar tests, to avoid biases; the whole conversation with AI can be provided upon request. In comparing student reading behaviour across the two tasks, notable differences in metacognitive reading behaviour emerged. In the initial eye-tracking experiment, students primarily fixated on the introduction and the vocabulary item "irritable," showing evidence of goal-setting and local vocabulary monitoring. However, they largely overlooked the concluding section, missing the opportunity to integrate and reflect on the full meaning of the text, suggesting limited comprehension monitoring. The post-instruction experiment, in contrast, revealed a more balanced and distributed pattern of attention, with students fixating not only on the introduction and key terms like "hydration," but also on the final paragraphs and multiple-choice comprehension questions (See Figures 1 & 2) This indicates improved alignment between reading and task

demands, as students actively engaged with the parts of the text necessary to answer comprehension questions. Overall, the shift from selective to more comprehensive attention patterns suggests growth in strategic reading behaviours, particularly in comprehension monitoring and task-aware scanning.
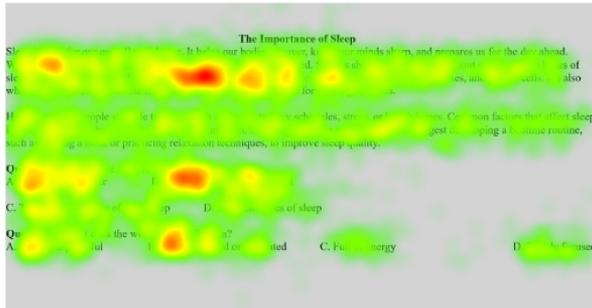
Figure 1: Pre-instruction (Text 1).
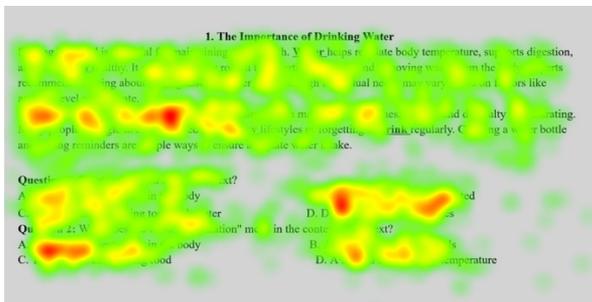
Figure 2: Post-instruction (Text 1).

Another example showed that students' initial reading behaviours showed broad and somewhat scattered attention across the text, with only moderate fixation on specific task-relevant segments. While there was some engagement with the multiple-choice questions and isolated vocabulary terms, the heat pattern suggests a relatively undirected reading style, with weaker signs of strategic focus on key information or question-driven navigation. By contrast, in the post-instruction heatmap, there is clear evidence of improved metacognitive engagement. Students demonstrated stronger fixation on the question prompts and on text sections most relevant to answering those questions, including bolded or underlined terms and answer-aligned segments. Additionally, attention was more sharply directed toward vocabulary-in-context items and structural markers in the text, suggesting enhanced comprehension monitoring, task alignment, and more purposeful scanning (See Figures 3 & 4).
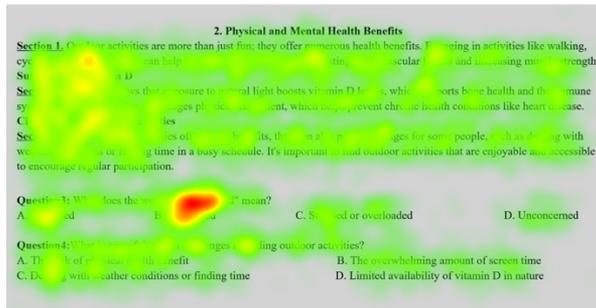
Figure 3: Pre-instruction (Text 2).
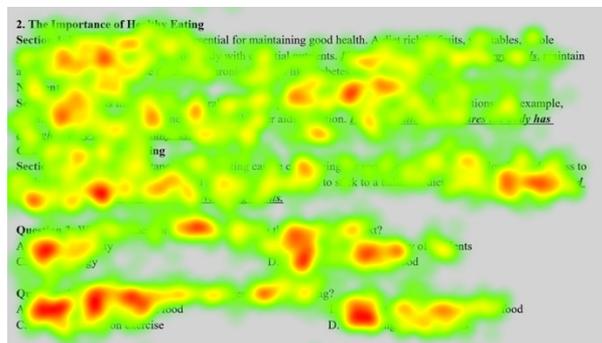
Figure 4: Post-instruction (Text 2).

As a next step, data metrics were derived from Tobii Pro Lab. The eye-tracking data provide strong support that explicit metacognitive reading instruction exerted substantial effects on students' reading behaviour and reading comprehension. To evaluate statistical changes, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Tests were conducted in SPSS. Owing to ordinal eye-tracking and test data and the small sample size (N = 32), which violated normality assumptions, this non-parametric test was appropriate. It allowed comparison of post- and pre-instruction scores on several measures that correspond to key metacognitive reading strategies.

There were also substantial post-instruction gains in fixation count overall ($p < .001$), which reflects more rigorous processing of text and more frequent use of comprehension-monitoring strategies such as re-reading to ensure understanding and changing reading rate when text becomes difficult. A significant decrease in time until first fixation ($p = .008$) indicates that students were more efficient at identifying relevant information, which matches metacognitive reading strategies of carrying a clear purpose in reading and checking whether the text serves that purpose. Finally, there were significant declines in first fixation time ($p < .001$), which reflects more efficient initial processing of text, perhaps due to previewing or more confident antecedent scanning before engaging deeply with the text. The increase in overall fixation time ($p = .027$), with marginal increases in mean fixation

length (p = .063), reflects more sustained cognitive processing and stopping to think when reading: signs of metacognitive regulation. At the lexical level, there were significant increases in fixation number and time spent on words that were B2+ (both p = .008), reflecting increased deployment of approaches to checking one's vocabulary, such as guessing unfamiliar words' meanings based on contextual cues.

Interestingly, after training, students allocated much more time to reading question-relevant sections of text (p = .008), which indicates more purposeful reading, yet another metacognitive reading strategy. Though fixation on the actual questions themselves didn't significantly differ (p = .314), increased attention to relevant text indicates better self-monitoring and correspondence of comprehension, and both of these changes in behaviour were accompanied by a significant enhancement in reading comprehension tests (p = .001), also attesting to the success of the intervention.

Overall, results of the Wilcoxon tests confirm that students not only showed heightened metacognitive awareness but also displayed marked changes in reading behaviour that corresponded to key metacognitive reading strategies: re-reading, vocabulary inference, pacing, purposeful reading, and self-monitoring. These findings underscore the significance of explicit metacognitive reading instruction in changing what students read and how they read.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was primarily directed by the question of "how explicit metacognitive reading instruction impacts the real-time reading behaviour of international students." The study primarily made use of pre- and post-instruction eye-tracking experiments. Following instruction, students showed more focused, strategic engagement with texts, characterised by increased attention to task-relevant segments, more purposeful fixations, and clearer signs of active comprehension monitoring. These findings align with previous research that underscores the effectiveness of explicit metacognitive reading instruction in fostering deeper reading comprehension and academic success (Haukås et al., 2018; Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025). Moreover, this study highlighted the move from self-reported awareness to observable action, which supports the view that strategy knowledge alone is insufficient unless supported by instruction (Veenman & van Cleef, 2019; Csíkos, 2022).

In light of these findings, a more deliberate integration of explicit metacognitive reading instruction is needed in EMI environments. The behavioural changes observed after only ten instructional sessions suggest that learners benefit from explicit guidance on how to navigate academic texts. Teachers and curriculum designers can support this by incorporating brief, targeted activities that model how to preview text structure, examine task demands before reading, annotate key

information, and infer unfamiliar vocabulary from context. These practices closely mirror the strategic behaviours observed in the post-instruction eye-tracking data and can be easily embedded within academic skills or reading-focused courses. Importantly, these observations correspond directly to the significant differences found in fixation count, fixation duration, and first-fixation measures, demonstrating that behavioural improvements accompanied the instructional intervention rather than emerging coincidentally.

This study also raises a broader institutional question: why is academic reading still underemphasised in university curricula, particularly when so much attention is devoted to academic writing? Academic reading is not a passive skill but a complex, higher-order cognitive activity essential for synthesising knowledge, interpreting academic texts, and succeeding in disciplines such as medicine, where reading comprehension has real-world implications. Universities increasingly support academic writing through dedicated courses and writing centres; it is time that academic reading received similar attention—especially in EMI environments, where the gap between language proficiency and academic expectations is often widest. Improvements in reading skills translate directly into better comprehension of lectures, greater confidence in handling lengthy readings, and stronger performance on reading-based assessments. Over time, such strategic behaviours can reduce reliance on rote memorisation or translation and support a smoother progression into discipline-specific courses, ultimately contributing to improved long-term academic performance.

While the sample size in this study was relatively small and limited to one cultural and disciplinary group, the results suggest that structured, explicit metacognitive reading instruction can lead to meaningful change. Future research should explore long-term effects, include more diverse populations, and examine how these strategies interact with other academic skills such as note-taking, summarising, and test-taking. Overall, this study demonstrates that metacognitive reading strategies can be taught, practised, and internalised—and that doing so yields both behavioural and academic benefits. In an era of growing internationalisation in higher education, fostering strong academic readers is not a remedial intervention; it is a necessary foundation for student success. By directly linking observed behavioural changes to the instructional intervention, this study provides empirical evidence that explicit metacognitive strategy training translates into measurable improvements in real-time reading processes and, by implication, academic success in higher education.

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WHISPERS OF THE PSYCHE: DECODING JOHN DONNE'S DANCE BETWEEN PAIN AND PLEASURE

Abstract: This paper examines the paradoxical interdependence of pain and pleasure in John Donne's poetry through a sustained psychoanalytic reading of three representative texts: "The Ecstasy", "The Canonization", and "Holy Sonnet XIV" ("Batter my heart, three-person'd God"). Drawing principally on Freud's pleasure principle and his notions of repetition compulsion and the death drive, and supplementing these with Lacanian *jouissance*, Kristeva's theory of abjection, and Scarry's account of pain and representation, the study argues that Donne's metaphysical conceits stage an early modern dramatization of psychic ambivalence. The article advances a specific contribution beyond existing Freudian readings by (a) demonstrating how Donne repeatedly thematizes repetition and prolongation as the aesthetic logic through which desire attains intensity, (b) articulating how erotic suffering is ritualized into sanctity, and (c) connecting Donne's formal strategies to contemporary conversations on affect and trauma. Close readings of the selected poems show that pleasure in Donne is not simply opposed to pain but produced with, and through, it; thus Donne can be read as a proto-psychoanalytic poet whose poetics anticipate modern accounts of ambivalent desire.

Keywords: John Donne, psychoanalysis, pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, jouissance, pain, pleasure

1. Introduction

John Donne's poetry has for decades posed a critical problem that is at once theological, rhetorical, and psychological: how does language hold together the collision of erotic desire and spiritual yearning? Donne's metaphysical imagination persistently brings bodily passion and devotional intensity into the same frame, producing paradoxes that critics have described variously as a "unification of sensibility" (Eliot, 1921/1964), a poetics of tension (Carey, 1981), or a dramatization

of inward conflict (Fish, 1972). Much recent work has enriched these perspectives by historicizing Donne's sexual and theological language (Edwards, 2001; Bach, 2005; Saunders, 2006), but relatively few sustained studies have pursued the implications of his paradoxes as organized psychic structures—that is, as recurring formal enactments of ambivalence rather than solely as theological or cultural puzzles.

This article proposes that a psychoanalytic lens – specifically Freud's account of the pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, and the death drive (Freud, 1920/1961) – offers conceptual tools that illuminate the psychological mechanics behind Donne's recurrent coupling of pain and pleasure. Importantly, the aim is not to reduce Donne to a biographical subject of psychoanalysis. Rather, following the hermeneutic method of close reading allied with psychoanalytic theory, the paper reads Donne's poems as structural performances of desire: symbolic enactments where the postponement, repetition, or intensification of suffering is central to the constitution of aesthetic and affective meaning. This interpretive move builds upon but also extends earlier interventions: while critics such as Targoff (2001) and Guibbory (2006) have emphasized Donne's body/soul tension and the eroticization of the devotional voice, and while Saunders (2006) and Bach (2005) have re-placed Donne within modern debates on sexuality, this article advances a distinct claim. It argues that Donne's formal strategies (conceit, paradox, and repetitional imagery) instantiate psychic logics – prolongation, repetition, and ecstatic rupture – that anticipate psychoanalytic accounts of ambivalent desire and *jouissance* (Lacan, 1977).

To make this claim tractable, the study concentrates on three poems that articulate complementary facets of Donne's affective paradox. "The Ecstasy" (a secular lyric) exemplifies sublimation and the pleasure principle's paradox: bodily proximity without consummation produces heightened desire. "The Canonization" reframes erotic suffering as sanctity, thereby dramatizing repetition compulsion and the ritualization of pain as proof of devotion. "Holy Sonnet XIV" ("Batter my heart, three-person'd God") radicalizes these dynamics by tendering spiritual renewal as violent rupture – a locus in which the death drive and Lacanian *jouissance* converge. These texts were selected because they collectively map the principal operations through which Donne stages pain and pleasure: deferral and sublimation, sanctification and repetition, and ecstatic annihilation. Restricting the corpus to these three allows for sustained close reading; nevertheless, the study is explicitly positioned as a focused intervention whose findings invite subsequent extension across Donne's wider oeuvre.

Methodologically, the paper combines formalist close reading with theoretical mediation: textual features (imagery, conceit, metric tension, lexical repetition) are read in relation to psychoanalytic categories. The approach follows scholarly caution against reductive psychoanalysis (Brooks, 1947) and insists that theory be used as an interpretive heuristic, anchored in textual evidence rather than imposed upon it. The contribution is therefore twofold: analytically, it demonstrates how specific formal

devices in Donne map onto psychoanalytic dynamics; theoretically, it contends that Donne's metaphysical poetics anticipate elements of modern affect theory and trauma studies by making the ambivalence of desire a central aesthetic resource.

The article proceeds as follows. After situating the study within recent Donne scholarship and the relevant psychoanalytic literature (Section 2), I outline methodological premises and corpus selection (Section 3). The core readings (Section 4) examine "The Ecstasy", "The Canonization", and "Holy Sonnet XIV" in turn, attending to how each poem enacts prolongation, repetition, and ecstatic collapse respectively. A discussion (Section 5) synthesizes the findings and locates them in broader scholarly conversations on affect and representability; a concise conclusion (Section 6) reiterates the original contribution and suggests directions for further research, including the extension of this psychoanalytic mapping to a larger corpus.

By explicitly identifying the three poems under analysis and foregrounding the psychoanalytic mechanisms they dramatize, this article clarifies its distinct contribution to Donne studies. Rather than merely "applying" Freud to a seventeenth-century poet, it demonstrates how Donne's lyric structures already anticipate psychoanalytic insights into the dynamics of pleasure, repression, and repetition. Donne's art becomes not an object of diagnosis but a participant in the long cultural formation of the modern subject's divided desires. His conceits, paradoxes, and linguistic excesses articulate psychic processes that Freud and later theorists would systematize; in this sense, Donne emerges as a proto-psychoanalytic thinker whose poetry stages the instability of the self at the threshold between body and spirit, pain and pleasure, union and loss. Situating Donne within this genealogy enriches both Renaissance and psychoanalytic scholarship by suggesting that the modern vocabulary of ambivalence – so central to theories of desire and affect— has literary origins in metaphysical poetics. In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing interdisciplinary debates on how early modern texts prefigure later theoretical frameworks of subjectivity, desire, and trauma, reaffirming Donne's relevance as a poet of profound psychological and philosophical resonance.

2. Literature Review

Criticism of John Donne's poetry has consistently emphasized its paradoxical intensity and its capacity to collapse boundaries between physicality and spirituality. Early scholarship, such as Louis Martz's *The Poetry of Meditation* (1954), situated Donne within the devotional and meditative traditions of the seventeenth century, emphasizing his theological and formal inheritance. Later, John Carey's *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1981) reoriented attention toward the psychological dimension of Donne's poetics, highlighting his fascination with bringing "mind and body, passion and faith into volatile conjunction" (p. 22). These seminal studies illuminate Donne's

negotiation of the sacred and profane but largely interpret it through historical or religious frameworks rather than psychological or affective ones.

The paradox of erotic and spiritual desire has remained central to Donne scholarship. Achsah Guibbory (2006) notes that Donne's lyrics are marked by a "continual oscillation between the body's insistence and the soul's aspiration" (p. 17), while Ramie Targoff (2008) emphasizes the poet's sustained attempt to reconcile the unity of body and soul. Similarly, Barbara Lewalski (1993) describes Donne's lyric voice as embodying "the conflicts of Protestant poetics, where inward devotion is dramatized through conflicting impulses of desire and denial" (p. 216). These readings underscore Donne's persistent engagement with ambivalence and paradox but stop short of articulating how these tensions might also encode unconscious psychic dynamics.

Recent interpretive trends have extended this discussion by focusing on Donne's rhetorical performance of contradiction. Stanley Fish (1991) famously argued that Donne's verse does not resolve tension but performs it, producing an interpretive instability that mirrors the restless oscillation of desire itself. Likewise, John Stubbs (2006) underscores the poet's lived entanglements with faith, sexuality, and ambition, reading his verse as a product of existential struggle and ecstatic intensity. Collectively, such perspectives frame Donne's attraction to contradiction as a defining feature of his poetic identity, though they tend to privilege theological, moral, or biographical explanations over psychoanalytic or affective ones.

In parallel, psychoanalytic theory has provided literary criticism with tools for interpreting such paradoxes of desire. Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1961) articulated the interplay between the pleasure principle, the compulsion to repeat, and the death drive – concepts that illuminate the ways in which suffering can function as a form of psychic gratification. Subsequent theorists have expanded this framework: Scarry (1985) explores how pain both destroys and generates meaning; Kristeva (1987) theorizes the ambivalence of abjection as central to identity formation; and Felman (1982) demonstrates how literary texts stage unconscious conflicts rather than merely represent them. Together, these insights suggest that the paradox of pleasure and pain can be understood not only as thematic content but also as an enactment of psychic processes.

While psychoanalytic readings have been applied extensively to Renaissance drama (Adelman, 1992; Greenblatt, 1980) and to lyric traditions more broadly, Donne's poetry has received relatively little sustained psychoanalytic analysis. Most discussions of his eroticism and spirituality remain grounded in cultural-historical or theological paradigms. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by employing Freud's theorization of the pleasure principle and death drive to examine how Donne's poetry dramatizes the mutual implication of suffering and desire.

By bringing Donne studies into dialogue with psychoanalytic theory, this research contributes a fresh interpretive pathway. It positions Donne's verse not merely as a record of early modern paradox but as a poetic performance of psychic

ambivalence, where pain and pleasure collapse into one another in dramatizations of the unconscious economy of desire. In doing so, it extends existing scholarship by reframing Donne's poetic tension as both a psychological structure and a mode of artistic creation – one that anticipates modern conceptions of subjectivity and the divided self.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative interpretive methodology** grounded in psychoanalytic literary criticism. The aim is to investigate how John Donne's poetry dramatizes the paradoxical entanglement of pain and pleasure, employing Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1961) as the primary theoretical framework. The methodological approach integrates **close reading of primary texts** with **psychoanalytic conceptual analysis**, situating Donne's poetry at the intersection of early modern cultural expression and enduring psychological tensions.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Freud's theorization of the *pleasure principle* – the psychic tendency to seek pleasure and avoid unpleasure – provides the central interpretive lens for this study. Freud's complementary account of *repetition compulsion* and the *death drive* reveals that suffering may paradoxically be pursued as a form of psychic gratification, exposing the ambivalence at the heart of human desire (Freud, 1920/1961). This framework enables Donne's representations of erotic suffering, spiritual torment, and ecstatic union to be read not merely as thematic oppositions but as dramatizations of the unconscious economy of desire that oscillates between tension and release, longing and annihilation.

While Freud remains foundational, the analysis draws upon post-Freudian and feminist elaborations that complicate his model. Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) clarifies how physical agony can become a source of meaning and expression, a paradox echoed in Donne's metaphysical conceits that turn suffering into articulation. Kristeva's *Tales of Love* (1987) and *Powers of Horror* (1982) inform this reading through their concepts of *ambivalence* and *abjection*, which illuminate the unsettling overlap between sanctity and sensuality in Donne's verse. Felman's (1982) claim that literature stages the drama of the unconscious further supports this interpretive method, suggesting that Donne's poems perform psychic tensions rather than merely represent them. The theoretical framework, therefore, combines Freudian and post-Freudian vocabularies to expose how Donne's poetics embody a paradoxical logic of pleasure within pain, spiritual transcendence within corporeal bondage.

3.2. Corpus Selection

The corpus consists of three poems that represent distinct yet interrelated facets of Donne's engagement with desire, suffering, and transcendence: "The Ecstasy", "The Canonization", and "Holy Sonnet XIV" ("Batter my heart, three-person'd God"). Together, they span Donne's secular and sacred writings, thereby reflecting his persistent preoccupation with the convergence of erotic and spiritual energies.

"The Ecstasy" dramatizes the paradox of spiritual union achieved through embodied love, situating sensual pleasure as the gateway to metaphysical communion. "The Canonization" sanctifies erotic devotion, translating profane passion into religious transcendence. "Holy Sonnet XIV", by contrast, radicalizes this movement toward the divine by turning submission, violence, and pain into conditions for spiritual rebirth. The choice of these texts is guided not by thematic convenience but by their structural and affective continuity: each poem enacts a complex psychic economy in which suffering becomes an instrument of transcendence.

Limiting the corpus to these exemplary poems allows for sustained and nuanced engagement without dispersing the analysis across Donne's extensive body of work. This focused selection also provides a coherent field in which to articulate psychoanalytic insights that are both textually grounded and theoretically rigorous. By examining these poems in depth, the study seeks to reveal how Donne's poetry dramatizes the paradoxical interdependence of pain and pleasure, a tension that is central not only to his metaphysical poetics but also to the dynamics of the unconscious as conceptualized in psychoanalytic theory.

3.3. Analytical Procedures

The analysis proceeds in two interrelated stages, each grounded in established literary-critical practices yet adapted to the psychoanalytic framework. The first stage involves *close reading*, which isolates the poems' rhetorical and structural features – conceit, paradox, oxymoron, syntax, imagery, and sound patterning – that generate tension between pleasure and pain. Particular attention is given to repetitions, contradictions, and moments of semantic instability, since these often serve as textual equivalents of psychic conflict. For instance, in *The Ecstasy*, the oscillation between "two better than themselves" and "interinanimates two souls" dramatizes Freud's pleasure principle in linguistic form: pleasure resides not in release but in the maintenance of desire's suspension.

The second stage interprets these formal observations through psychoanalytic concepts. Repetitive imagery or cyclical conceits are examined in light of *repetition compulsion*; figures of violent union or ecstatic surrender are read through the *death drive*; and moments of linguistic dissonance are related to *Kristevan ambivalence* or

abjection. This interpretive movement remains dialectical rather than hierarchical: theory elucidates textual dynamics, while textual evidence continually tests the limits of theory. In this respect, the methodology follows Brooks's (1947) principle that poetic paradox must be preserved as an "equilibrium of opposed forces," not reduced to external explanation.

This dual process ensures that psychoanalytic theory is anchored in textual evidence rather than imposed upon it. As Brooks (1947) argued, literary analysis must preserve the paradoxical unity of form and meaning, avoiding reduction to psychological case study. Accordingly, this study does not seek to psychoanalyze Donne as a historical individual but to examine how his poetry performs psychological dramas that resonate with psychoanalytic concepts. In other words, this process resists the biographical fallacy. Donne's verse is not treated as evidence of individual pathology but as a discursive site in which cultural, theological, and psychic tensions are dramatized. The approach thereby preserves the integrity of literary analysis while employing psychoanalytic insights as interpretive heuristics rather than explanatory dogma.

3.4. Methodological Justification

The justification for a psychoanalytic framework lies in the structural and affective congruence between Donne's poetic imagination and the mechanisms of the unconscious. Donne's persistent use of paradox, his fascination with doubleness, and his tendency to fuse pleasure with anguish mirror Freud's understanding of the psyche as governed by conflicting drives. Historical or theological readings, though illuminating, cannot alone account for the psychic dimension of these paradoxes – the way Donne's poems perform rather than merely describe the ambivalence of desire.

By combining close reading with psychoanalytic interpretation, this study aligns itself with a long tradition of literary scholarship that treats form and affect as mutually constitutive. The approach does not impose theory upon the text but allows theory and text to engage in interpretive reciprocity. Moreover, grounding psychoanalytic concepts in precise textual analysis ensures methodological rigor and guards against speculative overreach. As such, the study contributes not only to Donne scholarship but also to broader discussions of how early modern literature anticipates the structures of modern psychic life. In sum, this methodology enables a disciplined inquiry into how Donne's verse enacts the paradoxical interplay between pain and pleasure – an inquiry that extends beyond thematic observation to reveal the deep formal and affective logic through which Donne transforms suffering into a mode of transcendence.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. "The Ecstasy": Desire, Union, and Psychic Ambivalence

Donne's "The Ecstasy" exemplifies his capacity to render desire as a site of psychic and metaphysical paradox, where pleasure and pain, body and soul, coexist and inform one another (Carey, 1981; Guibbory, 2006). The poem depicts two lovers reclining together, hands and gazes intertwined, while their souls engage in an imperceptible yet profound communion:

> Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
> Our eyes upon one double string;
> So to' intergraft our hands, as yet
> Was all the means to make us one (Donne, 1633/2000, p. 53).

The imagery of intertwining – of beams, hands, and soul – stages a fusion in which physical intimacy and spiritual union coexist without collapsing into one another. Desire is neither fully consummated nor wholly sublimated, but suspended in a prolonged tension that psychoanalytic theory identifies as a locus of intensified pleasure (Freud, 1920/1961). The poem dramatizes the paradox that gratification is indefinitely deferred, transforming the postponement of desire into an active source of psychic and aesthetic satisfaction.

The concept of the "interanimation of two souls" captures this ambivalent dynamic. Here, the body functions as a mediator rather than the primary locus of union, while the soul undertakes the central act of communion. This displacement aligns with Freud's theory of sublimation (1905/2000), in which instinctual drives are redirected toward socially or spiritually sanctioned ends. The poem enacts a negotiation between the sensual and the transcendent, showing how corporeal desire energizes spiritual ecstasy rather than opposing it (Guibbory, 2006).

Lacan's notion of jouissance further illuminates the poem's psychic dynamics. Jouissance refers to an excessive, often painful form of enjoyment that emerges when desire exceeds its conventional limits (Lacan, 1977). Donne's lovers, in their suspended union, exemplify this: their pleasure arises from the tension of deferred consummation. The body, though seemingly secondary, remains indispensable:

> So must pure lovers' souls descend
> T' affections, and to faculties,
> Which sense may reach and apprehend,
> Else a great prince in prison lies (Donne, 1633/2000, p. 54).

The "prince in prison" metaphor underscores the interdependence of body and soul: spiritual union cannot be fully realized without corporeal mediation. Psychoanalytically, this illustrates ambivalence – the simultaneous coexistence of opposing desires within the psyche (Freud, 1920/1961; Kristeva, 1987). Physical

and spiritual pleasure are mutually implicated, and the eroticized soul cannot fully escape the body that enables it (Carey, 1981).

The poem's structure reinforces this psychic tension. Each stanza revolves around the paradox of union without consummation, forming a circular, recursive pattern that mirrors the compulsion to repeat (Freud, 1920/1961). Repetition transforms desire itself into a source of pleasure, illustrating how tension and deferral constitute the poem's aesthetic and psychic economy. The intricate conceits and paradoxes characteristic of Donne's metaphysical style make form inseparable from theme (Fish, 1991).

The entwining of "eye-beams" suggests not only visual and bodily intimacy but also the projection of consciousness into another, creating a shared subjectivity (Targoff, 2008). The hands and eyes anchor this otherwise immaterial experience, highlighting the interdependence of corporeal and spiritual registers. As Carey (1981) observes, Donne "seeks to spiritualize sex without denying its bodily origins" (p. 105). From a psychoanalytic perspective, this oscillation between sublimation and bodily persistence generates a dynamic psychic economy, in which deferred desire fuels the spiritual ecstasy it ostensibly transcends (Freud, 1920/1961; Lacan, 1977).

Finally, the poem's title, "The Ecstasy", derives from the Greek *ekstasis*, meaning "to stand outside oneself" (Liddell & Scott, 1940). This etymology underscores the poem's exploration of self-transcendence, where pleasure and pain converge and conventional subject boundaries dissolve. Donne's lovers inhabit this ecstatic state, where bodily and spiritual pleasures intermingle, and tension itself becomes the locus of desire (Lacan, 1977; Guibbory, 2006).

In conclusion, "The Ecstasy" stages the psychic ambivalence of desire, showing how Donne transforms deferred gratification and oscillating impulses into a central source of poetic pleasure. Its imagery, formal recursion, and metaphysical conceits enact a psychoanalytic economy in which tension and deferral generate their own gratification. By integrating Freud's pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, sublimation, and Lacan's jouissance, this analysis demonstrates that Donne constructs desire as an interdependent, ambivalent, and richly textured psychic phenomenon.

4.2. "The Canonization": Erotic Suffering as Sanctity

In "The Canonization", Donne stages erotic desire as a paradoxical form of sanctity, presenting physical passion and suffering as pathways to spiritual and emotional elevation. The poem opens with a defiant address to the critics of the lovers' passion:

> Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
> Call her one, me another fly,
> We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
> And we in us find the eagle and the dove (Donne, 1633/2000, p. 61).

The poem immediately frames erotic love as a site of intense paradox: the lovers' union produces both suffering and transcendence. The metaphor of the taper, which consumes itself to give light, resonates with Freud's (1920/1961) concept of the pleasure principle and repetition compulsion. The act of loving, in its intensity and persistence despite potential social or emotional pain, embodies a form of self-sacrifice that paradoxically yields psychic gratification. The lovers' suffering becomes a conscious, even ritualized, repetition of desire, in which the pain itself is entwined with pleasure, transforming erotic devotion into sanctified experience (Carey, 1981; Guibbory, 2006).

Donne's conceits heighten this paradoxical structure. The simultaneous invocation of the eagle and the dove situates the lovers within symbolic registers of power and peace, aggression and harmony, reflecting the oscillation between ecstatic pleasure and the ache of longing (Lewalski, 1993). Psychoanalytically, this oscillation mirrors the ambivalence identified by Kristeva (1987), wherein desire is inseparable from anxiety and suffering. The erotic relationship is not merely pleasurable; it is also a psychic and spiritual ordeal, a structured enactment of longing and delay that mirrors Freud's notion of compulsion to repeat (1920/1961). By embracing their pain, the lovers generate a sense of sanctity: suffering is not incidental but constitutive of their erotic and spiritual identity.

The poem's formal qualities reinforce this thematic tension. Donne's witty, controlled rhymes and rhetorical flourishes produce a rhythm that alternates between assertion and counterpoint, mirroring the oscillation between pleasure and pain. The rhetorical structure of the argument—responding to critics, defending the sacredness of erotic love, and constructing the lovers as exemplars of devotion—creates a meta-discursive layer, where erotic suffering becomes a performative act of both poetic and psychic canonization (Fish, 1991; Targoff, 2008).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "The Canonization" stages what Freud (1920/1961) identifies as the paradoxical reward of suffering: repeated engagement with desire, even when painful or socially prohibited, yields a form of psychic satisfaction. The lovers' erotic devotion, framed as both passionate and sacrificial, aligns with Lacan's (1977) jouissance: pleasure intertwined with pain, amplified by the deferral and intensity of desire. Erotic suffering becomes its own reward, sanctifying the lovers in a manner that is simultaneously social, spiritual, and psychological.

Critical interpretations reinforce this reading. Guibbory (2006) emphasizes Donne's capacity to transform transgressive eroticism into socially and spiritually meaningful forms. Carey (1981) notes that the lovers' devotion exemplifies a "conflation of bodily passion and elevated consciousness" (p. 112), highlighting the interplay of pain, desire, and sublimated spiritual pleasure. Targoff (2008) situates Donne within a tradition of early modern psychological exploration, noting that the poet stages the affective tension of love as a deliberate, repeated enactment, thereby prefiguring psychoanalytic insights into the ambivalence and intensity of desire.

The final conceit of the poem – comparing the lovers' lives to a canonization – links erotic devotion to spiritual ritual and sanctity:

> For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love;
> Or chide my palsy, or my gout;
> My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout;
> With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve;
> Take you a course, get you a place,
> Observe his honor, or his grace;
> Or the king's real, or his stamp'd face
> Contemplate; what you will, approve,
> So you will let me love (Donne, 1633/2000, pp. 61–62).

Here, the lovers' devotion is valorized over external achievements or societal expectations. Erotic suffering, embodied in repeated acts of love and the endurance of social censure, becomes an active, almost liturgical practice. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this aligns with Freud's (1920/1961) notion that the psyche derives satisfaction from the engagement with deferred or resisted desire. The canonization metaphor itself stages desire as sacred labor, reinforcing the interdependence of erotic, psychic, and spiritual registers.

In sum, "The Canonization" dramatizes the paradoxical sanctity of erotic suffering, illustrating how love's intensity, delay, and social transgression generate psychic and spiritual reward. Donne constructs desire as simultaneously pleasurable and painful, using rhetorical structure, conceits, and repetitive patterns to enact a psychoanalytic economy in which suffering is valorized and erotic devotion is sanctified. Through the integration of Freud's pleasure principle and repetition compulsion, Lacan's jouissance, and Kristeva's ambivalence, this analysis demonstrates that erotic suffering in Donne's verse is neither incidental nor extraneous: it constitutes the very mechanism through which desire attains both intensity and transcendence.

4.3. "Holy Sonnet XIV": Spiritual Torment and the Death Drive

If "The Ecstasy" suspends consummation and "The Canonization" sanctifies erotic suffering, "Holy Sonnet XIV" ("Batter my heart, three-person'd God") intensifies the paradox to its extreme, staging the soul's violent yearning for divine ravishment. The poem begins with a plea for divine aggression:

> Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new. (Donne, 1633/2000, p. 283)

The language is one of assault, not gentle grace. The divine must not merely "knock" but "batter," not heal but "break, blow, burn." This violent paradox mirrors Freud's *death drive* (1920/1961): the compulsion toward self-destruction as a means of renewal. The speaker craves annihilation, not as an end but as the path to transformation.

Here erotic and spiritual registers collapse into one another. The final lines make this most explicit:

> Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (Donne, 1633/2000, p. 283)

The oxymoronic logic – imprisonment as freedom, ravishment as chastity – embodies Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, the paradoxical pleasure that includes pain. The speaker desires violation, recognizing that only through the collapse of self can divine union be achieved.

Critics such as Ramie Targoff (2001) have highlighted the violent intensity of Donne's devotional poetics, where spiritual longing is inseparable from corporeal imagery. Psychoanalysis sharpens this insight: the sonnet dramatizes the psyche's drive toward dissolution, toward the paradoxical ecstasy of destruction.

Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) is illuminating here. For Scarry, pain "unmakes the world" by erasing language and subjectivity (3-6). Donne's speaker, however, inverts this logic: divine pain becomes the very condition of remaking. The violence that should annihilate instead renews. Thus, suffering is not merely endured but desired, because it is the means of union with God.

Julia Kristeva's reflections in *Powers of Horror* (1982) also resonate (7-11). The plea to be "ravished" by God evokes the abjection of the self: a willing collapse of boundaries, an ecstatic self-loss. This abjection is not horrifying but salvific. The sonnet dramatizes the way Kristeva relates the abject with what I would call the "ambivalence of jouissance"[1]: the subject's simultaneous dread and desire for dissolution. In this sense, jouissance marks a threshold experience – a psychic limit where pleasure merges with pain. The self yearns for transcendence through annihilation yet recoils from the loss of coherence it entails. Donne's speaker thus inhabits a space where spiritual longing is inseparable from psychic risk, where ecstasy becomes indistinguishable from self-undoing.

Formally, the sonnet intensifies this psychic ambivalence through its relentless sequence of imperatives: "Batter… break… burn… take… enthrall… ravish." The accumulation enacts the compulsion to repeat, echoing Freud's insight that trauma

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[1] The term jouissance, although popularized in Kristeva's psychoanalytic vocabulary, originates in Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freudian drives. While Freud distinguishes between pleasure (bound to tension reduction) and unpleasure (arising when excitation exceeds psychic containment), Lacan posits jouissance as an excessive, transgressive enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle – an experience at once alluring and threatening to the subject's coherence (Écrits, 1966; Seminar VII, 1959–60). Lacan's notion is fundamentally ambivalent: jouissance fascinates because it promises intensity and dissolution of lack, but it terrifies insofar as it destabilizes boundaries of the self. Kristeva extends this logic to abjection, where the subject is simultaneously repelled and seduced by what undoes identity (Powers of Horror, 1982). My use of "ambivalence of jouissance" thus refers to this psychoanalytic dynamic: the simultaneous craving for and recoil from that which exceeds the self.

is not resolved but re-enacted. Donne's speaker compulsively restages his own annihilation in language, seeking mastery through repetition. What emerges is a vision of spirituality inseparable from masochism. Donne's God is not a gentle healer but a violent lover, whose assault is the only path to salvation. In this, the sonnet brings to culmination the logic traced in "The Ecstasy" and "The Canonization": desire as prolongation, suffering as sanctity, and finally, torment as ecstatic self-loss.

4.4. Union, Martyrdom, and Spiritual Siege: a Synthetic Reading Donne's Poetics of Excess

Taken together, these three case studies illuminate Donne's persistent negotiation of the paradoxes of human desire. "The Ecstasy" dramatizes pleasure as both delayed and sublimated, revealing the psychic ambivalence between bodily desire and spiritual transcendence. "The Canonization" advances this paradox by transfiguring erotic suffering into sanctity, foregrounding repetition and the embrace of pain as devotion. Finally, "Holy Sonnet XIV" intensifies the interplay of torment and joy, presenting divine violence as the ultimate form of ecstatic fulfillment. Across these texts, Donne's poetics exemplify Freud's insight that pleasure and pain are never fully separable but remain entangled within the unconscious. Moreover, the poems demonstrate how language itself becomes the stage on which ambivalence, sublimation, and psychic contradiction are performed. The interplay of these forces within each poem yields distinct yet interconnected trajectories; patterns that Table 1 synthesizes in comparative form, clarifying how each text stages Donne's logic of ambivalent desire.

Table 1. Summary of Analytical Findings[2]

Poem	Psychoanalytic Framework	Key Imagery / Tropes	Dynamic of Pain & Pleasure	Contribution to Argument
"The Ecstasy"	Freud's Pleasure Principle; Sublimation	Soul–body tension; "interanimation of two souls"	Pleasure achieved through prolongation and deferral; pain in denial of consummation	Demonstrates ambivalence of desire as psychic equilibrium
"The Canonization"	Repetition Compulsion; Death Drive	Phoenix; tapers; lovers as martyrs/saints	Suffering embraced as sanctity; pain becomes proof of devotion	Shows how erotic suffering is transformed into sacred legitimacy
"Holy Sonnet XIV"	Death Drive; Jouissance; Scarry's Pain; Kristeva's Abjection	Violent divine imagery: "break, blow, burn, ravish"	Torment desired as ecstatic renewal; agony and joy collapse	Culminates in spirituality framed as masochistic ecstasy and psychic dissolution

[2] (Adapted from Donne, 1633/2000; Freud, 1920/1961; Kristeva, 1982; Scarry, 1985)

5. Discussion

The foregoing analyses demonstrate Donne's intricate negotiation of pleasure and pain across multiple poetic registers, yet their implications extend beyond isolated texts. Collectively, the readings illuminate broader intersections between Renaissance metaphysical poetics, psychoanalytic theory, and the cultural history of desire, situating Donne as a poet whose work prefigures modern explorations of the unconscious. His metaphysical conceits and paradoxical structures not only dramatize individual psychological experiences but also encode culturally mediated forms of desire, suffering, and ecstasy. In doing so, Donne's work invites readers to consider the ways in which early modern poetics both anticipate and inform contemporary debates in literary theory, affect studies, and the history of subjectivity.

While Freud and Lacan wrote centuries after Donne, their theoretical models resonate strikingly with his poetic strategies. Freud's pleasure principle (1920/1961), which posits the psyche's drive toward gratification while paradoxically sustaining tension, is vividly dramatized in "The Ecstasy", where the deferral of physical pleasure and its sublimation into spiritual communion produce heightened, paradoxical satisfaction. In "The Canonization", repetition compulsion emerges in the cyclical valorization of suffering; the lovers' continual engagement with pain and social censure functions as both a psychic and moral reinforcement, prefiguring the idea that suffering itself can become a source of gratification. Lacan's concept of jouissance (1977), describing enjoyment that exceeds itself into pain, finds expression in "Holy Sonnet XIV", where divine violence is not merely endured but paradoxically desired, illustrating the collapse of conventional oppositions between pleasure and pain. In each instance, Donne's metaphysical conceits anticipate psychoanalytic insights into the contradictions inherent in the psyche, revealing that desire is never straightforward but entangled with its own negation. These conceptual parallels demonstrate that Donne's poetry not only dramatizes desire and ambivalence but also anticipates psychoanalytic models of the unconscious, suggesting that literary and psychological dynamics are mutually illuminating rather than temporally isolated phenomena.

Donne's oeuvre consistently destabilizes the boundary between sacred and profane, revealing a nuanced engagement with erotic, spiritual, and psychic energies. Scholars such as Targoff (2001) and Carey (1981) have highlighted how his religious and erotic poetry refuse easy compartmentalization, illustrating the permeability of moral, theological, and emotional categories. Psychoanalysis offers a lens to articulate this ambivalence: sublimation transforms instinctual drives without eliminating them, repetition binds subjects to suffering as a source of psychic reward, and jouissance collapses the binary of torment and ecstasy, making pleasure inseparable from pain (Kristeva, 1987; Lacan, 1977). Donne's language exemplifies this fusion: violent verbs such as *break*, *blow*, and *burn* in religious contexts acquire erotic resonance, while ostensibly erotic imagery, such as dying

or rising, carries theological connotations. The sacred and profane, far from being oppositional, coexist as mutually constitutive forces, underscoring Donne's interest in the liminality of human experience. This interpenetration suggests that his poetics are less concerned with resolving moral or ontological tensions than with inhabiting them fully, staging ambivalence as a persistent, generative, and morally charged psychic condition.

By foregrounding the psychoanalytic dimensions of ambivalence, the present study contributes to ongoing debates in Donne scholarship. Helen Gardner (1961) emphasized Donne's "drama of ideas," while Stanley Fish (1972) characterized his poetry as "self-consuming artifacts," noting its intellectual and formal complexity. This analysis extends such perspectives by demonstrating that Donne's metaphysical conceits are not only aesthetic or intellectual devices but also performative enactments of unconscious processes, staging desire, ambivalence, and psychic tension in ways that resonate with modern psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, the study situates Donne within a larger trajectory of Western thought on subjectivity, illustrating the interplay of theology, philosophy, and psychology in early modern literary production. By interpreting poetic paradoxes as symbolic manifestations of unconscious dynamics, this approach enriches our understanding of the mechanisms through which Donne's poetry communicates the entwined nature of pleasure, suffering, and transcendence, offering insights that historical or strictly theological readings alone cannot provide.

Finally, the discussion underscores the enduring relevance of Donne's poetics for contemporary literary theory. The intricate interplay of pain and pleasure resonates with ongoing debates in affect theory, embodiment studies, queer theory, and trauma studies (Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2014). Donne's verse anticipates questions central to these fields: How does desire persist amidst contradiction? How can suffering function as a site of identity formation? How does language mediate – or fail to mediate – the experience of pain? By staging psychic ambivalence through formal, linguistic, and conceptual devices, Donne demonstrates that these questions are not solely modern but have deep roots in early modern poetics. His work thereby offers a historically grounded yet theoretically rich resource for exploring the complex dynamics of desire, pleasure, pain, and subjectivity, confirming that early modern literature can speak directly to contemporary scholarly concerns while maintaining its own distinctive aesthetic and intellectual rigor.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that John Donne's poetry, when examined through a psychoanalytic lens, exposes a complex and enduring entanglement of pain and pleasure, revealing the poet's ability to collapse conventional binaries such as body and soul, sacred and profane, or agony and ecstasy. By close-reading "The Ecstasy",

"The Canonization", and "Holy Sonnet XIV", the analysis has shown that Donne's metaphysical conceits are not merely intellectual exercises but active dramatizations of psychic processes, in which desire, suffering, and fulfillment are intricately interwoven. Psychoanalytic concepts – including Freud's pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, and the death drive, alongside Lacan's notion of jouissance – serve as crucial interpretive tools, elucidating how Donne structures desire as both dependent on and resistant to its own satisfaction. The prolongation of tension, the sanctification of erotic suffering, and the ecstatic collapse of bodily and spiritual registers all demonstrate that pleasure and pain are mutually constitutive in his poetic universe.

Moreover, this study situates Donne within broader literary, cultural, and theoretical contexts. His fusion of sacred and profane registers, and his ability to render psychic and corporeal ambivalence into poetic form, anticipate debates in modern literary theory concerning affect, embodiment, and subjectivity (Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2014). By translating otherwise ineffable experiences of pain and desire into striking metaphors, conceits, and paradoxes, Donne demonstrates the capacity of language to both express and shape psychic experience, echoing Scarry's (1985) and Kristeva's (1982) insights on representation, abjection, and ambivalence. In this sense, his poetry functions not only as a historical artifact of early modern metaphysical poetics but also as a site of ongoing theoretical relevance, where psychoanalytic frameworks illuminate the enduring complexity of human emotion and desire.

In contributing to Donne studies, the present research offers a nuanced account of how his verse dramatizes unconscious dynamics rather than merely reflecting historical, biographical, or theological circumstances. It emphasizes that Donne's metaphysical conceits are performative: they stage the oscillation between fulfillment and denial, presence and absence, and pleasure and pain. This interpretive lens complements existing scholarship (Carey, 1981; Guibbory, 2006; Targoff, 2008) while providing a psychoanalytic vocabulary for understanding the intricate ways in which desire and ambivalence are embedded in early modern poetry.

Finally, the study underscores Donne's continuing relevance for contemporary critical inquiry. His treatment of the entwined nature of pain and pleasure, suffering and ecstasy, resonates with modern approaches to literature, affect theory, trauma studies, and psychoanalysis. By staging these tensions with formal, linguistic, and imaginative precision, Donne not only reflects the paradoxes of human experience but also anticipates conceptual frameworks that would emerge centuries later. Ultimately, his poetry endures because it captures the complexities of the human psyche with striking immediacy, demonstrating that the interplay of pain and pleasure is not an anomaly but a defining feature of human subjectivity, consciousness, and emotional life. Donne's verse reminds readers that ambivalence is not a limitation to be resolved but a productive and generative space in which the deepest dimensions of desire, suffering, and pleasure are enacted, contemplated, and transformed through art.

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On the Natural Environment as a Conceptual Source and Target in Tok Pisin

Abstract: The study of the relation between language and the natural environment in non-European languages is one of the foci of contemporary ecolinguistics (Penz & Fill, 2022, pp. 247–248). It remains in line with the anthropological proposition to investigate the semantic systems of non-Western languages, whose number is decreasing as a result of fast modernization and the spread of Western culture across the world (Keesing, 1985, p. 214; Mühlhäusler, 1995, p. 282; Mallett, 2003, p. 131). Subscribing to this perspective, the present paper discusses nature-related concepts in the lexicon of Tok Pisin, a creole of Papua New Guinea, lexified by English and the indigenous languages. It employs the methodological framework of cognitive and cultural linguistics (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2015; Langacker, 1994, p. 31; Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2017) to present the use of a broad range of natural terms as conceptual sources and targets of both metaphors and metonymies. It is argued that the Oceanic cognitive schema of integrity of humans and the natural world (Flassy, 2018, p. 73; Singh, 2022, p. 4), together with concepts related to the local fauna, flora, climate, and topography, produce an emic and culture-specific view of the natural environment of Melanesia, which gives Tok Pisin semantics a strongly relativist character.

Keywords: anthropomorphization, body part term, metaphor, metonymy, natural environment.

1. Introduction

Tok Pisin (henceforth TP) developed from Pidgin English used on plantations of Western Samoa (Mühlhäusler, 1976 as cited in Todd & Mühlhäusler, 1978, p. 16). Thanks to the later influence of Melanesian languages of New Britain and New Ireland, as well as English (Todd & Mühlhäusler, 1978, p. 16), it gradually transformed into a creole and a lingua franca of Papua New Guinea (henceforth PNG) – a country that speaks some 750 indigenous languages. As a contact language originating in the European colonisation of Oceania, TP is a mixture of

the indigenous linguistic substrate and the European lexical superstrate. Though the bulk of the vocabulary is of English origin, as much as 16-17% come from the indigenous languages of PNG (Kurosawa, 2009, p. 40). There are also words from German, Malay, or Portuguese. Because of its reduced vocabulary, TP is a grammatical language (Haiman, 1985, p. 166) – periphrastic constructions are more frequent than in non-contact languages. For example, the expressions *haus kuk* house cook 'kitchen' and *haus ka* house car 'garage' are the equivalents of the English monolexemes; even more complex constructions are *samting bilong pait* something of-FUNC fight 'weapons' or *samting long skul yu mas pinisim long haus* something PREP school you must finish PREP house / home 'homework'. Rural Pidgin, which is a basilectal and standard TP, reflects a strong influence of Melanesian grammar and semantics.

The present analysis focuses on the part of TP lexicon related to the natural environment. The text is structured into six sections. Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework and the methodology of the analysis, as well as presents the data. Section 3 is a brief description of the natural environment and the inhabitants of PNG. Sections 4 and 5 are analytic: the first one discusses the use of natural elements as metaphorical and metonymic sources; the second one focuses on the natural environment as a metaphorical target. Section 6 summarizes the findings and concludes the analysis.

2. The theoretical framework, the data, and the methodology

Edward Sapir's paper "Language and Environment" (2001 [1912]) first established the relation between 'Nature', understood as the topography of the country, its climate, the fauna, the flora, etc., and the vocabulary of a language (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001, p. 2). Sapir writes:

> Properly speaking, of course, the physical environment is reflected in language only in so far as it has been influenced by social factors. The mere existence, for instance, of a certain type of animal in the physical environment of a people does not suffice to give rise to a linguistic symbol referring to it. It is necessary that the animal be known by the members of the group in common and that they have some interest, however slight, in it before the language of the community is called upon to make reference to this particular element of the physical environment. (2001 [1912], p. 14)

One of the areas of research within contemporary ecolinguistics is the study of how non-European languages represent the natural environment (Penz & Fill, 2022, p. 247). Riches (1995), for example, discusses the Inuits' attitude to animals; Stibbe (2012) analyses the indigenous people's views of animals, plants, and rivers; Fill (2021) deals with the relation between people and territory in the Aboriginal languages of Australia (Penz & Fill, 2022, p. 248). Such an approach is in line with the anthropological proposition to study non-Western semantic systems and

the metaphors present in them (Keesing, 1985, p. 214; Mühlhäusler, 1995, p. 282; Mallett, 2003, p. 131).

Contemporary cultural linguistics, which grows out of cognitive linguistics (Langacker, 1994, p. 31; 2014, p. 33 as cited in Sharifian, 2017, p. 34), offers a methodological framework to deal with the relation between language and the culture-motivated views of the natural environment. Both approaches explore "conceptualisations that have a cultural basis and are encoded in and communicated through features of human languages" (Sharifian, 2017, p. 34). Palmer (1996, p. 3 as cited in Sharifian, 2017, p. 35) writes: "language is the play of verbal symbols that are based in imagery" and imagery "is what we see in our mind's eye, but it is also the taste of mango, the feel of walking in a tropical downpour, the music of *Mississippi Masala*." Much of linguistic imagery is figurative rather than literal.

The figurative and image-based character of language rests on analogy-based metaphor and association-based metonymy as two dominant conceptual patterns (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2015; Dirven, 2002). The main function of metaphor is to provide understanding of a target concept in terms of a source concept by means of a systematic set of mappings between them. For example, the expressions "We've *gotten off the track*", "We're *stuck*", and "We're *spinning our wheels*" are instances of the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, which map various obstacles on a journey onto a crisis in a relationship (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 4–9). Some metaphors map only individual images onto each other rather than producing systematic entailments between conceptual domains. For example, André Breton's line "My wife … whose *waist* is an *hourglass*" (1931) superimposes "the image of an hourglass onto the image of a woman's waist by virtue of their common shape" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 229).

The main function of metonymy, which involves a mapping between parts of a single domain, is referential (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 147–148). For example, in the expression *There's a lot of Beethoven on the upper shelf*, the proper name *Beethoven* is a source that may provide access to the target of the records containing the interpretations of the composer's works. However, the conceptual link between them is contingent or cancellable (Panther & Thornburg, 2007, pp. 240–241) – instead of using the expression *Beethoven*, one could use the literal statement *There's a lot of records containing music by Beethoven on the upper shelf*. Both metaphor and metonymy operate in expressions of varied structural complexity – lexemes, idioms, and parts of composite expressions. For example, in the endocentric compound *steamboat* only the dependent *steam* functions as the source of the metonymy SOURCE OF ENERGY FOR MANNER OF OPERATION – a steamboat is a boat propelled by means of steam. For a contrast, the whole exocentric compound *redneck* functions as the source of the metonymy BODY PART FOR PERSON. Several possible forms of metaphor-metonymy interaction are collectively referred to as metaphtonymy (Goossens, 1990). Thus, for example, the expression *beat one's breast* 'make an open show of sorrow that may be partly pretence', which represents a part of the scenario of a religious confession, can be

extended to refer to a non-religious expression of sorrow as well. It is thus a case of metaphor from metonymy (Goossens, 1990, pp. 332–333). The expression *be / get up on one's hind legs* 'stand up in order to say or argue something, esp. in public', in turn, represents a case of metaphor within metonymy – the element *hind* is the source domain of the metaphor PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS operating within the whole expression (Goossens, 1990, p. 335) based on the metonymy SUBEVENT FOR WHOLE EVENT.

The TP expressions analysed below were gathered by means of the lexical method (Kövecses, Ambrus, Hegedűs, Imai & Sobczak, 2019). The procedure of selection consisted of four steps, some of which draw on Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) created by Praglejaz Group (2007). The first step involved finding items related to the analysed topic. They were drawn from two print dictionaries of the creole: Michalic's *The Jacaranda dictionary and grammar of Melanesian Pidgin* (1983) and the more up-to-date *Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin English dictionary* (2020) by Baing, Deutrom, Jackson & Volker, prepared in co-operation with *Wantok niuspepa*. Dutton & Thomas's (1985) course-book of the creole, Mühlhäusler's (1985d) chapter on variation in TP, and papers on TP idioms by Todd & Mühlhäusler (1978) and Franklin & Thomas (2006) also provided some examples. All expressions were then compared and supplemented with the relevant entries from four electronic dictionaries of the creole: *English-Tok Pisin-English dictionary* (2025); *FREELANG Tok Pisin-English-Tok Pisin online dictionary* (2025); *Tok Pisin English dictionary* (2025); *Tok Pisin translation, resources, and discussion* (2025). The electronic version of the *Oxford English dictionary* (2025) was consulted for their English counterparts. The second step meant checking the examples for the property of indirectness. It involved determining the basic meaning of each expression and then seeing if it can be related to the new sense by some form of similarity or contiguity based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cross-domain mapping view of metaphor and Radden and Kövecses's (1999) within-domain mapping view of metonymy with the underlying part-for-whole relation. The third step consisted in the division of the expressions into various thematic groups following their functions as metaphorical sources and metonymic vehicles. The fourth step involved checking the target domains for which the metaphorical sources and metonymic vehicles were used.

3. The natural environment and people of Papua New Guinea

As in the rest of Melanesia, the natural environment of PNG is varied and rich in plant and animal life. Vegetation is tropical and consists of savannah, grassland, and forests; the fauna includes the original species, such as various marsupials, birds, and fish, as well as animals introduced by people, such as dogs and pigs (Sillitoe, 1998, pp. 3–5).

Some 85% of the population of the country are farmers (Kurosawa, 2009, p. 40). It should thus come as no surprise that – like all "people who depend directly on their own efforts to meet their subsistence requirements" (Sillitoe, 1998, p. 17) – they live close to nature. Dogs accompany people who hunt; pigs are common on farms. Such animals are often domesticated. Pigs even become pets on a leash – the owners talk to them, give them personal names, and treat them as members of the family (Sillitoe, 1998, pp. 32, 47–51). The close contact between man and nature is also reflected in the relation between the human and the natural life cycles. Pregnancy and birth, for example, are sometimes correlated with women's productivity of planting crops and raising pigs (Queensland Health, 2024).

Bodily ornaments often consist of sea shells and "colourfully plumed headdresses" made from feathers of the "magnificent bird of paradise" (Sillitoe, 1998, p. 92). Dog's teeth, teeth of crocodiles and porpoise, or pig's tusks function as jewellery, currency, and objects of wealth and exchange (Sillitoe, 1998, p. 92). Bark-fibre string is used to manufacture capes and *bilums* or netted string bags (Sillitoe, 1998, pp. 118–122).

Animals and plants are also a part of mythology, which justifies the local practice, institutions, and conveys moral messages. For example, one of the myths common among the pig-raising and taro-growing Baktaman population of central PNG says that the world begins with a dog which pulls people and places from the holes under the trees; taro, their main crop, is fetched from the hole by a swallow (Sillitoe, 1998, pp. 229–230, 232–233).

Finally, the natural and the social worlds are often embedded within each other. For example, the Kamea people of PNG have a non-genealogical system of expressing family relatedness – the growth of social relationships is equivalent to the growth of trees (Bamford, 2009 as cited in Ellen, 1998, p. 144).

4. The natural environment as a conceptual source in Tok Pisin

The natural environment includes all living things, but its sense is often narrowed down to earth and its parts (Flassy, 2018, p. 70). Some of those elements function as sources of metaphors only in English; others are sources of metaphors and metonymies in both TP and English.

4.1. Literal in Tok Pisin vs. metaphorical in English

The Melanesians live by the integrity of humans and plants, thus taking a holistic view of the surrounding world (Flassy, 2018, p. 73). The view motivates a cognitive schema, common in the whole of Oceania, in which the self is a "part of nature" and human beings are "equals with nature, not dominant over it" (Singh, 2022, pp. 4–5).

Such form of culture-shaped cognition motivates the scope of figurativity in Oceanic languages. For example, Murphy (1966, p. 40 as cited in Mühlhäusler,

1985b, p. 616) argues that *gras* – from English *grass* – is rarely used to mean 'grass', but refers to 'hair', 'fur', or 'feathers'. In a similar fashion, Hall explains that "English *grass* appears in Pidgin as /gras/, but refers, not only to the green plant, but to anything that grows outward from a surface in a blade-like shape" (1966, pp. 90ff as cited in Mühlhäusler, 1985b, p. 616). As a result, though such expressions as

    (1) *gras antap long ai* grass on.top prep eye 'eyebrows'
    (2) *gras bilong het* grass of-part head 'hair'
    (3) *gras bilong pes* grass of-part face 'beard'
    (4) *i gat gras* pm have grass 'be hairy'
    (5) *katim gras* cut grass 'cut hair, shave'
    (6) *kunai gras* sword grass 'bushy beard or hair'
    (7) *mausgras* mouth.grass 'moustache, beard, catfish'
    (8) *waitpela gras* white grass 'grey hair, grey-headed person, egret, heron'
    (9) *gras bilong pisin* grass of-poss bird 'feathers',

may seem to be metaphorical to a speaker of English, they are literal to a speaker of TP. Mühlhäusler explains: "In actual fact , the semantic space occupied by the literal meanings of *hair, fuzz, feathers, grass, mould*, etc. in English is occupied by just one literal meaning in Tok Pisin" (1985b, p. 616). That is because in Oceania a human being, as a "part of nature", is "a category alongside tree and grass"[1] (Singh, 2022, p. 5).

Thus, whether a meaning is metaphorical depends on the cultural perception of the world and "can be determined only within a given language, not by comparing languages" (Mühlhäusler, 1985b, p. 616; 1985c, p. 73). In other words, "any use of metaphorical extension of a meaning should be in conformity with the role of metaphor in that language and not be influenced by conventions in another language. English metaphors frequently cannot be integrated into the semantic system of Tok Pisin" (Mühlhäusler, 1985b, p. 616).

4.2. Figurative in Tok Pisin and in English

The elements of the natural environment that are figurative to the speakers of TP and English include the fauna, the flora, the winds and the weather, the sun, and the water. English has many similar expressions (Seidl & McMordie, 1989), but the TP counterparts usually reflect the local motivation.

4.2.1. The fauna

The fauna-related elements function as sources of metaphor-based ANIMALIZATION of plants, outward appearance, physical condition, social origin, and money:

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[1] In Fijian and Samoan, both Oceanic languages, hair is leaves to a tree (Singh, 2022, p. 5).

(10) *tel bilong diwai* tail of-part tree 'the thinner end of the tree trunk'
(11) *blulang* blu.fly 'blow fly = policeman'
(12) *frok-bel* frog.belly 'obese person'
(13) *Kumul ya!* bird of paradise really 'Beautiful woman!'
(14) *longpela muruk* long cassowary 'person with long legs'
(15) *pato-lek* duck.leg 'waddling person'[2]
(16) *pukpuk* crocodile 'person covered with tinea'
(17) *bun kakaruk* bone chicken 'very thin, malnourished person'
(18) *Muruk i kilim em* cassowary pm hit him 'He had an epileptic attack'
(19) *sik dok* sick dog 'weak person'
(20) *strit dok* street dog 'urbanite'
(21) *kina* large mother of pearl shell 'unit of PNG currency'
(22) *toea* small pearl shell 'unit of PNG currency'.

In example (10), the image of a thin animal tail motivates the metaphor-based extension of *tel*. TP employs a human or animal body part term (henceforth BPT) to represent one part of the tree trunk – *as bilong diwai* ass of-PART tree 'the base of the tree' (Radomyski, 2023, pp. 163, 165, 175) – and animal BPT to represent the part organically connected with it. Expressions (11)–(16) are all related to human outward appearance. Example (11) is based on the similarity of the colour of the insect to the blue uniforms of the police in PNG. Examples (12) and (15) are conceptually more complex – whereas the initial elements of the compounds are loci of metaphors, the BPTs access their human referents by means of the metonymy BODY PART FOR PERSON. The expressions are thus instances of metaphor operating within metonymy. Expression (13) is motivated by the beautiful bird of paradise – a symbol of the country. Examples (14) and (16), as well as (17) reflect some iconic relation between the animals and the people. Whereas (14) and (16) are based on metaphor, (17) is based on the metonymy BODY PART FOR PERSON interacting with the metaphor of ANIMALIZATION and also contains an implicit reference to "the stereotypical scrawny village chicken" (Franklin & Thomas, 2006, p. 5). Example (18) likens an epileptic attack to the effects of being hit by a cassowary. Metaphorical expressions (19) and (20), the second of which is descriptive of a person's social origin, are both motivated by the common presence of dogs in people's households and the streets of PNG towns. Finally, metaphor-based concepts (21)–(22) reflect the role of the sea and the shellfish in the life of PNG. They also reflect the value attached to such objects: the kina is "[…] used widely for trading and as a traditional store of wealth and adornment" (Bank of Papua New Guinea [B of PNG], 2025). The toea, in turn, "is […] used for trading and bride price ceremonies in the Motuan villages, and is valued because it is found in the depths of the ocean and only at certain times of the year. […] [It] is worked on and transformed into armbands, and thus becomes a means of payment and store of wealth"[3] (B of PNG, 2025).

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[2] The first element of the expression reflects the influence of Spanish on the lexicon of TP.
[3] Sea shells are used in *kula*, which is a "complex system of exchange of shell tokens of social status, with its economic, political, and ritual overtones" (Firth, 1989, p. 15). It was described in detail by Malinowski (1922).

4.2.2. The flora

Throughout PNG *bus* bush 'jungle, forest, wilds, woods, any area outside the village or gardening limits', often contrasted with *ples* place 'place, village, region, area, town', refers to "extra-social space"[4] (Fajans, 1998, p. 12). As a metonymic source, it is used to access the origin and properties of humans and animals. Thus, in such expressions as

(23) *buskanaka* bush.man 'wild man'
(24) *busman* bush.man 'outcast'
(25) *manabus* man.of.bush 'savage, ignorant bush-dweller'
(26) *man bilong bus* man of-orig bush 'person from the interior'
(27) *paul bilong bus* fowl of-orig bush 'wild fowl, bush hen'
(28) *pik bilong bus* pig of-orig bush 'wild pig',

the element *bus* not only specifies the location but also implies the properties of being ignorant, savage, or wild. That is why it also serves as the source of the metonymy LOCATION FOR PROPERTY.

Grassy valleys are another part of the landscape of PNG that motivates some expressions related to the origin and outward appearance of people:

(29) *kanaka bilong kunai* man of-orig sword grass 'native of the grass country'
(30) *wankunai* one.sword grass 'person from the same grassy valley of the Highlands'
(31) *kunai i paia* sword grass pm burned off 'bald-headed person'.

In example (29), the element *kunai* is the source of the metonymy PLANT FOR AREA.[5] In (30) the metaphor SIMILAR IS ONE in the initial element of the compound precedes the metonymic chain (Fass, 1997, p. 73) PLANT FOR AREA FOR PERSON operating in its second element. In expression (31), an aspect of the landscape serves to represent baldness – the word *kunai* does not literally mean 'hair' but accesses the concept by means of a more specific metaphor-based image.

Other elements of the flora also motivate some metaphorical expressions related to human outward appearance, social relations, and intellect:

(32) *karamap saksak* cover.up sago 'parcel of sago = pregnant woman'
(33) *Longpela kokonas i pundaun pinis* long coconut pm fall.down perf 'The chief of the village has died'[6]
(34) *Wanpela diwai i stap klostu long haus bilong yu i pundaun long graun* one tree pm be close. to prep house of-poss you pm fall.down prep ground 'Someone near or dear to you has died'
(35) *het diwai* head wood 'stupid, foolish person'.

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[4] Both concepts are used "to organize cosmology and social practice" of the people (Fajans, 1998, p. 12).

[5] The English equivalent of *kunai* has a metaphorical element – the sword-like shape of the grass. The translation 'man of-ORIG sword grass' may thus be based on metaphor within metonymy.

[6] Coconut palms play a major role in the agriculture of the country – some are even owned by individuals (Sillitoe, 1998, p. 23). As a result, the trees have the largest number of names in the semantic field of plants (Mühlhäusler, 1985a, p. 427).

In example (32), malleable *saksak* resembles "the jostling movement of a pregnant woman's belly" (Franklin & Thomas, 2006, p. 6). Examples (33) and (34) both form a part of the stylistic register of *tok bokis* talk box 'hidden talk', which is used to deal with taboo concepts (Mühlhäusler, 1985d, p. 267). Expression (35) combines the metonymy BODY PART FOR PERSON located in the BPT with the metaphor IMPERVIOUS IS DRY operating in the following element. It is thus a case of metaphor within metonymy.

4.2.3. The winds and the weather

PNG's proximity to the Equator means that the winds blowing in the area are the basis for the local wind calendar, the descriptions of the related weather conditions, and for nomenclature of geographical areas (Michalic, 1983, pp. 163, 190; Sillitoe, 1998, p. 5; Singh, 2022, p. 12):

(36) *taim bilong rai* time of-attr south-east trade wind 'the south-east season: May to October'
(37) *taim bilong (bik) san* time of-attr (big) sun 'drought, the dry season'
(38) *taim bilong draiwara* time of-attr dry.water 'the dry season'
(39) *taim bilong taleo* time of-attr north-west monsoon 'the north-west season: November to April'
(40) *taim bilong ren* time of-attr 'the wet season'
(41) *taim bilong haiwara* time of-attr high.water 'the rainy season, the flood time'
(42) *Raikos* course of south-east trade wind 'the coast from Madang to Finschafen, the Huon Peninsula'.

In wind-related expressions (36) and (39), the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE with the names of the winds as sources serves to access the dry and the rainy seasons of the year. As *rai* is connected with the absence of rainfall, the related expressions (37) and (38) describe the condition by means of the metonymies CAUSE FOR EFFECT and EFFECT FOR CAUSE using the postmodifier nouns as their sources. For a contrast, *taleo* causes rainfall – expression (40) thus employs the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT to access the wet season; (41), in turn, focuses on the floods and uses the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE to access the time of the year. In both cases, the postmodifier nouns function as metonymic sources. Expression (42), related to the local geographical nomenclature, is again based on the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE, which uses it as its source.

4.2.4. The sun

Before precise clock measures became known in PNG, the natives determined the passage of time by reference to the position of the sun. The practice is still reflected in various expressions related to various parts of day:

(43) *sankamap* sun.come.up 'morning, dawn'
(44) *taim bilong san i kamap* time of-attr sun pm come.up 'morning, dawn'

(45) *san* sun 'daytime'
(46) *taim long san* time prep sun 'daytime'
(47) *san i stap antap tru* sun pm be on.top true 'midday, the high noon'
(48) *biksan* big.sun 'midday, the high noon'
(49) *sandaun* sun.down 'evening'
(50) *taim bilong san i godaun* time of-attr sun pm go.down 'evening'.

All of them are periphrastic constructions based on the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT – the position of the sun and the intensity of its operation determine the intensity of light used a reference point to distinguish the successive parts of day. Expression (48) is a case of metaphor within metonymy – the adjective *bik* is the source domain of the metaphor STRONG IS BIG.

4.2.5. The water

The Melanesian experience of waterbound life from early years on (Sillitoe, 1998, p. 57) provides motivation for some expressions related to diverse aspects of experience, such as physiological processes and marital relations:

(51) *Mi go si / solwara* I go sea / salt.water 'I go for a pee'
(52) *Saman wantaim kanu i no orait* outrigger one.time canoe pm not alright 'The outrigger and the canoe do not match = They are unhappily married'.

Based on deliberate metaphors, the expressions are further instances of *tok bokis* talk box 'hidden talk' (Mühlhäusler, 1985d, p. 267). Example (51) maps the sea water onto urine; (52) is a culture-specific elaboration of the cross-culturally common metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

5. The natural environment as a conceptual target

A further consequence of the Oceanic schema of the interdependence and equality of humans and nature is the natives' tendency to picture the natural environment – the fauna, the flora, topographical landmarks, and even astral bodies – as human beings:

(53) *ai bilong kokonas* eye of-part coconut 'the sprout hole of the coconut shell'
(54) *ai bilong taro* eye of-part taro 'the taro bud'
(55) *ai bilong wara* eye of-part water 'the source of the river'[7]
(56) *as bilong diwai* ass of-part tree 'the base of the tree'
(57) *as bilong mun* ass of-part moon 'the beginning of the month'
(58) *bel diwai* belly tree 'the tree trunk'

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[7] The expression (55) and the complementary expression (70) *lek bilong wara* foot of-PART water 'the estuary of the river' are indigenous concepts and may have been replaced by the English equivalents by now (Todd & Mühlhäusler, 1978, pp. 18–19).

(59) *bel bilong tri* belly of-part tree 'the inside of the tree trunk'

(60) *blut bilong diwai* blood of-part tree 'the sap of the tree'

(61) *blut bilong kapiak* blood of-part breadfruit tree 'the sticky sap of the breadfruit tree'

(62) *bun diwai* bone tree 'the inner part of the tree trunk'

(63) *han bilong diwai* hand of-part tree 'the branch of the tree'[8]

(64) *han bilong wara* hand of-part water 'the tributary of the river'

(65) *han bilong dok* hand of-poss dog 'the dog's paw'

(66) *het bilong diwai* head of-part tree 'the tree top, the crown of the tree'

(67) *het bilong maunten* head of-part mountain 'the summit / the top of the mountain'

(68) *het bilong wara* head of-part water 'the source of the river, the headwater'

(69) *lek bilong wara* foot of-part water 'the estuary of the river'

(70) *lek bilong dok* leg of-poss dog 'the hind limb of the dog'[9]

(71) *maus bilong hul* mouth of-part hole 'the mouth of the cave'

(72) *maus bilong pisin* mouth of-poss bird 'the bird's beak'

(73) *maus bilong wara* mouth of-part water 'the mouth of the river'

(74) *skin bilong diwai* skin of-part tree 'the bark of the tree'

(75) *skin kina* skin oyster 'the oyster shell'

(76) *skin bilong kokonas* skin of-part coconut 'the coconut husk'

(77) *skin bilong trausel* skin of-poss turtle 'the turtle shell'

(78) *Em i papa bilong dispela pig* he pm father of-func this pig 'He is the owner of / takes care of / is responsible for this pig'

(79) *Husat i mama bilong dispela pik?* who pm mother of-func this pig 'Which woman does this pig belong to?'[10]

(80) *pikinini bulmakau* child bull.and.cow 'calf'

(81) *pikinini dok* child dog 'puppy'

(82) *pikinini pis* child fish 'minnow'

(83) *pikinini bilong diwai* child of-orig tree 'fruit, seed, the nut of the tree'

(84) *pikinini bilong mango* child of-orig mango 'the fruit of mango'

(85) *pikinini bilong rais* child of-orig rice 'the rice kernels'

(86) *pikinini bilong yambo* child of-orig guava 'the fruit of the guava tree'.

The anthropomorphization of animals, plants, topographical landmarks, and astral bodies, which involves the mapping of BPTs and family terms onto the target concepts, is based on the general metaphor NATURE IS A HUMAN BEING.[11] These concepts are figurative both for the speakers of English and TP (Mühlhäusler, 1985a, p. 426; Todd & Mühlhäusler, 1978, pp. 20–21, 24).

Similar conceptual patterns are also common in SAE languages. English, for example, has such concepts as *the eye of the storm*, *the foot of the mountain*, *the mouth of the river*, etc. However, in TP the scope of anthropomorphization is much

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[8] Damon (1998, p. 84) describes the northeast *kula* ring personification of the *kausilay* tree as a female. It is used as a material to build outrigger canoes.

[9] The Oceanic languages frequently use *leg* to refer to both 'limb' and 'foot'.

[10] The use of the family-related term *papa* in example (78) is also motivated by the traditional social roles of family members. Michalic says, however, that "in the Highlands in particular, pigs are cared for only by the women" (1983, p. 128).

[11] Radomyski (2023, pp. 163, 165, 175) argues that *ass* could be regarded as a part of a human being or an animal.

more extensive than in its main lexifier, where the extensions of such BPTs as *ass*, *belly*, *blood*, *bone*, *hand*, *skin*, and *offspring* are not used in similar contexts. The creole conceptualizations thus reflect a culture-specific way of perceiving the natural environment, which is largely motivated by the above-mentioned cognitive schema of the interdependence of the human and the natural worlds.

6. Summary and conclusions

The range of natural elements used in TP as conceptual sources and targets well illustrates the prominent role that the natural environment plays in the lives of Melanesians. These elements are used to structure the culture-specific concepts of animals, plants, outward appearance, physical condition, social origin, social relations, money, intellect, time, calendar, weather, topographical landmarks, geographical nomenclature, and physiology. Whereas animals, plants, and human BPTs are the most common metaphorical sources, the common targets include people, animals, plants, and topographical landmarks. Frequent metonymic sources include plants and weather, which function as parts, causes, and effects providing access to the seasons of the year or time's passage.

The absence of metaphors where English and other SAE semantic systems have them and broader scope of anthropomorphization of the natural world reflect the relativist character of TP semantics, strongly motivated by culturally-shaped cognition. Such semantics illustrates the intercultural context of the process of linguistic accommodation typical of contact languages (Mühlhäusler, 1992 as cited in Sebba, 1997, p. 288) and reflects the character of TP as a restructured language (Sebba, 1997, pp. 25–26). The creole's concepts are complex and describable in unique emic – "insider", "folk", or "experience-near" (Levisen, 2024, p. 20) – terms.[12] They thus deny the claims that contact languages are more primitive and less expressive than non-contact languages (e.g. Seuren, 1998, pp. 292–293 as cited in DeGraff, 2005, p. 543).

Abbreviations used in the text

FULL CAPS are used in the names of metaphors and metonymies, as well as in the abbreviations in the main body of the text and the Notes.

small caps are used in the abbreviations of the names of grammatical categories in the glosses of the linguistic examples.

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[12] Levisen (2004, pp. 54-67), focusing on the concepts of *graon* 'land, territory, home', *aelan* '(home) island', and *kantri* 'country', argues for the presence of similar concepts in another Pacific creole – Bislama used in Vanuatu.

BPT =   body part term (except for the Abstract and the References)
func =   functional
fut =   future
orig =   origin
part =   partitive
perf =   perfective
pl =   plural
pm =   predicate marker
PNG =   Papua New Guinea (except for the Abstract, the titles of the parts of the paper, and the References)
poss =   possessive
prep =   preposition
SAE =   Standard Average European
TP =   Tok Pisin (except for the Abtract, the titles of the paper and its parts, the quotations, and the References)

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UNBOXING THE IDEA OF "THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX": ON THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN TRANSLATION TRAINING

Abstract: Creativity and innovation involve finding new ways of thinking and organizing ideas. A creative individual is someone who can identify problems and come up with effective solutions. Creative thinking helps adapt to changes in today's fast-evolving world and it should be applied across all areas of life, including education. By fostering creative thinking, teachers can better prepare students for jobs that currently exist but may be transformed by automation in the future. This is not only relevant for fields like translation, but also areas such as medicine and law, where automation is becoming more prevalent. While certain tasks can be automated, the nature of creativity remains irreplicable. Therefore, those who can creatively develop methods of automating processes will be highly sought after, as will those whose creative abilities enable them to thrive in professions that have not yet emerged. The aim of this paper is to delve deeper into the concept of creativity and its key elements, explore ways it can be stimulated, outline strategies for incorporating creativity-focused tasks in the translation classroom, as well as provide methods for encouraging creative thinking among translation students.

Key words: creativity, translation classroom, translation teaching, translator training.

1. Creativity matters

Creativity is a multifaceted concept with varying definitions depending on the perspective. For instance, Adair (2007, p. 8) describes it as "the faculty of mind and spirit that enables us to bring into existence, ostensibly out of nothing, something of use, order, beauty or significance". An interesting perspective on creativity is offered by Gruber and Davis (1988), who challenge the myth of sudden inspiration, viewing creativity as a gradual process of reflection and discovery. Some scholars see creativity as a universal human trait, not limited to great works or discoveries but expressed in behaviours, performances, ideas (Taylor, 1988, p. 104), or

products like scientific theories and advertising (Perkins, 1988, p. 378). Lucas (2016, p. 279) defines creativity as a multi-dimensional quality found across life domains, emerging from creative thinking – a social process often triggered by challenges. This aligns with Cox's (2015, p. 21) definition of creativity as an act of generating ideas, and with Lucas's (2017)[1] distinction between creative thinking and creative activity, which results in original, purposeful outcomes.

Another view links creativity closely to problem-solving, which involves applying specific techniques to achieve a goal. This process draws on both new strategies and past experiences (Landau, 1976, pp. 25, 76). Problem-solving, like decision-making, requires three essential skills: analysis (breaking down complex problems into smaller components), synthesis (combining these components into a larger whole), and evaluation (assessing them in terms of values and norms) (Szabó, 2002, p. 14). Research also connects creativity to frustration tolerance. Kakas (1987, p. 79) notes that creative individuals have personality traits that help them manage frustration in challenging situations, while less creative people may become blocked or emotionally overwhelmed when faced with challenges.

The Centre for Real-World Learning proposes a five-dimensional model of creative thinking (Lucas, 2016, pp. 281–282), identifying five core habits:

1. **Inquisition.** Exploring and asking interesting questions.
— wondering and questioning – posing questions that foster new ideas;
— exploring and investigating – seeking out additional questions to deepen understanding;
— challenging assumptions – being skeptical and not accepting things at face value without thorough examination.
2. **Imagination.** Generating creative solutions.
— playing with possibilities – experimenting with ideas, testing and refining them in the process;
— making connections – synthesizing information and linking disparate ideas;
— using intuition – trusting intuition to form new connections between concepts.
3. **Persistence.** Creative people are not easily discouraged.
— sticking with difficulty – persevering through challenges, practicing patience, pushing beyond the familiar, and developing new ideas in the process;
— daring to be different – having the confidence to take sensible risks and embrace unique approaches;
— tolerating uncertainty – being comfortable with a certain level of uncertainty and ambiguity.
4. **Collaboration.** Recognizing that addressing complex challenges of the modern world often requires teamwork, and valuing the social aspects of the creative process.
— sharing the product – creative output, whether an idea or a tangible product, needs to be shared to have an impact on others;

[1] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/teaching-creative-thinking-advice-and-examples/, accessed 2 May 2025.

— giving and receiving feedback – offering feedback to others and receiving constructive criticism, using it as a tool to enhance one's work;
— cooperating appropriately – collaborating effectively, respecting and valuing other people's ideas and contributions.
5. **Discipline.** Creativity requires knowledge and the ability to develop expertise.
— developing techniques – consistently honing one's skills;
— reflecting critically – critically assessing ideas, evaluating their feasibility and making necessary decisions;
— crafting and improving – paying attention to detail and willingly correcting mistakes.

When creativity is fostered in areas like education or business, it enhances innovation, productivity, and overall well-being. As the model suggests, creative individuals are capable of inventing, innovating, educating, problem-solving, inquiring and exploring.

2. Can creativity be taught?

Barras (2014)[2] highlights an increasing emphasis on fostering creativity in both schools and institutes of higher education. While creativity may stem from innate abilities, research shows it can also be developed through intentional strategies and structured practice. Thus, it is increasingly viewed not just as a natural gift, but as a skill that can be learned, taught, developed, and practiced. However, Polish schools often do little to cultivate students' creativity. Students are frequently hesitant to think outside the box, likely due to the dominance of standardized tests that encourage conformity rather than original thinking. Closed-ended questions limit imaginative responses, and creative answers that differ from the norm are often marked wrong, stifling students' early enthusiasm (Barras, ibidem).

Barras (ibidem) refers to the research which suggests that certain conditions, like a relaxed mental state, can foster creativity. This is linked to "divergent thinking," which involves generating multiple solutions to open-ended problems. In contrast, schools often prioritize "convergent thinking," focusing on single-answer problems. However, this does not mean that teachers should discard textbooks. As Barras (ibidem) points out, students must have a solid understanding of the material they are studying. Still, educators should embrace students' imagination and provide opportunities to cultivate creativity.

Lucas (2017)[3] observes that schools which successfully teach students to be creative thinkers, capable of solving various problems, typically follow a four-stage process:

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[2] http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140314-learn-to-be-creative, accessed 2 May 2025.
[3] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/teaching-creative-thinking-advice-and-examples/, accessed 7 May 2025.

Stage 1: Develop a deep understanding of creative thinking. Teachers should structure their classes around key concepts such as questioning, challenging assumptions, tolerating uncertainty, taking risks, daring to be different, reflecting critically.

Stage 2: Establish a supportive classroom environment and implement two key strategies: "split-screen "and "visible thinking". Split-screen teaching focuses both on content and creative habits. It aligns with inquiry-based learning, promoting skills like curiosity and multi-perspective thinking (Murdoch, 2013).[4] An example of split-screen teaching might be a situation in which while learning about climate change (content), students are also asked to analyze cause and effect and generate alternative solutions (thinking). This dual focus deepens understanding and nurtures creativity in problem-solving. Visible thinking is a framework using routines – structured tools or prompts (e.g., "Circle of Viewpoints", "Options Explosion"[5]) – simple, repeatable practices that guide students in different types of thought processes. For example, when analyzing a historical event, students might use the routine "See–Think–Wonder" to first observe a photo, then interpret its meaning, and finally generate creative questions or alternate perspectives. Many of the routines within the "visible thinking" approach can be effectively applied in the translation classroom.

Stage 3: Select teaching methods most conducive to fostering creative thinking. Lucas (2017)[6] recommends:
— Problem-based learning: real-world problems foster practical thinking;
— Classroom learning communities: students co-construct knowledge and contribute to and advance each other's understanding;
— Playful experimentation: relaxed exploration encourages generation of new ideas;
— Growth mindset: practice strengthens intelligence and creativity;
— Deliberate practice: repetition and refinement enhance skill.

Stage 4: Enhance student involvement and commitment to developing their creative abilities. Creativity is a way of engaging with the world, not just a talent. As Judkins notices: "Creativity isn't a switch that's flicked on or off, it's a way of seeing, engaging and responding to the world around you".[7] Adair (2007,

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[4] https://justwonderingblog.com/2013/05/02/inquiring-into-the-how/, accessed 3 May 2025.
[5] Detailed descriptions of all the routines of the "visible thinking" approach can be found at: https://www.edutopia.org/article/visible-thinking-strategies-student-engagement/.
[6] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/teaching-creative-thinking-advice-and-examples/, accessed 4 May 2025.
[7] Judkins, R. *The Art of Creative Thinking*: https://www.leapessence.com/art-creative-thinking-89-ways-see-things-differently-rod-judkins-book-summary-pdf/, accessed 4 May 2025.

p. 7) adds that creativity often involves combining existing ideas in novel ways, creating value from the unexpected:

> "You do not have to conjure up new ideas from the air. Your task as a creative thinker is to combine ideas or elements that already exist. If the result is an unlikely but valuable combination of ideas or things that hitherto were not thought to be linked, then you will be seen as a creative thinker. You will have added value to the synthesis, for a whole is more than the sum of its parts" (ibidem).

Ultimately, schools must move beyond the false choice between teaching facts and fostering creative thinking. Instead, they should recognize that a thoughtfully planned blend of both approaches is the one that will most benefit both students and educators.

3. Translation classroom: encouraging out-of-the-box thinking

The idea of integrating creativity into classrooms is not a new one. In fact, a 2012 U.S. study among college-educated professionals, "Creativity and Education: Why It Matters", highlighted that creative thinking should receive more attention when designing education curricula. The study found a growing consensus that creativity is not just a personality trait, but a skill that can be developed. Researchers surveyed 1,000 full-time workers aged 25 and older, with at least a four-year college degree, and discovered that 85% of participants agreed that creative thinking is essential for problem-solving in their professional lives. Additionally, 68% believed that creativity is a skill that can be learnt. Furthermore, 91% stated that academic subjects alone are insufficient to prepare students for success in both school and life, and 82% expressed regret over not having had more opportunities to develop creative thinking during their education.[8]

This research emphasizes the increasing need for creative thinking to be integrated into higher education in Poland, where, arguably, the traditional education system fails to promote creativity in the classroom, focusing primarily on teaching the correct answers. Classes and tests are full of closed-ended questions that leave little space for imagination and students are typically rewarded for reproducing standard solutions and established methods, rather than being encouraged to think creatively and innovatively. They are generally expected to present someone else's ideas without a critical analysis (Żylińska, 2013, p. 9). Those who are particularly creative often struggle to adapt to the rigid expectations of this education system. Ironically, their talents and innovative thinking can even be obstacles, as tests based on formulas and rote learning favour students who provide the most conventional and predictable answers (Żylińska, 2013, p. 64).

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[8] The results of the research can be found at: https://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pressreleases/201211/110712AdobeEducationCreativityStudy.html, accessed 6 May 2025.

Rather than nurturing individual talents and fostering an environment for their growth, the traditional education system tends to suppress them, discouraging students from showcasing their uniqueness. This clearly calls for a new approach – one that would integrate creativity into educational standards.

Clifford (2012)[9] outlines 30 different approaches that teachers can apply to encourage creative thinking in their classrooms, irrespective of the subject they teach. Many of them, for instance those listed below, are also applicable to teaching translation:

1. **Treat creativity as part of the learning process**. Create a classroom environment that values creativity and make it clear to students creative thinking is encouraged, as well as invite them to think of innovative solutions to problems.
2. **View creativity as a skill.** Creativity is not an innate trait but a skill that can be developed. It can be broken down into smaller, teachable components. Psychologists often categorize creativity into two types: Big C, which drives world-changing ideas, and Little C, which addresses everyday problem-solving. Both types can be incorporated into the classroom.
3. **Incorporate emotions.** Research has shown that creativity is most effectively nurtured when it engages the learner's emotions. One way to do this is by having students create solutions that can assist others in need, allowing them to interact with and positively contribute to their environment.
4. **Consider how classroom activities require both convergent and divergent thinking**. Standardized tests generally assess convergent thinking, which involves logical reasoning and finding a single correct answer. Divergent thinking, however, encourages students to approach problems in multiple ways and make associations. Classroom activities and assignments should therefore offer opportunities to develop both types of thinking.
5. **Foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere.** As Clifford (ibidem) states, "creativity flourishes in a 'congenial environment,'" meaning that for creativity to flourish, individuals need to be in a socially supportive setting.
6. **Monitor discussions.** Educators can promote creativity by validating students' creative thinking. This might be done, for instance, by engaging with students who ask questions beyond the class topic and taking time to explore these enquiries, encouraging out-of-the-box thinking.
7. **Encourage freedom of expression.** Students should feel comfortable freely expressing and sharing their ideas in the classroom.
8. **Allow mistakes.** Research shows that allowing mistakes boosts students' confidence and problem-solving abilities. Mistakes can become valuable

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[9] https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/30-things-you-can-do-to-promote-creativity-in-your-classroom/, accessed 6 May 2025.

learning tools and contribute to the discovery process, helping students learn important lessons.[10] As Sir Ken Robinson stated: "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original."[11]

9. **Encourage students to ask questions.** Create an environment where students feel encouraged to ask questions. Since some may hesitate out of fear that their questions may seem foolish, emphasize that there are no "stupid" questions. Be open to answering or, at least, discussing these questions with the class. Structure your classes to foster curiosity and exploration.

10. **Recognize that creativity boosts confidence.** A key goal of effective teaching is to help students take ownership of their own learning. This might be achieved, for instance, by letting them design a project where they can utilize their creative abilities and collaborate with others. This empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning process.

11. **Encourage curiosity.** Try to see the world from your students' perspective. Think of what matters to them, what interests and motivates them. Draw inspiration from their lives and identify what sparks their curiosity. As William Arthur Ward said, "curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning."[12]

12. **Make classes multidisciplinary.** Whenever possible, create lessons that encourage students to apply knowledge from various fields. In translation classes, this can be achieved by using texts on diverse topics and from diverse subject fields, allowing students to connect concepts across disciplines.

13. **Consider multiple intelligences.** Creativity engages different areas of the brain, and there are various types of intelligences, as outlined by Howard Gardner.[13] Allow students to utilize their individual strengths when tackling problems, as this can lead to surprising and innovative outcomes.

14. **Understand that creativity is crucial for students' future success.** Since the job market is constantly evolving, it is likely that in the future students will work in jobs that do not yet exist. To prepare them for this, encourage them to be creative and innovative when faced with challenges.

The present-day education system must acknowledge that the traditional methods of teaching, where educators deliver information for students to memorize and later recall during tests, are no longer sufficient for preparing young people for their future.

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[10] Some interesting ideas of how to turn mistakes to our advantage can be found at: https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/the-value-of-mistakes-should-it-matter-how-long-a-student-take-to-learn/.

[11] Quotation from Ken Robinson's TED Talk: "How Schools Kill Creativity", available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY.

[12] https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/curiosity.

[13] Descriptions of the seven distinct intelligences identified by Gardner can be found in the book "Multiple Intelligences" (2006, Perseus-Basic Books). Brief descriptions available at: http://www.tecweb.org/styles/gardner.html.

The rapid changes in society and technological advancements require new approaches to education that foster creativity and problem-solving skills. The challenge facing public education today is to integrate more creative learning at all levels.

4. Fostering creativity in translation classroom

In recent years, creativity has become an increasingly important focus in translator education. As the discipline moves away from rigid frameworks of equivalence and fidelity, educators are beginning to acknowledge translation as a creative activity. Encouraging creative thinking is vital for preparing students to meet the challenges of real-world translation, especially when tasks involve cultural sensitivity, stylistic flexibility, or multimodal content. Below are certain teaching approaches that develop students' creative abilities alongside their linguistic and technical competencies.

1. Open-ended, genre-varied translation tasks
Rather than resorting to conventional translation tasks that stress direct equivalence, a more creative alternative involves using open-ended tasks from diverse genres, e.g. poetry, advertising, children's literature, etc., which naturally require imaginative solutions. Kussmaul (2000, p. 35) observes that such texts "require the translator to make interpretative decisions and to exercise aesthetic judgment," thus enhancing students' creative thinking. Letting students select from various texts or versions further boosts their involvement in the creative process.

2. Transcreation
Incorporating transcreation – a blend of translation, creative writing, and cultural adaptation – can sharpen students' creative and cross-cultural skills. Especially relevant in marketing contexts, this approach shifts the focus from literal meaning to emotional or persuasive impact. Pedersen (2014, p. 36) asserts that transcreation fosters "creative autonomy and cultural awareness". Activities might include adapting slogans, brand names or web content to different cultural markets, helping students to balance fidelity and communicative impact.

3. Constraints may fuel creativity
Interestingly, constraints such as word count, rhyme, or stylistic imitation can actually boost creativity by pushing students to find inventive solutions. Drawing from literary translation, Boase-Beier (2006, p. 51) notes that these limitations activate problem-solving and innovation. For instance, translating a poem while preserving both meter and meaning can generate rich classroom dialogue about creative trade-offs.

4. Collaborative translation

Group projects, peer feedback, and role-based teamwork allow students to explain, challenge, and refine their creative choices. Kiraly (2000, p. 110) emphasizes that collaborative environments help creativity emerge through dialogue and reflection rather than individual inspiration. Digital platforms like Google Docs or Trados Live allow students to co-translate in real time or asynchronously, fostering shared responsibility and deeper learning.

5. Multimodal and intersemiotic translation

Tasks involving multimodal translation – such as subtitling, audio description, or visual storytelling – broaden students' understanding of what translation entails. These tasks require the integration of verbal, visual, and auditory elements. O'Sullivan (2013, p. 25) argues that such tasks push students to engage in complex creative problem-solving across modes of communication. Assignments like writing subtitles for silent films or adapting comic strips invite both creative experimentation and critical analysis.

6. Creativity journals

Asking students to keep creativity journals or reflection logs helps them become more conscious of their decision-making during translation. These reflections allow students to assess their choices and consider alternative strategies. According to Robinson (2003, p. 106), reflection "moves creativity from being an unconscious or random act to a structured, analyzable process". Teachers can support this with rewarding risk-taking, originality, and justified departures from literal meaning.

7. Gamification and creative challenges

Integrating game-like elements – such as timed translation sprints, text-based puzzles, or "translation duels" – can make learning more engaging while fostering creative spontaneity. Malmkjær (2004, p. 42) notes that games "can reduce anxiety and foster linguistic creativity, especially in early-stage learners". For instance, "bad translation" games, where students intentionally mistranslate texts for humorous effect, spark discussions on meaning and interpretation.

5. Creativity in translation classroom: humour and the art of punning

As already implied, translation classes in the 21st century, whether held in traditional settings or online, should aim to be not just informative – providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the translation market – but also engaging, memorable, and designed to spark students' creativity.

One way to encourage creativity in the translation classroom is by incorporating humour. Research in neuroscience has shown that humour stimulates the brain's dopamine reward system, which plays a vital role in both motivation towards goals

and long-term memory, as demonstrated by cognitive studies (Mobbs et al., 2003; Shohamy and Adcock, 2010). Furthermore, educational research indicates that humour, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool for enhancing information retention in students of all ages (Banas et al., 2011).

Thus, the advantages of including humour in translation activities are significant, as it can boost memorization, improve information retention, stimulate creativity, and help develop a positive classroom environment. In light of this, below is one idea for a humour-using translation task that might be implemented in translation classroom. It requires students to creatively translate pun-containing slogans and it can be easily adapted for different student age groups and skill levels. The translations were produced by 2nd year students enrolled in the BA programme in English Philology at the University of Rzeszów.

Table 1. Examples of students' creative translations of puns.

Original pun-containing text	Students' creative translations	Comments on the translations
Cutting (h)edge *[an advert of a highly advanced machine for cutting hedges]*	– Najwyższa pora przyciąć krzaczora – Wykosimy konkurencję	The original pun plays on the expression "cutting edge" (modern and advanced) and "cutting" as in trimming hedges. In the Polish version, the phrase "Najwyższa pora przyciąć krzaczora" (It's high time to trim the bush) cleverly shifts the "cutting" aspect to a playful image of trimming bushes, while the rhyme and the augmentative form of "bush" add to the humour of the phrase. "Wykosimy konkurencję" alludes to a competitive edge, meaning "we'll mow down the competition", which still ties in with the concept of cutting, while applying a well-known Polish idiom.
When in Rome…have a burger *[a heading of an article about fast food industry invading Italy]*	– Przybyłem, zobaczyłem, na burgera się skusiłem – Wszystkie drogi prowadzą do… Burger Kinga	The first translation plays on the famous "Veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered) phrase by replacing "conquered" with "had a burger", effectively subverting the solemn tone of the original quote with a humorous take. The second translation, "Wszystkie drogi prowadzą do… Burger Kinga" (All roads lead to… Burger King), is a play on the popular saying "All roads lead to Rome", skilfully adapted to the context of fast food.
Oil's well that ends well *[a heading of an article about oil fields in Kazakhstan]*	– Kto pod kim dołki kopie, ten zarabia na ropie – Kazahstan ropą płynący – Kazahstan postawił (k)ropę nad i	The first translation uses the Polish idiom "kopać pod kimś dołki" (literally: digging pits under someone) meaning conspiring against someone, and merges it with the idea of oil drilling, thus creating an inventive mix. The second, "Kazahstan ropą płynący" (Kazahstan flowing with oil), cleverly alludes to the expression "a land flowing with milk and honey", at the same time reflecting Kazahstan's oil-rich landscape. The last translation, "Kazahstan postawił (k)ropę nad i", humorously integrates the idea of "dotting the i's" into oil drilling. The clever inclusion of the word "kropa" (augmentative form of "dot") and "ropa" ("oil") showcases the inventive manipulation of language.

For a few pounds you can lose a few *[advertisement for a slimming course]*	– Za piątaka zrobisz sobie sześciopaka – Odchudzimy Ciebie, a nie Twój portfel	The first translation transforms the concept of weight loss into a clever play on words, where "piątka" (five zlotys) suggests a minimal investment for a toned "sześciopak" (six-pack abs). The second translation, which literally means "we'll slim you down and not your wallet", plays on the idea of losing weight at an affordable price, which is an amusing twist on the original.
We'll give you sound advice *[hi-fi shop advertisement]*	– Doradzimy ci śpiewająco – Będziesz nam dźwięczny	Both translations creatively use wordplay related to sound. "Doradzimy ci śpiewająco" (We'll advise you melodiously) incorporates "singing" into the idea of giving good advice. "Będziesz nam dźwięczny" uses the word which means "melodious" but at the same time produces immediate associations with the word "wdzięczny" meaning "grateful", thus creating an innovative pun.
Marriage isn't a word, but a sentence *[a joke]*	– Małżeństwo to nie sakrament, ale pokuta – Małżeństwo to nie zawiasy, ale dożywocie	These translations stand out by blending humour and dark irony. The first one uses "pokuta" (penance) as a play on the concept of "punishment" in marriage, while the second one, "Małżeństwo to nie zawiasy, ale dożywocie" (Marriage is not parole, but life imprisonment), uses a legal metaphor to convey the humorous (and grim) idea of the lifetime commitment in marriage.
We'll give you food for thought *[restaurant advertisement]*	– Strawa dla brzucha i ducha – Nakarmimy ciało i umysł	These translations playfully merge the concept of nourishment for both the body and mind. "Strawa dla brzucha i ducha" (Food for the stomach and soul) creatively keeps the connection between physical and intellectual nourishment intact, while "Nakarmimy ciało i umysł" (We will feed your body and mind) cleverly emphasizes the dual focus of the advertisement.
B(r)ea(s)t cancer *[cancer awareness campaign]*	– Pier(w) si w walce z rakiem	This translation shows creativity by transforming the English pun into a Polish wordplay using the words "pierwsi" (the first) and "piersi" (breasts), expressing the idea of being first in the fight against breast cancer. The clever use of "w" in "pier(w)si" skilfully mimics the original structure while focusing on the battle against cancer.
Becoming a vegan is a huge missed steak *[an Internet meme]*	– Weganizm to stek bzdur – Chcesz być wegańską divą? Porzuć wszelkie mięsiwo.	The first translation, "Weganizm to stek bzdur" (literally: Veganism is a steak of nonsense), uses a well-known Polish idiom meaning "a load of nonsense", thus expressing critique of veganism as a concept. The second translation (literally: Do you want to be a vegan diva? Give up all the meat) humorously comments on the vegan trend with a playful call to abandon meat, and it incorporates the rhyme and the augmentative form of the word "meat", adding to the overall humour of the phrase. However, although certainly creative, it fails to capture the criticism of veganism present in the original.
Buy our pizza – we knead the dough *[advertisement of a pizza place]*	– Ciast-to pieniądz – Apetyt rośnie w miarę pieczenia	These adaptations play on the word "dough" as both a literal ingredient for pizza and a metaphor for money. "Ciast-to pieniądz" (Dough is money) cleverly alludes to the phrase "czas to pieniądz" ("time is money") and ties the idea of making pizza dough to the concept of

		making money, while "Apetyt rośnie w miarę pieczenia" (The appetite rises with baking) alludes to the idiom "the appetite comes with eating" and it focuses on the rising anticipation, further enhancing the pun.
Our products suck *[Hoover advertisement]*	– Pora na sprzątanie – włącz ssanie – Nasze produkty wciągają	These translations use wordplay around the vacuum cleaner's function ("suck") while keeping it humorous. "Pora na sprzątanie – włącz ssanie" (Time to clean – turn on the suction) directly references the vacuuming action while using the rhyme, whereas "Nasze produkty wciągają" (Our products suck you in) plays with the dual meaning of "suck" – both as suction and as something engaging or attractive.

The above translations can be considered creative since they not only retain the humour and essence of the original puns but also adapt them to the nuances of the Polish language and culture. The students have successfully handled wordplay, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references to produce catchy, relevant, and amusing translations that work within the Polish linguistic framework. Prior to introducing this type of activity, it is important to clearly communicate to students the need to use their creativity, suggest different solutions, consider various perspectives, and think outside the box. Translation instructors need to help students understand that translation does not have a single correct answer, nor is it a task with a fixed solution that they must "match." On the contrary, students should recognize that translation often offers multiple possible solutions, and educators should be open to accepting various versions.

A particular advantage of such creativity-boosting activities is that there is no "answer key" and multiple versions are acceptable. By offering translation trainees the chance to work with texts that involve wordplay and humour, educators can encourage them to view translation challenges not just as problems to solve, but as interesting sources of entertainment and valuable creativity boosters.

6. Conclusion

As already stated, translation can be considered a creative activity. It might be viewed as "recreation" (Kussmaul, 1995) because, rather than rendering the source text into the target language in an automatic, mechanical way, it entails that the translator creates a text that would be equivalent to the source one, but would also differ from it in many respects and involve new elements, non-existent in the original text. Hence, creativity here is linked to this new nature of the final product (Kussmaul, 1995, p. 121).

In the area of education in general, and translator training in particular, teachers can be considered the "idea people". Their main responsibility is to prepare students for life beyond the educational institution. In an era of rapid technological

development and uncertainty about the future, one way to ensure students' success is by nurturing their out-of-the-box thinking. This will help them not only survive but thrive in a world of constant change. At the same time, it is essential that teachers recognize the immense creative potential within every individual. As Adair (2007, p. 80) insightfully claims:

> "We have all been given minds capable of creative thinking and there is no going back on that. So we are more than halfway there. We just have to believe that there are words and music in the air, so to speak, if we tune in our instruments to the right wavelengths. They will come in their own time and place. Our task is to be ready for them. For inspiration, like chance, favours the prepared mind".

Therefore, creativity in translation teaching should not be viewed as a luxury or merely an add-on, but as a central pedagogical goal. The tasks and activities discussed in this paper demonstrate that creativity can be taught, fostered, and assessed in structured and meaningful ways. These methods not only prepare students for the multifaceted realities of professional translation but also empower them to become reflective, flexible, and autonomous translators. As translation increasingly intersects with digital media, marketing, and global communication, the value of creativity in translator education is likely to grow.

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WHEN NEXT WEDNESDAY'S MEETING IS A RED-LETTER DAY: THE EFFECT OF RED ON TEMPORAL REASONING

Abstract: Interpretation of the ambiguous statement "Next Wednesday's meeting has been moved two days" depends on dichotomous metaphorical perspectives on time. The ego-moving perspective, which implies a future-bound movement, renders the meeting postponed to next *Friday*. Alternatively, the time-moving perspective, which implies a past-bound movement, translates the situation into an earlier occurrence to next M*onday*. Motor experiences in space and those grounded as such can influence the preferred perspectives on time. Emerging evidence suggests that sensory experiences can likewise exert an impact. Along these lines and focusing on visual perception, this research examined the unexplored effect of color on temporal reasoning. We found that exposure to the word "meeting" styled in red (*versus* black) font heightened arousal, which in turn reduced perceived temporal distance that maps onto the time-moving perspective, resulting in a *Monday* interpretation (Experiment 1). We further demonstrated that the strength of the association between red and the time-moving perspective was conditional on levels of arousal (Experiment 2). By documenting the novel contributor of color to the malleability of temporal perspective preferences and the underlying psychological mechanism thereof, our work adds to the literature on color and psychological functioning and underscores the significance of sensory perception in temporal cognition.

Key words: Time/ego-moving perspective; Red; Arousal; Perceived temporal distance; Embodied cognition

1. Introduction

As fundamental as time is to human existence, it cannot be directly captured by our sensory apparatus. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the understanding of this abstract construct is achieved through metaphorical mapping from the more perceptually rich domain of space (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To appreciate the spatial undergirding of temporal conceptualization, one needs to look no further

than the miscellany of spatiotemporal metaphors in common expressions. Reflecting sequential temporal frame of reference whereby events in time are located in relation to one another, the spatial terms "front" and "back" are metaphorically mapped onto temporal concepts denoting "earlier" and "later", as in "The Spring Festival is followed by the Lantern Festival". Contrastively and using the deictic temporal reference frame whereby events are fixed relative to the metaphorical location of the ego (i.e., the here and now), the same positional terms are employed in service of conceptualizing "future" and "past", as in "She has never looked back because she has the whole of her life in front of her" (Duffy & Vyvyan, 2017; Moore, 2011). The interval between events in time is likewise metaphorically represented in terms of distance between locations in space, as in "Short videos can serve an educational purpose in the long run" (Casasanto & Boroditsky, 2008).

The focus of the current research is on the binary deictic metaphorical perspectives on time, which contrast in direction of travel (past-bound vs. future-bound) and temporal agency (time vs. ego) (McGlone & Harding, 1998). To illustrate, an event may be envisioned as moving from the future toward the stationary self and continuing on in the direction of the past. This is conceptualized as the time-moving perspective and exemplified by the expression "The Year of the Snake has arrived". Conversely, one may envisage oneself as the moving entity toward an awaiting future event, which is conceptualized as the ego-moving perspective and instantiated in the expression "We are approaching the Lunar New Year" (Clark, 1973; Huumo, 2017; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

The dichotomy of temporal perspectives therefore allows for their malleability, which is commonly examined via the temporal disambiguation paradigm (i.e., "Next Wednesday's meeting has been moved forward two days") (Boroditsky, 2000). The statement is ambiguous in that the adverb "forward" delimiting the direction of the movement of the meeting is unspecified, thereby allowing divergent directions to qualify *forwardness* dependent on and reflective of the temporal perspective of choice. Concretely, if the forward movement of the meeting is reasoned to be toward the future, whereby it is rescheduled to take place later than is originally planned (i.e., next *Friday*), then the temporal perspective taken in this case would be the ego-moving perspective with common future-ward movement. Contrarily, if the forward movement is reasoned to be in the direction of the past, whereby the meeting is to occur ahead of the schedule (i.e., next *Monday*), then the temporal perspective adopted in this case would be the time-moving perspective with shared past-ward movement (McGlone & Harding, 1998).

1.1 Motor experiences and temporal perspectives

An accumulation of studies has shown that changes in spatial experiences can result in different temporal perspective preferences in the resolution of the "Next Wednesday's meeting" ambiguity (Boroditsky, 2000; Matlock et al., 2011). For

example, Boroditsky and Ramscar (2002) compared the disambiguation responses of passengers who had just touched down at an airport with those of people who were there waiting to collect others and found that the former chose the ego-moving perspective significantly more frequently than the latter, suggesting that experience of movement through space facilitated the thought about movement through time. Importantly, because the understanding of fictive motion involves the mental simulation of motion (Matlock, 2004), the influence on temporal thinking does not necessitate actual movement. Indeed, Matlock et al. (2005) reported that participants primed with fictive motion describing a road going away from the location where they were (analogous to the ego-moving perspective) tended to respond *Friday*, whereas those primed with the reverse in the form of a road coming toward their current location (analogous to the time-moving perspective) tended to respond *Monday*.

Since people's metaphorical perspectives on time can vary as a function of spatial motion, it is logical to assume that non-spatial factors grounded as such may exert a similar effect (Hauser et al., 2009). As a key example, on the strength that emotion triggers embodied responses, such that positive emotion activates behavioral approach and negative emotion behavioral avoidance (Chen & Bargh, 1999), Margolies and Crawford (2008) predicted that positivity/negativity would be associated with the ego/time-moving perspective through shared approach/ avoidance motivation. As predicted, they found that participants who had engaged in thought about a future event they felt enthusiastic about, thereby inducing strong positive emotion preferred the ego-moving perspective. In contrast, those who had engaged in thought about a future event they dreaded facing, thereby inducing strong negative emotion favored the time-moving perspective. More recently, given that the Taoist doctrine *wu-wei* (*none action*: inaction) emphasizes a passive approach to the vicissitudes of the world and thereby habituates believers practicing this religion to lower levels of personal agency (Moon, 2015) and given that lack of personal agency is spatially represented by avoidance-related motivation and as such was related to the time-moving perspective (Richmond et al., 2012), Li and Cao (2020) predicted that Taoists, relative to atheists, should therefore be more inclined toward the time-moving perspective. Aligning with their prediction, the results showed that Taoism practitioners preponderantly took the time-moving perspective, which was in stark contrast to their atheist counterparts who were neural in perspective-taking. Taken together, these empirical findings suggest that non-spatial experiences that tap into approach-/avoidance motivation rooted in spatial motion can equally influence metaphorical perspectives on time.

1.2 Perceived temporal distance and temporal perspectives

Other than being contrary in spatial motivation, the dichotomous temporal perspectives also differ in deixis, that is, direction of movement in relation to the cognizer's current position in time (Duffy & Feist, 2017), causing differential

perceptions of temporal distance to the future as a result. Specifically, the ego-moving perspective presupposes a longer perceived distance to the future, whereas the time-moving perspective presupposes a shorter perception. Diverse streams of findings support this inference. For example, in an investigation into the influence of temporal perspectives on task duration judgments, Boltz and Yum (2010) found that participants primed with the ego-moving perspective perceived the distance to the conclusion of the experimental session to be significantly farther than those primed with the time-moving prime. More pertinently, in an examination of how lexical and constructional factors may influence the resolution of the "Next Wednesday's meeting" ambiguity, Feist and Duffy (2015) found that participants gave more *Monday* responses when the meeting was "brought forward" than when it was "taken forward". This is because "bring" encodes deictic motion toward the self, whereas "take" encodes deictic motion away from the self, thereby shortening and lengthening the subjective distance, respectively. Providing convergent evidence, a later study conducted by the same authors found that briefly adopting a high-power pose, which features limb movement away from the torso yielded a significantly greater preference for the ego-moving perspective than adoption of a low-power pose that features limb movement directed toward the torso (Duffy & Feist, 2017). An additional line of evidence associating perceived temporal distance with temporal perspectives stems from the work on intertemporal decision-making (Crilly, 2017). In a most recent study on the influence of temporal perspectives on consumer behavior, Xu et al. (2024) found that compared to a product delivery scenario framed from the time-moving perspective (i.e., "The delivery day is approaching"), framing the equivalent from the ego-moving perspective (i.e., "You are approaching the delivery day") made customers more likely to opt for the express delivery service as a result of the ego-moving perspective lengthening the perceived distance to the delivery day and provoking impatience.

1.3 Arousal and perceived temporal distance

Since temporal perspectives imply perceived temporal distance (Duffy & Feist, 2017), it follows that factors that can vary perceived temporal distance should in turn influence temporal perspective preferences. One such factor is arousal. Arousal has an established effect on subjective time perception, with high-arousing stimuli generating a shorter perception than low-arousing ones regardless of valence (Droit-Volet & Meck, 2007; Noulhiane et al., 2007). For example, Campbell and Bryant (2007) measured skydivers' perceived time duration of the skydive and found that higher levels of excitement recorded before and soon after landing were associated with shorter estimation. Similarly, a later investigation into the effect of counting direction on time judgements revealed that counting downward generated significantly higher ratings of arousal and resulted in significantly shorter estimate of task duration compared to counting upward (Shalev & Morwitz, 2013). Because areas of the brain

involved in processing time that has elapsed are also engaged in gauging time that has yet to come (Kim & Zauberman, 2019), the adverse effect of arousal on duration estimation parallels its effect on projection of temporal distance to the future. As a case in point, Van Boven and collaborators (2010) found that people perceived negative events they dreaded happening as psychologically closer than positive events they were looking forward to because negative events were emotionally more arousing than positive ones. Providing corroboratory evidence, Gu and Tse (2016) found that narrative perspective shift from first-personal pronoun "I" to third-personal pronoun "s/he", compared to the reversed shift in autobiographical memory attenuated the emotional intensity of and lengthened the psychological distance to both positive and negative recalled events. Echoing the inverse relationship between arousal and perceived temporal distance, a more recent study showed that participants primed with coffee cues reported a significantly shorter time horizon until the engagement of future activities than those primed with tea cues. For explanation, measures of both psychological arousal (i.e., self-reported) and physiological arousal (i.e., heart rate) further revealed coffee to be rated as more arousing than tea (Chan & Maglio, 2019).

1.4 The color red and arousal

Given that temporal perspectives embed differential perceptions of temporal distance (Duffy & Feist, 2017) and that arousal can vary perceived temporal distance (Chan & Maglio, 2019), it stands to reason that factors which can modulate arousal should potentially influence temporal perspective preferences through varying perceived temporal distance. The factor of primary interest in the present research is the color red. Prior work on color psychology has converged toward red being highly arousing, identifying it with descriptors such as "exciting" and "stimulating" (Briki & Hue, 2016; Wexner, 1954). For example, in semi-structured interviews where participants accorded emotions and meanings to color terms, Clarke and Costall (2008) found that whilst green and blue were more frequently described using low-arousal adjectives like "peaceful" and "relaxing", red was described in terms of high-arousal emotions such as "anger" and "passion". Consistent with semantic associations, psychological and physiological measures (e.g., skin conductance responses) of the effects of color on arousal revealed red stimuli (e.g., room and lighting) to be more arousing relative to blue ones (Jacobs & Hustmyer, 1974; Küller et al., 2009; Rajae-Joordens, 2010; Wilson, 1966). Providing further circumstantial evidence, data from consumer research showed that a red (vs. blue) background elicited higher bid jumps in eBay auctions and fewer price offers in negotiations, which was driven by red heightening arousal that subsequently induced aggressive intention against other bidders and the seller (Bagchi & Cheema, 2013). Elsewhere, the influence of red on arousal perception in an achievement context found that test-relevant pictures set in a red frame were perceived to be more arousing than blue-framed ones (Buechner &

Maier, 2016). More recently, in harmony with the Yerkes-Dodson law which proposes that high arousal is more advantageous than low arousal for simple tasks, whereas low arousal is more advantageous than high arousal for difficult tasks (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), Hong and collaborators (2022) demonstrated that whilst the more challenging dart-throwing performance was better when the stimulus was blue than when it was red, the less complicated handgrip performance was better in the red condition than in the blue one, thereby offering indirect evidence connecting red/blue to high/low arousal. Collectively, these multiple findings converge toward the conclusion that the color red is associated with high arousal.

2. The present study

Concatenating the triadic strands of reviewed literature, namely, the association between red and arousal (Buechner & Maier, 2016), the association between arousal and perceived temporal distance (Chan & Maglio, 2019), and the association between perceived temporal distance and temporal perspectives (Duffy & Feist, 2017), the current research sought to investigate whether red may influence temporal perspective preferences through arousal and perceived temporal distance. To this end, Experiment 1 compared the answers to the "Next Wednesday's meeting" question where the word "meeting" was styled in red font with those to the same question where the word retained its default black font. Evoked arousal and perceived temporal distance were tested as mediators. Experiment 2 manipulated arousal adventitious to the manipulation of color to provide substantiating evidence for the mediating role of arousal in the effect of red on temporal perspectives.

2.1 Experiment 1

Based on the tripartite link surveyed above, we hypothesized that in the interpretation of the "Next Wednesday's meeting" ambiguity, people exposed to the "meeting" in red, relative to the word in black would be more prone to the time-moving perspective, resulting in more next *Monday* interpretations. This tendency was further postulated to be driven sequentially by heightened arousal and the consequent reduction in perceived temporal distance.

2.1.1 Participants

The sample size for the experiment was determined using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009). *A priori* power analysis with a medium-sized effect ($d = 0.50$) and 0.80 power at the alpha level of 0.05 assumed indicated a minimum sample size

of 128. 142 students were recruited from a university in southwest China. They were distributed between the red condition and the black (control) condition in a random and even manner. 3 participants in the former condition and 4 participants in the latter condition did not complete the questionnaire and therefore their data were excluded, leaving 68 samples for the red condition (43 females, M_{age} =22.43 years, SD = 2.60) and 67 for the black condition (46 females, M_{age} = 21.81 years, SD = 2.64). Data were entered in SPSS 25.0 for statistical analyses. There was no significant difference between conditions in age or gender ($ps > 0.05$). All participants provided informed consent and were each monetarily compensated for their time.

2.1.2 Materials and procedure

The experiment was conducted in quite classrooms using pen and paper. Participants were informed of the purpose of the experiment, which was to answer a short survey on time management in the form of a seven-page booklet. First, they gave informed consent and provided demographic information of age, gender, and major. Then, participants in both conditions were presented with the same target temporal question that read, "下周三的会议移动了两天。移动后的会议在哪天举行？(*Next Wednesday's meeting has been moved two days. What day is the meeting now that it has been moved*?)" (Qin, 2024a). The only thing that differentiated the two conditions was the font color of the temporal event in question, i.e., "会议(meeting)", with that for the red condition being red, as in "会议(meeting)". Concretely, the HSB (Hue, Saturation, Brightness) values for the red font were 0%, 100%, 100%, corresponding to 255, 0, 0 in the RGB (Red, Green, Blue) model. Those for the black font were 0 on all the dimensions for both models. Noticeably, the Chinese adaptation is rid of the adverb "forward". The justification for its removal is that the Chinese spatiotemporal term "前(*forward*)", when used in an exclusively temporal context, is readily equated with an event being advanced in time, due in no small part to the assimilation of conventionalized expressions such as "提前出发(*lift forward exit start*: earlier departure)" (Li & Cao, 2020; Qin, 2024a; 2024b). Clipping the adverb therefore transposes the seat of ambiguity to the verb "move", with its direction being either future-bound or past-bound. As such, disambiguation is done in the same way as the English original (McGlone & Harding, 1998). To wit, future-ward movement fits in with the ego-moving perspective, resulting in a deferral to next *Friday*. In contrast, past-ward movement ties in with the time-moving perspective, resulting in an advancement to next *Monday*. To obviate an *either-or* response, two choices were provided ("A. Next Monday" or "B. Next Friday") for participants to pick from.

This was followed by the measurement of arousal. Previous research has employed both psychological and physical measures of arousal (e.g., Chan & Maglio, 2019), which do not necessarily yield homogeneous results (Mauss et

al., 2004). Here, we only measured psychological arousal, the reason being that metaphorical conceptualization of temporal movement should be qualified as a cognitive process, to which perceived arousal may bear more relevance (Xu et al., 2024). Accordingly, we followed a precedent (Kim & Zauberman, 2019) and asked participants to assess their emotional states in response to the meeting in accordance with the arousal dimension of the Self-Assessment Manikin (Mehrabian & Russell1, 1974). Specifically, the dimension consists of six bipolar adjectives: "stimulated – relaxed", "excited – calm", "frenzied – sluggish", "jittery – dull", "wide awake – sleepy", and "aroused – unaroused" and each continuum ranges in a descending order from "9 = *very much so*" to "1 = *not in the least*", with higher total score indicating greater arousal. Participant's ratings of the six items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.890) were each averaged to index their subjective arousal. Then, they went on to judge how psychologically distant they perceived the coming meeting to be on two 10-point scales ("1 = *it feels like it may occur tomorrow*" to "10 = *it feels like very far away from now*" and "1 = *it feels very near*" to "10 = *it feels very distant*") adapted from two analogous studies (Mei et al., 2018; Van Boven et al., 2010). Scores of the two items ($r = 0.804$, $p < 0.001$) were averaged to create an index of perceived temporal distance.

Subsequently, participants evaluated how anxious and angry they felt toward the meeting, also on a 9-point Likert scale, with higher number indicating greater emotional intensity. The inclusion of these two particular emotions was motivated by their respective connection with red, which may potentially confound or even reverse the hypothesized effect. To elaborate, there is evidence associating red with anxiety (Jacobs & Suess, 1975; Reeves et al., 1978), which is related to the time-moving perspective through shared avoidance-related motivation (Richmond et al., 2012). Assuming that red evoked greater anxiety relative to black, we would anticipate the preference for the time-moving perspective consistent with the hypothesis. However, in this case, an alternative causal pathway whereby red directly induced anxiety which implicates avoidance motivation would warrant further investigation. Moreover, much evidence indicates that red is associated with anger (Kaya & Epps, 2004; Sutton & Altarriba, 2016), which is linked to the similarly approach-based ego-moving representation (Hauser et al., 2009). If red, compared to black elicited greater anger, a high-arousal emotion (Rowe & Fitness, 2018), then it would prompt more *Friday* interpretations indicative of the ego-moving perspective. This would largely contradict the proposed chain of effects, as in this case, instead of shortening the perceived temporal distance, the high arousal manifest in anger would be actually lengthening it, hence the necessary consideration of the role of anger.

As mentioned before, temporal perspective preferences can vary as a function of event valence (e.g., Zheng et al., 2019). Given that the attested ambiguousness of the "Next Wednesday's meeting" question is contingent on the temporal event being in black (Li, 2020) and that a word in red can connote evaluative valence

(Moller et al., 2009), rendering the "meeting" in red would make it less evaluatively neutral than when it is in black. Assessing participants' subjective feelings toward the "meeting" in different font colors was thus necessary to control for yet another potential confounding factor of event valence in the effect of red on the preferred perspectives on time. Accordingly, participants proceeded to rate how they felt about the meeting on an ascending scale of "1 = *dreading it*" to "9 = *looking forward to it*", with the midpoint "5 = *indifferent*". Finally, two supervenient questions asking "How many hours do you normally spend on assignments every day?" and "What time of the day do you find yourself most productive?" were appended to bolster the cover story.

2.1.3 Results and discussion

In consistence with our hypothesis, temporal perspective preferences differed significantly between conditions, as evidenced by a chi-square test of independence, $\chi_{1,135}$ = 9.068, p = 0.003, Cramer's V = 0.259, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.005]. As displayed in **Figure 1**, the majority of participants in the red condition (44 out of 68 or 64.71%) preferred the time-moving perspective by judging the meeting to be brought earlier to next *Monday*, which was markedly different from the rest who opted for the ego-moving perspective and responded next *Friday* (Z = -2.304, p = 0.021 by a sign test). In contrast, participants in the black condition did not exhibit any perspective bias (26 *Monday*s vs. 41 *Friday*s; Z = -1.710, p = 0.087). Also as hypothesized, participants in the red condition reported higher levels of arousal (M = 4.461, SD = 1.070) than those in the black condition (M = 2.822, SD = 0.810). An independent samples t-test revealed this difference to be statistically significant, $t(133)$ = -10.027, p < 0.001, d = -1.307, 95% CI = [-1.963, -1.316]. Furthermore, judgment of temporal distance also differed significantly between conditions, manifest in the fact that psychological distance to the future meeting was perceived to be significantly shorter in the red condition (M = 3.904, SD = 1.179) than in the black n (M = 5.134, SD = 1.437), $t(133)$ = 5.440, p < 0.001, d = 1.230, 95% CI = [0.783, 1.677]. In addition, ancillary analyses indicated no significant difference between conditions regarding anxiety, anger, and subjective feelings toward the meeting (ps > 0.05), which also did not bear on temporal perspectives (ps > 0.05) (see **Table 1** for details).

Correlation analyses were then performed. Presented in **Table 2**, the results indicated significant positive correlations between the study variables. To wit, color was significantly positively correlated with arousal, r = 0.656, p < 0.001 but significantly negatively correlated with perceived temporal distance, r = -0.427, p < 0.001 and temporal perspective, r = -0.259, p = 0.002. Arousal was significantly negatively correlated with perceived temporal distance, r = -0.752, p < 0.001 and temporal perspective, r = -0.519, p < 0.001. Perceived temporal distance was significantly positively correlated with temporal perspective, r = 0.736, p < 0.001.
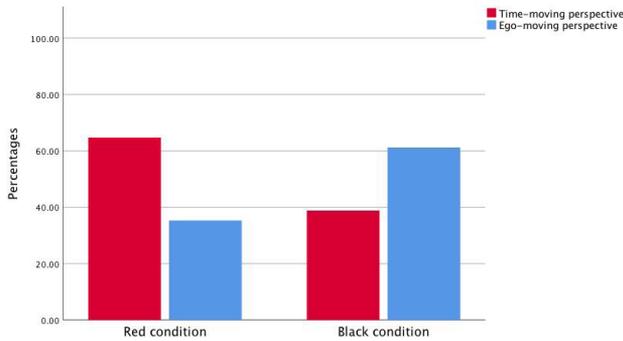
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Figure 1. Percentages of the time-moving perspective and the ego-moving perspective between the red condition and the black condition (Experiment 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables and independent samples t-tests between the red condition and the black condition (Experiment 1).

Variable	Red condition	Black condition				95%CI	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t	p	d	Lower	Upper
Arousal	4.461 (1.070)	2.822 (0.810)	-10.027	<0.001	-1.307	-1.565	-1.050
Perceived temporal distance	3.904 (1.179)	5.134 (1.437)	5.440	<0.001	0.850	0.541	1.159
Anxiety	3.162 (1.784)	2.836 (1.629)	-1.188	0.237	-0.204	-0.544	0.136
Anger	2.278 (1.091)	2.030 (1.128)	-1.307	0.193	-0.224	-0.564	0.115
Subjective feelings	5.529 (1.849)	5.045 (1.236)	1.788	0.076	0.485	-0.052	1.021

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, CI = Confidence Interval.

Table 2. Pearson correlations of the study variables (Experiment 1).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Color	-						
2. Arousal	0.656***	-					
3. Perceived temporal distance	-0.427***	-0.752***	-				
4. Temporal perspective	-0.259**	-0.519***	0.736***	-			
5. Anger	0.113	0.420	-0.092	0.025	-		
6. Anxiety	0.096	0.022	0.024	-0.009	-0.129	-	
7. Subjective feelings	0.153	0.091	-0.021	0.068	0.156	-0.060	-

Note. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

These positive significant correlations allowed us to test the hypothesized serial mediation effect (red → higher arousal → shorter perceived temporal distance → time-moving perspective). To do this, we first ran a series of regressions analyses for individual paths. The results are summarized in **Table 3**. Specifically, color (1 = red vs. 0 = black) was significantly negatively associated with temporal perspective

(1 = ego-moving vs. 0 = time-moving perspective), B = -0.259, SE = 0.084, p = 0.002, 95% CI = [-0.425, -0.093], significantly positively associated with arousal, B = 1.640, SE = 0.164, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [1.316, 1.963], and significantly negatively associated with perceived temporal distance, B = -1.230, SE = 0.226, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [-1.677, -0.783]. Moreover, arousal was significantly negatively associated with both perceived temporal distance, B = -0.867, SE = 0.066, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [-0.998, -0.737] and temporal perspective, B = -0.207, SE = 0.030, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [-0.266, -0.149]. Finally, perceived temporal distance was significantly positively associated with temporal perspective, B = 0.255, SE = 0.020, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [0.215, 0.295]. Together, these results provided support for the hypothesized serial mediation model, which is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Table 3. Regression analysis of variable relationships in the serial mediation model (Experiment 1)

Outcome variable	Predictor variable	R	R^2	F	β	t	SE	95%CI Lower	95%CI Upper
Temporal perspective	Color	0.259	0.067	9.577**	-0.259	-3.095	0.084	-0.425	-0.093
	Arousal	0.519	0.269	48.939***	-0.519	-6.996	0.030	-0.266	-0.149
	Perceived temporal distance	0.736	0.541	156.997***	0.736	12.530	0.020	0.215	0.295
Arousal	Color	0.656	0.430	100.537***	0.656	10.027	0.164	1.316	1.963
Perceived temporal distance	Color	0.427	0.182	29.595***	-0.427	-5.440	0.226	-1.677	-0.783
	Arousal	0.752	0.565	172.961***	-0.752	-13.151	0.066	-0.998	-0.737

Note. β = Standardized Beta, SE = Standard Error. *p <0.05, **p <0.01, ***p <0.001.
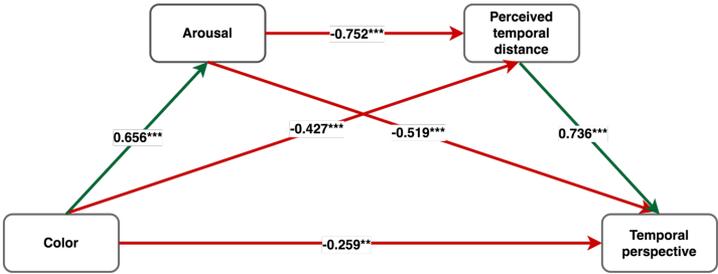
Figure 2. A serial mediation model of the relationship between color and temporal perspective through arousal and perceived temporal distance (Experiment 1). Standardized coefficients are displayed. Green lines indicate paths with positive associations. Red lines represent paths with negative associations. *Note.* **p <0.01, ***p < 0.001.

We then conducted single mediation analyses to examine the respective mediating roles of arousal and perceived temporal distance in the relationship between color and temporal perspective. Regressing temporal perspective on color when controlling for arousal revealed that only arousal, B = -0.245, SE = 0.039, p < 0.001, 95% CI = [-0.322, -0.167] but not color, B = -0.142, SE = 0.098, p =

0.148, 95% CI = [-0.051, 0.336] was still significant, suggesting that arousal fully mediated the effect of color on temporal perspective. Similarly, regressing color and perceived temporal distance together on temporal perspective revealed that only the latter remained significant, $B = 0.265$, $SE = 0.023$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.220, 0.309], suggesting that perceived temporal distance also played a fully mediating role in the color-time relationship.

Table 4. The direct and indirect effects of color on temporal perspective (Experiment 1)

Effect type	Path	Products of coefficients		Bootstrapped 95%CI	
		Effect	*SE*/Boot*SE*	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Direct effect	Color → temporal perspective	1.841	0.936	0.007	3.675
Total indirect effect	Color → temporal perspective	-3.874	1.577	-7.331	-2.304
Indirect effect 1:	Color → Arousal → Temporal perspective	-0.167	0.809	-1.851	1.435
Indirect effect 2:	Color → Perceived temporal distance → Temporal perspective	1.017	0.949	-0.647	3.003
Indirect effect 3:	Color → Arousal → Perceived temporal distance → Temporal perspective	-4.725	1.796	-9.001	-3.103

Note. Boot*SE* = Bootstrapped Standard Error, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

Finally, to test the statistical robustness of the serial mediation model, we used the PORCESS Macro v.4.2 for SPSS (Model 6) (Hayes, 2018), with a 95% confidence interval (CI) that does not contain 0 indicating statistical significance. Displayed in **Table 4**, the bootstrap test results based on 5000 samples showed that arousal and perceived temporal distance serially and fully mediated the relationship between color and temporal perspective, as the direct effect of color on temporal perspective was no longer significant after controlling for the mediators (effect = 1.841, $SE = 0.936$, 95% CI = [0.007, 3.675]). More specifically, the total indirect effect of color on temporal perspective was -3.874, $SE = 1.577$, 95% CI = [-7.331, -2.304], which was composed of the indirect effects produced by three pathways: (1) color → arousal → temporal perspective (effect = -0.167, $SE = 0.809$, 95% CI = [-1.851, 1.435]); (2) color → perceived temporal distance → temporal perspective (effect = 1.017, $SE = 0.949$, 95% CI = [-0.647, 3.003]); and (3) color → arousal → perceived temporal distance → temporal perspective (effect = -4.725, $SE = 1.796$, 95% CI = [-9.001, -3.103]). Since the two mediators were measured very close in time, the order in which the mediators worked may be interchangeable (Wang, Jia, & Wang, 2024). To determine which one of the two mediators was essential

in explaining the association between color and temporal perspective, comparison pathways approach was adopted whereby the indirect pathway was initiated by perceived temporal distance followed by arousal (Walter, 2018). The results showed that reversing the order of the mediators rendered the serial mediation effect insignificant, as indicated by the 95% CI = [-0.676, 0.546] that includes 0.

Overall, Experiment 1 demonstrated that exposure to the "meeting" in red (vs. black) inclined participants toward the time-moving perspective, giving rise to a next *Monday* interpretation. The effect of red on the time-moving perspective was driven serially by heightened arousal and reduced perceived temporal distance. Notably, when considered in isolation, arousal and perceived temporal distance respectively and fully accounted for the observed effect. However, when tested jointly in the serial mediation model, the indirect pathway through either arousal or perceived temporal distance became no longer significant. This discrepancy, in conjunction with the significant serial pathway thus underscored the interdependent roles of the two mediators in the established association between red and the time-moving perspective and emphasized in particular that of the first mediator (i.e., arousal). We then designed another experiment to offer complementary evidence for the criticality of arousal in the red-time relationship.

2.2 Experiment 2

We followed the moderation-of-process design demonstrated in a previous study (Chan & Maglio, 2019) and tested the moderating role of arousal in the effect of red on the time-moving perspective. Specifically, we manipulated levels of arousal in a way independent from that of color and expected this alteration in arousal to moderate the said effect. If arousal was key in driving the effect, then accidentally intensifying arousal should enhance its strength by amplifying arousal evoked by red. Conversely, abating arousal should weaken its strength by diminishing red-evoked arousal.

2.2.1 Participants

A priori power analysis assuming a medium-sized effect ($f = 0.25$) and 0.80 power at the alpha level of 0.05, with $df = 3$ and 4 groups indicated that a minimum sample size of 179 was required. 238 students from a university in southwest China were recruited. None had participated in the foregoing experiment. They were assigned to the high arousal condition and low arousal condition in a random and equal manner. Within each condition, participants were subdivided into two groups (red vs. black). They were told that the aim of the experiment was to assess the suitability of the background music for student social gatherings. 4 participants in the high arousal condition and 2 participants in the low arousal condition did not fill out the questionnaire and therefore their data were excluded, leaving 115 samples

for the former condition (76 females, M_{age} =21.50 years, SD = 1.81) and 117 for the latter (73 females, M_{age} = 21.87 years, SD = 1.82). There was no significant difference between the red group (81 females) and the black group (69 females) in age or gender (ps > 0.05). All participants provided informed consent and each was monetarily compensated for their time.

2.2.2 Materials and procedure

The experiment was conducted in multimedia network digital language laboratories. Participants sat in individual cubicles. Each cubicle is equipped with a headphone and a desktop connected to the central computer at the teacher's desk, from which audio, video, and text content are shared. Based on one study outcome that fast (vs. slow)-tempo pop music induced greater arousal (Kim & Zauberman, 2019), we manipulated arousal using music of different tempi. Specifically, adapted from Kim and Zauberman's study (2019: Study 3), the pop song "*Across the Universe*" by the Beatles was chosen as the musical stimulus. A fast tempo has 120 to 168 beats per minute (BPM) and a slow tempo 76 to 108 BPM (Fernández-Sotos et al., 2016). Accordingly and using an online audio editor *123APPs*, we sped up the original tempo of the song (77 BPM) to 126.66 BPM for the high arousal condition and slowed it down to 88.93 BPM for the low arousal condition whilst retaining its original pitch.

To ensure the intended effect on arousal, we conducted a pre-test involving 70 participants, who listened to either the faster-tempo version (n = 34) or the slower-tempo version (n = 36). First, to check whether tempo alterations were successful, participants were asked to rate the tempo of the music on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *very slow*"; "9 = *very fast*"). Then, participants reported how arousing they perceived the music to be according to the arousal dimension of the Self-Assessment Manikin, with "1 = *unaroused*" to "9 = *aroused*" (Bradley & Lang, 1994). They also rated how pleasant they found the music on the same scale ("1 = *very unpleasant*"; 9 = "*very pleasant*") to make sure that tempo manipulations impacted arousal without interfering with mood. The results showed that the fast-tempo version (M = 5.882, SD = 0.946) was judged to be significantly faster than its slower counterpart (M = 4.083, SD = 0.841), $t(68)$ = -8.420, $p < 0.001$, d = -1.419, 95% CI = [-1.756, -1.083]. Importantly, participants perceived the fast-tempo music (M = 5.588, SD = 1.373) to be significantly more arousing than the slower version (M = 4.361, SD = 1.457), $t(68)$ = -3.621, $p = 0.001$, d = -1.227, 95% CI = [-1.903, -0.551]. However, no significant difference was detected between the two regarding mood ($Mfast$ = 4.255, SD = 1.287; $Mslow$ = 3.971, SD = 1.403, p = 0.133). Taken together, these results suggested that tempo manipulations exerted the sole effect on arousal as intended.

The music was played by the experimenter operating the central control at the teacher's desk but participants themselves can adjust the volume of the music to a personally comfortable level. The fast-tempo music was played for the high

arousal condition and the slow-tempo version for the low arousal condition. Participants first listened to the music for about two minutes before starting to fill a booklet of the questionnaire. The music continued on in the background until the completion of all the questions. Specifically, demographic information and informed consent were first provided. Then participants designated to the red group and the black group proceeded to resolve the binary "Next Wednesday's meeting" question with the font colors of the word "meeting" correspondingly manipulated in the same way as was done in Experiment 1. As before, they subsequently reported current states of anxiety and anger, as well as feelings toward the meeting. To control for potential confounding music-related influences on temporal reasoning, participants subsequently evaluated the music itself in terms of familiarity and liking on an ascending 9-point Likert scale, with higher number indicating greater degree. Finally, two questions asking "What do you think of the genre of the music is" and "Would you pick this music as the background music for social gatherings for fellow students" were added to bolster the cover story.

2.2.3 Results and discussion

There was no significant difference between conditions regarding ratings of anxiety, anger, and subjective feelings toward the meeting. The same was true for those of familiarity and liking of the music (see **Table 5**). A factorial between-subjects 2 (arousal: high vs. low) × 2 (color: red vs. black) ANOVA was performed on the main and interaction effects of arousal and color on temporal perspectives. The results indicated that both the main effect of arousal, $F(1, 228) = 7.548$, $p = 0.006$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.032$ and the main effect of color, $F(1, 228) = 14.244$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.059$ were significant. Between conditions, significantly more participants in the high arousal condition (84 out of 115 or 73.04%) answered *Monday* by taking the time-moving perspective than those in the low arousal condition (65 out of 117 or 55.56%), $\chi^2_{1, 232} = 7.719$, $p = 0.005$, Cramer's $V = 0.182$, 95% CI = [0.005, 0.008]. Between groups, significantly more participants in the red group (88 out of 116 or 75.86%) adopted the time-moving perspective than those in the black group (61 out of 116 or 52.89%), $\chi^2_{1, 232} = 13.676$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.243$, 95% CI = [0.000, 0.001]. Crucially, the interaction between arousal and color was statistically significant, $F(1, 228) = 4.525$, $p = 0.034$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.019$. As illustrated in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**, in the high arousal condition, participants in the red group were significantly more likely to take the time-moving perspective (54 *Mondays* vs. 6 *Fridays*) than those in the black group (30 *Mondays* vs. 25 *Fridays*), $\chi^2_{1, 115} = 18.320$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.399$, 95% CI = [0.000, 0.000]. Contrarily in the low arousal condition, the red "meeting" did not bias participants in favor of the time-moving perspective (34 *Mondays* vs. 22 *Fridays*) more than its black equivalent (33 *Mondays* vs. 28 *Fridays*), $\chi^2_{1, 117} = 0.522$, $p = 0.470$, Cramer's $V = 0.067$, 95% CI = [0.557, 0.577].

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of anxiety, anger, subjective feelings, familiarity, and liking of the music and independent samples *t*-tests between the high arousal condition and the low arousal condition (Experiment 2)

Variable	High arousal condition	Low arousal condition				95% CI	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*t*	*p*	*d*	Lower	Upper
Anxiety	3.304 (1.778)	3.273 (1.851)	-0.129	0.897	-0.017	-0.276	0.242
Anger	2.539 (1.037)	2.350 (1.053)	-1.375	0.170	-0.180	-0.438	0.078
Subjective feelings	5.026 (1.501)	4.897 (1.528)	-0.647	0.518	-0.085	-0.344	0.174
Familiarity	2.070 (0.915)	2.248 (1.098)	1.343	0.181	0.176	-0.082	-.434
Liking	2.504 (0.842)	2.718 (1.265)	1.511	0.132	0.198	-0.060	0.456

Figure 3. Percentages of the time-moving perspective and the ego-moving perspective between the red group and the black group of the high arousal condition (Experiment 2).
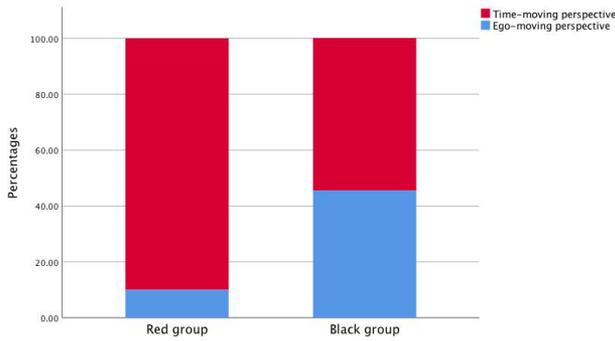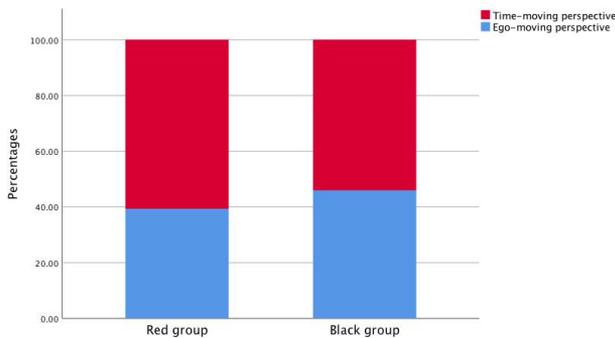

Figure 4. Percentages of the time-moving perspective and the ego-moving perspective between the red group and the black group of the low arousal condition (Experiment 2).

Taken together, these findings provided substantiating evidence for the predominant role of arousal in the association between red and the time-moving

perspective. Concretely, when arousal was kept at a high level, the effect of red on the preferred perspective on time remained strong. However, when arousal was subdued, as was the case in the low arousal condition where the arousal rating of the slow-tempo music averaged below the midpoint ($M = 4.361$), the strength of this effect attenuated markedly in consequence.

3. General discussion

3.1 Overview

The present research consisting of two experiments investigated the effect of red on temporal perspective preferences in the resolution of the ambiguous "Next Wednesday's meeting" question and the underlying mechanism thereof. The current findings evinced an association between red and the time-moving perspective underlain sequentially by arousal and perceived temporal distance. Specifically, Experiment 1 showed that exposure to the word "meeting" in red (vs. black) font led to higher levels of arousal, which in turn reduced perceived temporal distance, aligning with the time-moving perspective whereby the event had been moved earlier to next *Monday*. To supplement evidence for the mediating role of arousal in the color-time link, Experiment 2 manipulated arousal in a way external to that of color. The results confirmed that arousal moderated the effect of color on the preferred perspective on time, such that red was associated with the time-moving perspective only under the condition of high arousal. Taken as a whole, these findings represent the first empirical demonstration of how visual perception in the way of color stimulus may affect the metaphorical construal of time through evoked arousal and the attendant variation in perceived temporal distance.

3.2 Explanations

3.2.1 Red is arousing

The color red has long been associated with arousal (Buechner & Maier, 2016; Wilson, 1966). In consistence with this existing association, we also found that a word styled with red font, relative to black, was perceived to be more arousing. Attribution of arousal to red may be rooted in red's association with negative things which tend to be more arousing and salient than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). Both specific and general conditioning help shape and consolidate the red-negativity association (Elliot & Maier, 2012). To elaborate, using a reaction time paradigm to assess basic color-valence associations, Moller

and collaborators (2009) found that failure-denoting words (e.g., wrong) were categorized significantly faster when colored in red than in green or white, evidencing a connection between red and failure. This red-failure link is the result of conditioning particular to the achievement context where red markings signify mistakes and inadequacies (Elliot & Maier, 2007). In more general terms, the color red typically conjures scenes and images of fire, blood, and danger and is therefore often exploited to communicate physical risk and hazard as displayed on warning signs and traffic signals (Gerend & Sias, 2009; Moller et al., 2009). Indeed, red is the single color most commonly linked to threat in public consciousness (Wogalter et al., 2002). Supporting this implicit association, a Stroop word evaluation task revealed that danger-related words (e.g., poison) displayed in red and danger-denoting symbols on red backgrounds were categorized significantly more quickly than green and grey equivalents (Pravossoudovitch et al., 2014). Consequently, repeated exposure to those red-negativity pairings contextualized and otherwise may well habituate people to the association between red and things of negative connotations. However, this reasoning does not seem to apply to our findings. Recall that in Experiment 1 the "meeting" in red scored higher on valence than the "meeting" in black. Given the latter's average evaluative rating which approximates the midpoint ($M = 5.045$), that of red should be considered positive in comparison. As an explanation, it is worth noting that although negative stimuli are more arousing than positive ones in general (Baumeister et al., 2001), emotional stimuli are more arousing than neutral ones irrespective of valence (Droit-Volet et al., 2004; Van Boven et al., 2010). Following the latter assertion, it is possible that the red "meeting" intensified arousal to a greater extent than the black one because compared to the emotionally neutral black, red was evaluated relatively positively.

3.2.2 Red is emotionally ambivalent

On the other hand, the disparity in subjective feelings toward the "meeting" between the color conditions does not reach statistical significance, meaning that Mandarin speakers actually felt somewhat ambivalent about red's emotional valence. To account for this culture-specific ambivalence, the color-in-context theory (Elliot & Maier, 2012) is worth considering. According to this account, the emotional significance associated with and the psychological effects consequent of a given color stimulus depends on the specificity of the context, which can be appetitive (positive) or aversive (negative) (Lang, 1995). With particular reference to the color red, whereas "a red-letter day" symbolizes celebration and evokes feelings of joy, "red tape" symbolizes bureaucracy and evokes feelings of annoyance. Empirically validating this emotional duality dictated by context, infants preferred a red paperboard to a green one after seeing a happy face (a positive context), but such preference was not present following the presentation of an angry face (a negative context) (Maier et al.,

2009). Similarly, whereas athletes wearing red sportswear performed better in sports contests (Maier et al., 2016), challenging intellectual tasks preceded by a glimpse of red impaired test performance (Elliot et al., 2007; Shi et al., 2015). That the red-valence association is context-specific thus allows for both positive and negative attributions to the color red, which is true for Chinese culture where red's positive connotation is particularly conspicuous. In support of this, a cross-national study of color meanings reported that in addition to words like "active" and "vibrant" agreed on by people from both Eastern (e.g., China) and Western cultures (e.g., the United States), the color red was also accorded the meaning of "pleasantness" by Chinese people (Madden et al., 2000). Additionally, influenced by the way stock market fluctuations in Chinese Mainland are color-coded, whereby an upmarket is displayed in red and a downmarket is displayed in green, participants from Chinese Mainland were more likely to predict greater growth in economy and consumption when the experimental stimuli were presented in red than in green, suggesting an implicit association between red and positivity (Jiang et al., 2014). Unlike the universal red-negativity pairing that originates from natural associations with blood and fire (Moller et al., 2009), the red-positivity correspondence is likely the product of socio-cultural assimilation. As a paradigmatic example, red is identified as a symbol of auspice, gracing such traditional paraphernalia and decorations as red envelopes and red couplets distinguishing the Spring Festival (Kawai et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2014). Corroborating red's emotional ambivalence subject to different underlying mechanisms, an inquiry into the emotional effects of red color on Chinese people found that participants responded to both positive and negative words faster than neutral ones followed by a red perceptual stimulus (Wang et al., 2014).

In light of the unspecified nature of the "meeting", it is logic to assume that any contextual cue arising from the "meeting" *per se* would be chiefly based on its distinguishing feature, that is, the font color. This assumption, coupled with Mandarin speakers' emotional ambivalence about red thus makes it possible for a simultaneous but conflicting activation of positive and negative associations, thereby rendering red's evaluation ambivalent. Moreover, although the finding that red was positively-valenced relative to black as observed in Experiment 1 disagrees with the red-negativity association recorded elsewhere (Elliot & Maier, 2007), it is nevertheless compatible with the color-in-context theory (Elliot & Maier, 2012). As noted earlier, the pairing of red and failure is specific to an achievement situation (Moller et al., 2009) and despite the inimical effect of red on intellectual performance being consistent regardless of the color stimulus being in a pictorial (Moller et al., 2009) or lexical form (Shi et al., 2015), as was the case here, the fact that metaphorical perspectives on time does not qualify as intellectual performance makes it possible for red to be decoupled from taking on a decidedly negative connotation particular to the achievement context.

3.2.3 High arousal leads to reduced perceived temporal distance

A few studies have shown that emotional arousal reduces psychological temporal distance (Van Boven et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2024). Concordant with this proposition, the present work also found that the higher-arousal red font led to a shorter perceived distance to the future than the lower-arousal black font. In particular, Experiment 2 showed that whilst the effect of red on the time-moving perspective remained robust when levels of arousal were maintained high, its strength considerably weakened as arousal was abated. Presumably, lowered arousal consequent of background music may have diminished the impact of red on perceived temporal distance and consequently temporal perspectives. These findings are consistent with previous ones which indicated that coffee cues facilitated concrete construal only at high levels of arousal, as attenuated arousal via video clips similarly dented the effect of coffee on psychological distance determining construal level (Chan & Maglio, 2019: Experiment 4)

The inverse relationship between arousal and psychological temporal distance may be accounted for by attention, which plays a key role in human timing behavior (Zakay & Block, 1996). According to the attentional-gate model, a pacemaker autonomously emits pulses at a pace influenced by arousal. When attention is focused on time, the attentional gate widens and allows more pulses to pass through to the cognitive counter where the total pulse count is recorded. When attention is directed away from time, the gate narrows and causes a decrement in pulses to be transmitted from the pacemaker to the counter (Polti et al., 2018; Zakay & Block, 1996). Because a person's attentional resources are divided between processing temporal information and any coincidental non-temporal information in a duration estimation task, attending to time amounts to longer estimates, whereas distraction aggregates shorter estimates.

Since attention devoted to stimuli external to time results in shorter time perception, it follows that stimuli that capture attention would likely achieve the same outcome. Inasmuch as highly arousing events divert attention away from peripheral information and toward central objects (Heuer & Reisberg, 1990), the more arousing the stimuli, the more attention they grab and hold (Zsidó, 2024). Of special relevance to the current research, previous study found that compared to unpleasant scenes presented in grayscale, the same images presented in color were perceived to be more arousing and biased attention in favor of task-irrelevant emotional information, therefore evidencing the facilitative role of color in enhancing emotional intensity and capturing attention in the visual processing of emotionally meaningful contents (Bekhtereva & Müller, 2017). Most pertinently, the arousing attribute of red makes it advantageous in attracting attention in both positive and negative-valenced contexts (Kuniecki et al., 2015). Consequently, the more attention drawn to red would mean distraction from time and thereby result in shorter estimates. Crucially, time perception (perception of time that has elapsed)

and temporal distance judgement (perception of time that has yet to come) are positively linked, such that participants who overestimated durations also perceived the distance to the future to be longer (Kim & Zauberman, 2019). Together with the theorized shortening effect of red on time perception, it is plausible for red to exert the same effect on temporal distance judgement, resulting in shorter perceived temporal distance (in concordance with the time-moving perspective). However, the existing literature on the effect of red on time-perception has produced inconsistent results due to variation in, among other factors, color presentation modes, that is, as a background element or integrated into the task material (Hong et al., 2024). To provide supporting evidence for our reasoning, it is necessary for further research to test the proposed adverse effect of red on time perception, with red stimuli incorporated into the task instead of acting as the background color.

3.2.4 Reduced perceived temporal distance maps onto the time-moving perspective

Earlier work on the spatial conceptualization of time found that participants primed with an ego-moving spatial scenario tended to equate the "front" object to the one furthest away in a sequence of objects and accordingly interpret the meeting to be moved further down the line to next *Friday*. Conversely, when primed with a time-moving spatial scenario, participants tended to identify the "front" object as the one nearest to them in that sequence and consequently interpret the meeting to be moved ahead of time to next *Monday* (Boroditsky, 2000). These findings constitute first manifestation of conceptual mapping between spatial distance and temporal distance inherent in temporal perspectives. This association is corroborated by extended research demonstrating that factors via an embodied link to spatial distance can similarly affect temporal perspective preferences (Duffy & Feist, 2017; Matlock et al., 2005). For example, because the future appears less distant from the time-moving perspective than it does from the ego-moving perspective, the former perspective is associated with conscientiousness, attending to tasks without delay, whereas the latter is associated with procrastination, putting off tasks closer to the deadline (Duffy et al., 2014). Furthermore, a more distant perception of future, as is implied in the ego-moving perspective, makes the future less salient and therefore prioritizes the present. A closer such perception, on the other hand, as is implied in the time-moving perspective, makes the future stand out and privileges it accordingly (Crilly, 2017). Consequently, people preferring the time-moving perspective weighed future returns more heavily than those who favored the ego-moving perspective (Crilly, 2017), whilst those primed with the ego-moving (vs. time-moving) perspective perceived the future to be farther away and became more impatient in a waiting situation (Xu et al., 2024). Further attesting to the correspondence between perceived temporal distance and temporal perspectives, our findings suggested that red was linked to the time-moving perspective as a result of red shortening the perceived distance to the

future. The distance-perspective alignment means that factors that can modulate psychological distance may potentially influence temporal perspectives. For example, shifting from the observer perspective to the field perspective fosters a greater psychological distance (Gu & Tse, 2016). Whether doing so would lead to a propensity for the ego-moving perspective is worthy of further investigation.

3.3 Implications

3.3.1 Implications for color and psychological functioning

Perception of red can impact performance on cognitive tasks (Elliot et al., 2007; Maier et al., 2008; Mehta & Zhu, 2009). Adding another cognitive corollary, we documented the novel effect of red on temporal conceptualization. Specifically, despite rich evidence indicating that red can cause time distortion (Hong et al., 2024), no research thus far has inquired into its influence on the metaphorical perspectives on time. Filling this gap, our findings provide first evidence associating red with the preference for the time-moving perspective in the resolution of the "Next Wednesday's meeting" ambiguity. Notably, the detrimental effect of red on IQ test performance was ascribed to the perception of red prompting avoidance motivation (Maier et al., 2008), which is a prime manifestation of how color influences psychological functioning (Elliot & Maier, 2007). In a similar vein, the current research demonstrated that red impacted the time-moving perspective via heightened arousal and reduced psychological distance. As such, our work lays the foundation for further investigation into the potential effects other colors may have on temporal perspectives and the underlying psychological processes. For instance, previous research found that whereas red induced avoidance-underlain constriction of attention conducive to detail-oriented task performance, blue activated approach motivation beneficial for performance on a creativity task (Mehta & Zhu, 2009). Given that the ego-moving perspective is grounded in approach motivation (Hauser et al., 2009), it would be worth finding out whether perception of blue may facilitate psychological functioning associated with approach motivation and consequently promote the preference for ego-moving perspective.

3.3.2 Implications for the sensory influence on temporal perspective preferences

In addition to the multitude of human experiences, both spatial and somehow spatially grounded being uncovered as contributors to varying temporal perspective preferences (see Feist & Duffy, 2023 for a review), emerging lines of research have furnished evidence showing similar effects based on sensory stimuli. For example, Qin (2024a) found that when reasoning about the temporally ambiguous question, people who preferred spicy taste and those who actually consumed spicy

snacks were biased in favor of the ego-moving perspective. Similarly, a concurrent investigation into the effect of physical temperature on temporal reasoning showed that across both natural and artificial contexts, warm temperature evoked greater happiness, fostering an inclination toward the ego-moving perspective, whereas cold temperature evoked greater sadness, prompting an inclination toward the time-moving perspective (Qin, 2024b). Contributing complementary evidence along the same lines, our findings suggested that the visual perception of color can also modulate temporal perspective preferences. Further research may consider examining the potential effect of other sensory input on temporal reasoning. For instance, scents can evoke nostalgia, thus eliciting more positive emotion (Reid et al., 2015). In conjunction with the previously substantiated link between positive emotion and the ego-moving perspective (Zheng et al., 2019), it is possible that olfactory perception evocative of fond memories may relate to the ego-moving perspective through induced positive feelings. Future endeavors will do well to test this possibility.

3.4 Limitations

The present study suffers from mainly three limitations, which may inform future research. First, the strength of color-meaning associations is subject to the relative salience of the emotional dimension (e.g., valence and arousal). Whereas red and green are polar opposites on the valence dimension (i.e., red-negative vs. green-positive), red is strongly opposed to blue (i.e., red-aggressive/enthusiastic vs. blue-calm) on the arousal dimension (Schietecat et al., 2018). Besides, emotional valence and arousal can independently and interactively influence perceived temporal distance (Mei et al., 2018). These insights and the fact that red was contrasted with neither color raise concern about the generalizability of the association between red and the time-moving perspective established herein. Therefore, future research may test its generalizability by contrasting the effect of "meeting" in red font with those of "meeting" in green and blue fonts, respectively on temporal reasoning.

Relatedly, any given color is rarely viewed as a standalone but experienced compositely in combination with other colors (Schloss & Palmer, 2011). For instance, red conjoining black is a signifier of felicity for Chinese people, as is clearly shown in their wedding invitations designed in the pattern of black lettering on a red background (Madden et al., 2000). In the current research, the color manipulation was achieved by styling the temporal event in question (i.e., "meeting") in red font, leaving open whether red in combination with another color would exert the same impact on temporal perspective preferences as that of red alone. Future research may thus consider highlighting the "meeting" written in black in red and find out whether doing so would potentially tilt the red's

emotional ambivalence observed herein toward a decidedly positive evaluation, since the evaluative valence would be derived from the color pairing instead of the individual color. Given the link between positive valence with the ego-moving perspective (Zheng et al., 2019), color manipulation thus done may tend toward a preference for the ego-moving perspective. Inquiries along these lines would contribute to a more refined understanding of how perceptual responses to colors affect metaphorical construal of time.

Finally and as mentioned earlier, red activates avoidance motivation and narrows the breadth of attention, undermining intellectual performance in consequence (Maier et al., 2008). Admittedly, examination of temporal perspective preference is not a test of performance attainment. Nevertheless, given the tighter coupling between avoidance motivation and the time-moving perspective (Margolies & Crawford, 2008), it would be amiss to discount entirely the possibility that the red font may have simultaneously motivated avoidance even in a circumstance that does not bear on achievement. Therefore, the alternative pathway through which red relates to the time-moving perspective via avoidance motivation merits further confirmation.

4. Conclusion

The current research documented the novel effect of color on people's temporal perspective preferences in the interpretation of the ambiguous "Next Wednesday's meeting" statement and shed light on its underlying mechanism. Specifically, we found that exposure to the "meeting" in red (vs. black) font led to the preference for the time-moving perspective and that this effect was serially mediated by heightened arousal and reduced perceived temporal distance. As such, our findings add to the multitude of factors influential in varying temporal perspective preferences and enrich the literature on color and psychological functioning (Elliot & Maier, 2007). Notably, the revelation that arousal is pivotal to the association between red and the time-moving perspective should be of great import, as theoretically factors that can affect arousal are capable of modulating perceived temporal distance and subsequently shaping metaphorical perspectives on time. Exploration of those factors promises to be a productive line of further inquiry.

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MOTHERHOOD, DISABILITY, AND REBELLION: CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER IN HOBB'S *LIVESHIP TRADERS* TRILOGY

Abstract: Like many fantasy works, Robin Hobb's *Liveship Traders* trilogy is set in a patriarchal society, and the author, among other topics, portrays a variety of women characters and different ways they deal with it. There is limited research on Hobb's literary opus and feminist readings of the *Liveship Traders* trilogy are confined to student theses. Therefore, this paper aims to expand and add to the existing corpus of feminist and feminist disability readings by focusing on a character whose portrayal serves as a critique of the patriarchal system and the subordination of women through the intersectionality of gender and disability. The paper portrays how Mother's disability and gender role intersect to create specific conditions of othering and subordination that lead to her internalization of the role and attempts at rebellion against imposed constraints. Firstly, based on the research of Nancy J. Chodorow, Andrea O'Reilly, Catherine Rottenberg, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a short overview of feminist approaches to motherhood and feminist disability theory is provided. The paper then examines the role of violence, trauma, and naming as elements of identity construction. The chapter dealing with the mother–son relationship shows how Kennit others Mother, and the final chapter talks about Mother's internalization of motherhood and rebellion against Kennit. The paper concludes that Mother is othered by Kennit due to his perception of her failure as a mother and her disability that allows him to ascertain his power over her and serves as a cautionary tale of the effects patriarchal motherhood and disability can have on women.

Keywords: Robin Hobb, *Liveship Traders*, motherhood, disability, patriarchy

1. Introduction

Today most women in Western culture are able to choose how they will live their lives and decide whether marriage and motherhood will be a feature of those lives or not. For some, the choice is easy and their environment supportive, while others, such as disabled women, are discouraged from motherhood because they may transmit faulty genes and fear being judged incapable and inadequate (Mohamed & Shefer,

2015; Thomas, 1997). In addition, if disability is caused by a violent and traumatic event whilst already a mother, the woman must adjust her wishes and desires to a new reality. This happens to a character known as Mother in Robin Hobb's The *Liveship Traders* trilogy, comprised of *Ship of Magic* (1998), *Mad Ship* (1999), and *Ship of Destiny* (2000). Set in a patriarchal, pseudo-medieval fantasy world, the trilogy tells the story of the Vestrit family, traders who own a liveship – a magical sentient ship, and all those they meet along the way in their attempt to save the family from bankruptcy. When the ship is seized by the cruel pirate Kennit, Althea Vestrit and others embark on a dangerous quest to reclaim her and restore their family's wealth and honour, while other Vestrits become involved in local affairs and politics involving ancient, dragon-related powers. As literature is often produced by taking examples from real life and magnifying them, it can show readers the intricacies of the human character and the way people deal with various challenges. While many of the female characters in the trilogy challenge conventional gender roles and defy traditional portrayals of women, Mother embodies the impact of patriarchal expectations of motherhood combined with disability. Mother's portrayal highlights how gender and disability intersect and constrain her identity. Although a minor character, it is valuable to analyse her experience – she has suffered trauma and injury – her tongue was cut out (Hobb, 2015a), and her relationship with the men around her has led to the internalization of her role identity of the mother.

This paper analyses the intersectionality of gender and disability in terms of identity formation to show how Mother is othered and to illustrate her rebellion against her oppressor as her attempt at self-actualization. The paper aims to expand the research on the representation of motherhood in fantasy literature in terms of intersections of gender and disability, as in Kidd (2004), in which the author discusses how children's lives and experiences are shaped in connection to their mentally disabled mothers (2004). To do so, the paper utilizes intersectionality as a research paradigm because of its ability to "illuminate various interacting factors that affect human lives" (Goethals et al., 2015, p. 77), and identifies how these factors reproduce inequality. Thus, feminist theory, feminist disability theory, deconstruction, performativity, psychoanalysis, and identity theory are used to analyse Mother from a postmodern perspective.[1] By adopting an anti-essentialist view on identity,[2] the paper analyses what are, in fact, essentialist tendencies in Hobb's construction of Mother.

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[1] Postmodern feminism rejects the thesis that there is only one theory that can explain the position of women in society and advocates a combination of multiple theories of equal value (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Postmodern feminists consider the deconstruction of male, phallic language as necessary for progress and base their approach on the work of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Michel Foucault (Tong, 2014).

[2] The anti-essentialist view of identity prevails in contemporary scholarship and posits that identity is changeable, fluid, plastic, and fragmented, but also constructed by language and discourse, depending on different cultural and social practices and institutions (Peternai Andrić, 2012; Peternai Andrić, 2019).

There is a large body of work researching motherhood and mothers in different literary and non-literary genres and from different perspectives, including fantasy, "developing especially since the 1980s" (Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023, p. 6). There is no general overview of motherhood in fantasy literature, but there are many studies on women and gender that include motherhood as part of the analysis. Jeanne Hoeker LaHaie's work *Girls, Mothers and Others: Female Representation in the Adolescent Fantasy of J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Terry Pratchett* (2012) concludes that contemporary fantasy texts perpetuate and promote maternal values as the ideal for women, and Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats' collection of essays *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2016) incorporates essays on mothers and maternal care in fantasy literature. While Hob@b's novels have been examined from several perspectives, e.g. queer potential (Melville, 2018; Prater, 2016) and fluid identities (Räsänen, 2016), a deeper analysis of female characters in her opus is currently contained to student theses.[3]

2. Feminism, Motherhood, and Disability

Although analysing intersections of identity is "not simply a matter of integrating sexism with other axes of power and difference, but also facing up to the complex dynamics and complicities in play" (Gill, 2011, p. 69), these "crossings are nodal points for the materialization and subjectivation of the dictated conditions, promoting spaces of marginalization and nonacceptance of diversity as a historical and social way of life" (Crenshaw, 2002, as cited in Gomes et al., 2019, p. 3). Therefore, this chapter will provide an overview of the feminist view on motherhood and disability as two factors which may have negative effects on identity formation. The feminist view on motherhood is split between those who regard it as a uniting element among women and those who critique it as being used to deny women @rights and equality (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Motherhood is viewed as natural to women and central to their identity (Fahlgren & Williams, 2023) due to women's eligibility to have children and provide primary sustenance. These biological facts confirm gender as natural and justify social norms concerning sex roles, also presupposing the existence of the mothering instinct and a natural connection of the mother and the child (Peternai Andrić, 2019; Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023).[4]

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[3] *The Shift from the Traditional Feminine Role in Robin Hobb's Characters in her* The Farseer Trilogy *and* The Tawny Man *Trilogy* (2011) by Goran Katavić and Saga Bokne's *Patriarchy Under Scrutiny: Tracing Feminist Discourse in Hobb's* The Realm of the Elderlings (2017).

[4] The strengthening of the model of motherhood as women's calling and their subordination has occurred in the 19th century through the church ideology. Moreover, psychoanalysis states that because the woman lacks a phallus, she is perceived as the lack and must achieve integrity and completeness by having children – that is, through the Other (Grosz, 1990; Peternai Andrić, 2019).

Many feminists have refuted these claims and in recent times Judith Butler's performative-discursive theory of the development of gender identity has become widely accepted. Butler states that gender is construed by discursive practices and the process of the repetition of norms concerning the relationship of the subject, power, and resistance (Butler, 1999). The construction of gender "fundamentally affects men and women's perceptions and experiences" (Felski, 1989, p. 48). If they wish to be recognized as @ is a new conservatism in Northern Europe that formulates motherhood as a full-time job and asks women to turn away from paid employment" (Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023, p. 3). In recent decades, "the role of the mother has emerged as the most important in women's lives" (Badinter, 2011, as cited in Fahlgren & Williams, 2023, p. 136). Postmodern and poststructural feminism views motherhood as a part of a woman's identity and allows for a positive identification with motherhood (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Similarly, a recent strand of feminism, neoliberal feminism, posits the successful balance between family and career as an ideal to strive for and a path to happiness.[5] Neoliberal feminism does not encourage political activism targeted at improving social conditions and lives of women because it considers the goals of feminism to be mostly achieved (Rottenberg, 2018). Instead, it promotes the actualization of women in the private sphere, as wives and mothers, and in the public sphere, as successful businesswomen. However, women of other races, poor women, and immigrant women serve as unrecognized care providers, enabling professional women to pursue balance (Rottenberg, 2018).

The importance, meanings, and expectations connected to motherhood change when it comes to disabled women and mothers, whose experiences are researched by feminist disability scholars. Disability can be defined as an "umbrella term for any impairment, activity limitation or participation restriction which limits functioning within con-textual (personal and environmental) factors" (Palmer & Harley, 2012, p. 359). Feminist disability theory understands disability as a "culturally fabricated narrative of the body" which "produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies" (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 17), usually as subordinate within a system of exclusions and representation and "reveals discriminatory attitudes and practices directed at those bodies … as an effect of power relations" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, pp. 1557-58). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states that "many parallels exist between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies," such as their casting as deviant and inferior, exclusion from full participation in public and economic life, and defining them "in opposition

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[5] The term 'neoliberal feminism' was coined by Catherine Rottenberg under the influence of neoliberalism, a critical approach to postfeminism developed by Rosalind Gill, and a new feminist vocabulary present in the influential essay "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" (2012) by Anne-Marie Slaughter and Sheryl Sandberg's book Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead (2013) (Rottenberg, 2018).

to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority" (1997, p. 19). However, disabled women are often denied or discouraged from the reproductive role and their social and cultural capital is reduced, making them unfit subjects when analysed from the perspective of neoliberal feminism.

3. Violence, Trauma, and Naming

Considering that "feminist critique of patriarchal values cannot occur outside ideological and social structures in some privileged space, but constantly interacts with the very frameworks it challenges" (Felski, 1989, p. 59), Hobb creates a patriarchal society with the desire to critique it. Men have played important roles in Mother's life, influencing it with their actions and decisions. Mother was a girl from the pirate isles whom a liveship merchant from Bingtown married and they had a child named Kennit. They lived on an island where they made their home and lived in splendour. However, the island was invaded by Igrot, a pirate captain who wanted their liveship. In reality, "97% of impairments are acquired rather than congenital" (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015, p. 2), and so is Mother's. Igrot set fire to their home, killed Kennit's father, and cut off Mother's tongue: "Such an orgy of cruelty as Igrot indulged to his sensual limits" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 376). This happened nearly thirty-five years before the time of the narrative. He did an intentional act of violence, and such acts, as Anne Morris explains, are "aimed at achieving certain outcomes" (2005, p. 224), such as asserting the man's control over the woman and her child (2005). Igrot used Kennit in order to blackmail the liveship, Paragon, into sailing with him[6] and by his actions and their consequences on the victims created a rift between Mother and Kennit. Cathy Caruth states that "the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident" is what haunts the trauma victim (1996, p. 6). This is applicable to Mother, who is traumatized by the invasion and captivity. Trauma can refer to a state or condition produced by a stress or blow that causes disordered feelings or behaviour (Erikson, 1994). One of those feelings is fear and Sara Ahmed states that it relates to the present and the future and "involves an anticipation of hurt or injury" (2004, p. 65). Fear causes an intense bodily experience that may at times involve paralysis as it works "to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 65). By expanding his domain on Mother's island, Igrot restricted Mother's freedom, hurt her both physically and mentally; the fear and terror she felt paralysed her and made her unwilling to act against him in any way, for her sake or for Kennit's.

The memories of trauma are intermingled with the victim's everyday thoughts and can turn up in the form of symptoms including anxiety (Horvitz, 2000, p. 17).

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[6] Igrot also sexually abused Kennit, thus the boy and the liveship made a plan. Kennit killed Igrot and sent Paragon away.

Mother's fear lingers and turns into anxiety that translates into a desire to remain on the island and live a simple life: "Now she no longer wanted luxuries and wealth on display. No. She trusted to her simple life to protect her" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). Mother displays what Ahmed terms "fear of 'the world' as the scene of a future injury … which shrinks bodies in a state of afraidness, a shrinkage which may involve a refusal to leave the enclosed spaces of home" (2004, pp. 70). Although she does not want to leave the island, Mother cannot think of anyone living in the big house where the crimes happened without an emotional reaction—she cries out when an event triggers remembrance (Hobb, 2015a, p. 376). Caruth states that stories of trauma involve "the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (1996, p. 7), which is further complicated for Mother as she is now mute. She has lived in isolation since Kennit killed Igrot, as he is the only person who knows where Mother is, but he rarely visits. His behaviour agrees with the fact that one of the ways people deal with disability is by "avoiding anomalous things" or segregating them (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 35), which causes women with disabilities to experience greater social isolation (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015). Kennit brings Mother companions in the second novel when it becomes convenient for him to do so and she does not object to the company.

Considering that she is a side character, mute, and connected to Kennit, Mother's description comes from other characters—chiefly Kennit and Paragon—and they always refer to her as Mother, never by her name. According to the study of performative language, the act of naming provides a temporary stabilization of fluid identity.[7] It is a speech act which in saying does what it says, and does it in the moment of that saying (Austin, 1962). To be addressed is to "have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible" (Butler, 1997, p. 5), and it can represent inclusion into a community or exclusion from it (Peternai Andrić, 2012). Mother is always addressed as Mother; thus, that is her only identity—the one the community accepts and by which it knows her. This supports with Louis Althusser's statement that if individuals are called by their names, they are "always-already interpellated as subjects with a personal identity," and if the subject responds affirmatively and accepts its name, it recognizes that it really does occupy the place designated for it (1971, p. 178). As Mother's name is not known, neither are her personal or other identities, but by accepting only the interpellation of "Mother," she situates herself firmly in the sphere of motherhood. Mother is also referred to as Lucky's widow (Hobb, 2015b, p. 643) and Ludluck woman (Hobb, 2015b, p. 643), according to her relation to her husband. Women as "others" are identified in terms of their relationships to men who—unlike women—are assumed to have identities in themselves (Westkott, 1977). In the novels, all the characters in the trilogy need Mother to be Kennit's mother and influence him; they require nothing more from her.

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[7] The theory of performativity states that language creates and transfers meaning, the relationship of the subject and reality is always mediated by language, and that language is the one that determines human activity (Peternai Andrić, 2019).

4. Mother-Son Relationship

Mother's early relationship with Kennit illustrates Freud's pre-oedipal dynamic, wherein the child experiences the mother as both nurturing and omnipotent. His perception of her as phallic, which Elizabeth Grosz terms "a consequence of a masculine fantasy of maternity" rather than a recognition of her lived maternal experience (1990, p. 151), highlights the Freudian and Lacanian imaginary structure of early mother-child relations. During captivity, Kennit sought comfort and imagined revenge against Igrot: "he would climb onto her lap, hug her neck tightly, and try to whisper his plans for vengeance into her ear. She would desperately and fearfully shush him. She had not even dared dream of revenge" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 380). Her passivity and fear of Igrot, combined with her lack of social power, ultimately shaped Kennit's perception of her as weak, spurring his desire to become strong and masculine in opposition. This dynamic aligns with Lacan's theory of the "Law of the Father," where the imaginary dyad between mother and child must be broken by the symbolic intervention of the father, who represents law, language, and authority (Grosz, 1990). The child must sacrifice his desire for the mother to enter the symbolic order, internalizing the father's authority and forming the superego (Grosz, 1990). In this process, the mother is symbolically castrated—not due to anatomical lack but because the child perceives her subordination to the father's authority and desire (Grosz, 1990). Kennit's internalization of this dynamic is evident in his identification with Igrot, whom he despises yet sees as a figure of masculine power. According to Lacan's concept of the Name-of-the-Father, the child's symbolic entry into culture depends on renouncing his mother and gaining a speaking position as a subject through paternal metaphor (Grosz, 1990). As Lacan argues, this transformation is not grounded in biological kinship but in symbolic naming and law, wherein the child becomes a cultural subject by aligning with patriarchal structures (Grosz, 1990). Thus, Kennit's psychological development, shaped by his mother's symbolic castration and Igrot's authoritarian presence, exemplifies the psychoanalytic narrative of subject formation through loss, repression, and patriarchal substitution. Grosz states that this pact "founds patriarchy anew for each generation, guaranteeing the son a position as heir to the father's position in so far as he takes on the father's attributes" (1990, p. 68), which Kennit does. Moreover, Julia Kristeva explains that taking on the father's attributes issues the struggle "against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject," repelling, rejecting, and abjecting" (1982, p. 13). Abject is what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982, p. 4). The one by whom abject exists divides and excludes, judges, and condemns, (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 8-13), all behaviours Kennit displays towards Mother, who can be construed as an abject body.

Thus, Kennit adheres to Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum's (1995) claim that "the love of a mother—both the son's for her, and hers for him" will

'feminize' him, "make him soft, weak, dependent, homebound … only through renunciation of the loving mother" does he become a man (as cited in O'Reilly, 2004b, p. 167). Kennit does what Chodorow describes as a part of masculine role training, he "represses those qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself, and rejects and devalues women and whatever he considers to be feminine in the social world" (1978, p. 181). Along with Kennit's continued perception of Mother as weak: "As he stepped away from his mother, she surrendered, as she always did. She sank down onto the chair … and wept. She always wept. It made no sense to him. How many times had she found that tears solved nothing?" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 384), he also finds her naïve and foolish. He disagrees with her conviction that a simple life will deter robbers: "No one can have so little that someone else can find nothing to envy" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). Kennit's abjection and 'othering' of Mother is also visible in his treatment of her with disgust. The construction of normalcy rationalises and bolsters the 'othering' of bodies "that do not fit into a particular culture's imaginary" of the acceptable" (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015, p. 2). Kennit does not consider her behaviour, appearance, and attempts at communication acceptable and is disgusted by them: "She was barefoot, he noted with distaste, and dressed in cotton tunic and trousers like a peasant … Never a slender woman, she had thickened with the years … She hurried toward him at an inglorious trot. He had to suffer the indignity of her squashy embrace … It revealed the stump of her tongue. Kennit looked aside in distaste" (Hobb, 2015a: 375-376). He cannot bear the fact Mother chooses to live a simple life, when she could do otherwise and is critical of her weight and injury. Furthermore, those who cause disgust are "constructed as non-human, as beneath and, below the bodies of the disgusted. Indeed, through the disgust reaction, 'belowness' and 'beneathness' become properties of their bodies. They embody that which is lower than human or civil life" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97). It is evident Kennit considers Mother as the one beneath himself in his comment on the cutting of her tongue: "over the years he had come to see it was not an entirely unfortunate incident. She still talked endlessly, or tried to, but since the event he could steer the conversation as he wished it to go. He told her when she agreed with him, and when a topic was settled" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 375). Kennit uses Mother's disability to ascertain his control over her by ignoring her attempts at communication, perceiving them as dumb, and disregarding her wishes and desires: 'his mother gabbled frantically at him. He nodded in approval. "I knew you wouldn't mind"' (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). By taking away Mother's ability to communicate, Kennit takes away her agency and turns her into a passive object. Michael Palmer and David Harley state that "the modern response to impairment has cast disabled people as the 'other', excluded from and denied access to society" (2012, p. 358). Therefore, another way in which Kennit others Mother is by denying her access to society and not allowing her to be an active participant and disregarding her autonomy and desires. Peter Brooks states that

muteness is used to represent "extreme moral and emotional conditions" and it "became symbolic of the defencelessness of innocence" (1974, p. 552), which can be applied to Mother as she is left powerless by Igrot and Kennit.

5. Internalization and Rebellion

By giving birth to a child, women adopt the role identity of the mother and self-meanings and expectations that accompany the role. Some, if not most, "then act to represent and preserve these meanings and expectations" (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227). The meanings society attributes to mothers and considers maternal virtues and tasks are giving unconditional love, guiding and teaching, endurance, self-sacrifice, devotion, housework, and childcare (Rich, 1995; Stets & Lee, 2000). Women who possess these virtues are labelled good mothers, whereas bad mothers are "selfish, not caring or sacrificial enough" (Peternai Andrić, 2019, p. 140); they are not executing "correct" motherhood (Jiao, 2019). As the patriarchal society of the novel limits Mother's possibilities for a career, she is not in a position to execute the neoliberal feminist ideal of balance between her career and her family. Thus Mother accepts her address and Althusser's statement that "the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order … that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'" (1971, p. 182) can be applied to her. Mother thus focuses on her role of the wife and mother and is positively described until the occurrence of violent events that prevent the normal continuation of her mothering. Agreeing with the fact that "women with disabilities are often stereotypically considered … unsuitable as parents" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1567), the relationship between her and Kennit changes, causing him to consider her weak and indeed unsuitable. "If looked upon with disdain and being ill-treated by others, the self-esteem of people with disabilities are harmed" (Gomes et al., 2019, p. 6) causing disabled women to feel pressure to demonstrate that they are 'good enough mothers' (Thomas, 1997). "If a woman performs her mother role in a way that carries meanings consistent with her mother identity meanings, she should be more likely to experience identity verification and feel competent and efficacious" (Stets & Lee, 2000, p. 134), but "individuals who are unable to conform to the societal expectations are set up for feelings of failure" (Hochschild, 1989, as cited in Mayer, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, according to the neoliberal feminist ethics that promotes the achievement of a woman's full potential (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg, 2019), and makes the woman responsible for her own failures in life (Rottenberg, 2018), Mother is unable to achieve her full potential as a mother with Kennit and her crying is an expression of her negative emotions and feelings of failure. Rich's statement that "grief at all we cannot do for our children in a society so inadequate to meet human needs … becomes translated into guilt and

self-laceration" (1995, p. 52) can be applied to Mother. Therefore, the desire for self-actualization as a mother combined with the failure to do so causes Mother to internalize society's patriarchal understanding of motherhood and its meanings of good maternal behaviour. This internalization involves distortions, defences, and transformations (Chodorow, 1978), which result in Mother accepting and perpetuating the subjugated position society places her in. In the end, Kennit dies after being declared King of the Pirate Isles and Mother grieves for him (Hobb, 2015b). However, she does not accept a noble title and position, but decides to care for and help Etta, Kennit's pregnant partner, evidencing that she is still trying to succeed in her prescribed role. This agrees with the observation that "[t]he guilt and shame women experience in failing to live up to what is in fact an impossible ideal is neither accidental nor inconsequential. Rather it perpetuates female sacrifice, resulting in the loss of female subjectivity and autonomy" (Jiao, 2019, p. 544). Mother shows her devotion to her late son and his offspring. By focusing her mothering on Etta and her future child, she negates any other possible self-identity.

Although she wishes to fulfil her role, Mother's garbling expresses her desire to be heard and to transgress the boundaries of her disability and the other's perception of her as disabled and therefore defected, unable to express herself. This can be analysed as an attempt to establish her subjectivity through an act of rebellion against imposed social constraints. Moreover, she rebels against Kennit and the constrains he put on her motherhood. She decides to retake control and join the protagonists on their way to confront Kennit in order to once again be a mother to him and try to save him from doing more evil. This is the only instance in which Mother directly disobeys Kennit's order to remain hidden on the island, and it is the moment when Mother becomes an active agent and expresses her desires. An opportunity provided by male characters allows her to take action, and, although their main plan is to use her to reach Kennit, she understands their goals and is a willing participant. In addition, Mother shows agency when she helps restore Paragon's memories. In her desire to get to Kennit, she is trying to fulfil her role of the guide and role model for her child (Hobb, 2015b). Although she disobeys her son, she is doing so to help him, which again aligns with the traits stereotypically related to nurturing mothers.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, disability intersects with gender in ways that have profound consequences for Mother's physical and psychological well-being. Hobb constructs Mother as a character who embodies the gender role of the woman as mother who wishes to achieve her full potential by mothering. She wants to be the archetypal mother – caring, loving, and self-sacrificial, but Igrot's act of violence causes her disability and traumatizes her so much she cannot rebel against him out of fear

and fulfil her role. Other than Igrot, her identity is influenced by her son, and less her husband, who affect and control her life in such a measure that she is only ever addressed according to her relation to them. Furthermore, their captivity and Mother's passivity change Kennit's perception of her to one that agrees with Garland-Thomson's statement that women with disabilities "have been cast in the collective cultural imagination as inferior, lacking, excessive, incapable, unfit, and useless" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1567). Kennit feels abjection and disgust towards Mother, thus, he others her both physically, by letting her live alone on the island, and emotionally and mentally by intentionally misunderstanding her wishes and desires, thus taking away her agency, asserting his power, and subordinating her. Mother's relationship with Kennit, or the lack thereof, leads to feelings of shame and guilt for her, and she ultimately feels such remorse at her unsuccessful mothering of Kennit that she internalizes her role and transfers her attentions to his wife and offspring, providing care for them as she could not do for Kennit. Although Mother does not fully accept her situation and rebels by trying to communicate her wishes and by disregarding Kennit's instructions, she does the latter to try to help him become a better person.

Therefore, Mother presents a mode of femininity still valued and accepted in many cultures, the ultimate mother and a modest woman who cares for others and seeks no fame or renown for herself, but her story can be understood as a cautionary tale of patriarchal motherhood and the trappings of disability. Her muteness makes it easier to disregard her wishes and subordinate her to others. By portraying a woman so immersed in her role as to only be recognizable by it, but who is othered because of her failure to fulfil it and her physical inadequacy, Hobb showcases how deeply gender norms, disability, and patriarchal structures influence and shape the lives of individuals, especially women. Hobb presents Mother as an extreme example of the influence of patriarchy and of men on women by creating her as a person without further identity, one who rejects other identities and devotes her life to her family.

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LIFE, DEATH AND THE PASTORAL: METAMODERN SENSIBILITIES IN MIKE MCCORMACK'S *SOLAR BONES*[1]

Abstract: Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* (2016) is an award-winning Irish novel that highlights the ongoing engagement of contemporary Irish fiction with its rich literary heritage. While its single-sentence, stream-of-consciousness form recalls Joyce, the novel's thematic rejection of urban modernism aligns it with Oona Frawley's concept of the Irish pastoral. Marcus, the posthumous narrator, returns as a ghost on All Souls' Day to reflect on his life through a series of nature-infused memories that draw on both classical and Romantic pastoral traditions. This article argues that *Solar Bones* participates not only in a "metamodernist" aesthetics (James and Seshagiri, 2010) – through its revival of Joycean formal experiment, but also in "a metamodern structure of feeling," characterised by the re-emergence of Romantic sensibilities (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010). By mapping neoromantic sensibilities in McCormack's representations of the protagonist's personal growth – mediated through his reflections on the natural world and his portrayal as a modern-age shepherd – the article posits *Solar Bones* as a work in which the new structure of feeling manifests primarily as an oscillation between the ordinary and the sublime, order and disorder, life and death, and the finite and infinite.

Keywords: contemporary Irish literature, pastoral tradition, metamodernism, Mike McCormack

1. Introduction

In the Introduction to the "Metamodernist" issue of *English Studies,* Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers (2019) draw attention to two seminal texts that offer

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contrasting conceptualizations of the new label: Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's "Notes on Metamodernism" from 2010 and the 2014 essay "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution." Vermeulen and van den Akker define metamodernism as a "structure of feeling" (p. 719), mapping its manifestations across the cultural landscape of film, art and architecture. James and Seshagiri, by contrast, use the label to refer to a "a body of artistic products" that "regards modernism as an era, an aesthetic and an archive" (p. 719). While the usefulness of James and Seshagiri's concept of metamodernism has been acknowledged, particularly in relation to "a resurgent modernism" in contemporary Irish literature (see Gilligan 2018, p. 775), testing of Vermeulen and van den Akker's conceptualization of metamodernism has been an ongoing process, encouraged by the critics themselves (see Vermeulen and van den Akker 2017, pp. 3-4).

In their early essay "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010) the scholars provide a variety of examples from contemporary cultural production to propose that the metamodern structure of feeling can be fundamentally characterized by the dynamic of metaxis and a revival of Romantic sensibilities. They draw their idea of metamodern in-betweenness from the Platonic understanding of human experience, as summarized by German philosopher Eric Voegelin:

> Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic metaxy, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness, between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence […] (Voegelin quoted in Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, p. 6)

Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) interpret the Platonic concept of metaxis "as a metaphor for a cultural sensibility that is particular to the metamodern discourse," manifesting primarily in the tension between "a modern desire for *sense* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all" (p. 6). They associate this sensibility with "the Romantic attitude," which, they argue, is also characterised by an oscillation between opposing poles, such as "finite and infinite, … attempt and failure, … [or] enthusiasm and irony" (p. 8). In their overview of contemporary works of art that they perceive as metamodern, the critics identify neoromantic sensibilities in the artists' "negotiations between the permanent and the temporary, … [the] questioning of Reason by the irrational, … [or] reappropriation of culture through nature" (p. 8). They also draw attention to the ways in which metamodern art engages with Romanticism through the representation of "the sublime, the uncanny, the ethereal, the mysterious, and so forth" (p. 10).

In their later study (van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen, 2019), they also address literary metamodernism, clarifying differences between their definition of the term and that of James and Seshagiri:

> […] in our work, metamodernism is a structure of feeling that manifests in literary works (and cultural and aesthetic forms more generally) through a mix of or oscillation between pre-modernist, modernist, and postmodernist tropes and devices[…]. Thus, whilst we too perceive

modernist tendencies, we also see the propensities of other movements – such as romanticism, realism, and postmodernism – as operative in metamodernist forms of cultural expression […]. Thus, pre-modern, modern, and postmodern devices are – in varying combinations – put to new use, engaging with, and responding to, the social, ethical, political, economic, and environment material circumstances of the twenty-first century. (p. 48)

Their understanding of metamodernist literary work as a text that combines the revival of the modernist tradition with the incorporation of pre-modernist and postmodernist tendencies, appears particularly useful for the discussion about Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* that this paper seeks to provide. *Solar Bones* (2016) can be regarded as a prime example of the metamodernist aesthetics that David James and Urmila Seshagiri (2014) have identified in the efforts of contemporary authors to "extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature" (p. 89). McCormack's novel is written as a single, stream-of-consciousness sentence presenting the flow of its ghost narrator's memories, a literary approach that several critics[2] have associated with the tradition of Irish experimental writing. In general, the critics agree on the function that this reappropriation of the modernist experiment fulfils in McCormack's novel. Joanna Jarząb-Napierała (2019) summarizes this function by reading *Solar Bones* as an example of contemporary Irish fiction that employs experimental modernist language "as a tool to express postmodern thought and perception of the surrounding reality" (p. 62). She further aligns this postmodern thought in McCormack's novel with the "nostalgia for the past" that "serves [the protagonist] as a defence mechanism against the current economic-crisis reality as well as his own tragedy of a lost life" (p. 63). Nevertheless, although McCormack's choice to structure his novel as a single sentence, formatted only by line-breaks, is undoubtedly an allusion to the experimental techniques of James Joyce, his decision to repudiate Joyce's modernist urbanism aligns his novel with another important strain of Irish literature: that which Oona Frawley (2005) has defined as the Irish pastoral.

Frawley (2005) sees the pastoral as a crucial element of Irish literature, a genre in which "nature and landscape [have] become signifiers, lenses through which it is possible to examine cultural and historical developments" (p.1). Frawley mapped the use of pastoral motifs throughout the course of Irish literature, ranging across the early medieval period, the Renaissance, the Revival period and into the 20th century, in order to illustrate how representations of nature, landscape and the land have been aligned with the historical milestones of Irish cultural and social experience, including English colonization, the Great Famine and the national revival of the 19th century. From this perspective, Joyce's "emphasis on urban space…represents an obvious point of departure within the Irish literary tradition that wrote so overwhelmingly of the rural" (p. 106). The combination of Joycean

[2] See, for example, Palmqvist (2016), Kirkus Reviews (2017), Boland (2016), Connoly (2021), Harrison (2022), Jarząb-Napierała (2019) or Reynolds (2024).

experimental narrative and a rural setting, a milieu which acquires a significance comparable to that of the city of Dublin in Joyce's masterpieces, positions *Solar Bones* as a piece of the "metamodernist writing" that "reactivates and *complicates* the aesthetic prerogatives of an earlier [modernist] cultural moment" (James and Seshagiri, 2014, p. 93, emphasis added). While establishing a significant link to Joycean modernism, McCormack's novel also engages with a longstanding literary tradition of portraying social crises by means of pastoral imagery, particularly through its thematic focus on the collapse of the Celtic Tiger.

Academic discussion of *Solar Bones* to date has predominantly explored the modernist aesthetics of the novel in relation to the novel's social concerns. The novel's important connections to other literary traditions, such as the pastoral, remain underexplored and its deeper, metaphysical dimensions have been largely overlooked. By focusing on the central role of nature and landscape in Marcus's stream-of-consciousness narrative, this paper explores the novel's turn towards pre-modernist traditions. Specifically, it considers the text's engagement with the classical pastoral – with its iconic motifs of the idealized shepherd and the urban-rural conflict – and its appropriation of the Romantic developments of the pastoral, which emphasize personal growth through immersion in and reflection on the natural world. The Romantic sensibilities, central to McCormack's reworking of the pastoral, are reinforced by his use of a ghost narrator who returns to his former home on All Souls' Day to reflect on his past life. Marcus's narrative unfolds as a flow of memories deeply attuned to the fragility of human existence, continually grappling with tensions between the ordinary and the sublime, order and disorder, life and death, and the finite and infinite. The protagonist's awareness of these tensions crucially depends on his perceptions of nature, which align with the neoromantic focus on "the sublime, the uncanny, the ethereal, the mysterious," identified by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010, 10) in metamodern artworks. As Vermeulen and van den Akker argue, the metamodern neoromanticism should be seen as re-signification: "the re-signification of the commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite" (2010, 12). In this light, representations of nature in metamodern art resonate with metaphysical concerns and a desire for transcendence, which in McCormack's representation of the pastoral appear to take on a more tangible form. In the pages that follow, we examine McCormack's neoromantic engagement with the pastoral in two parts. The first explores how nature – conceived as a sublime unity of order and disorder – shapes Marcus's identity, directing the continual drift of his stream of consciousness towards the idea of collapse. The second argues that Marcus can be read as a neoromantic shepherd figure, a role disclosed through the counter-movements in his thought, which consistently engage with notions of order and harmony.

2. Shaping the Self: Nature, the Sublime and Marcus's Identity

As Oona Frawley (2005) points out in her study on the Irish pastoral, representations of nature in Irish literature have been intrinsically connected to the expression of concerns about the cultural and national identity of the island's colonized people. This central aspect of Irish pastoral narratives – the focus on social and cultural struggles – can also be discerned in *Solar Bones*. Marcus's reflections on the 2008 collapse of the Irish economy create a central motif in his stream-of-consciousness narrative, drawing the attention of several critics who have framed the novel as an example of post-Celtic Tiger fiction.[3] Deirdre Flynn (2018) notes the novel's connection to Frawley's definition of the Irish pastoral, highlighting the primary role of the landscape in the novel as a source of stability for the protagonist within the chaotic times of the financial crisis. Drawing on Frawley's point that nature in Irish pastoral narratives often appears as "a steady and unaltered realm beyond the reaches of the fluctuating culture," Flynn (2018, p. 46) concludes that "Marcus must first find continuity in the landscape to piece together what it means to be Irish and learn what has been lost." Marcus's strong sense of belonging to Louisburgh, "the village in which [he] can trace [his] seed and breed back to" (p. 3) also reveals McCormack's preoccupation with the "fundamental link between Irish identity and the landscape," a connection that, as Gerry Smyth (2000, p. 16) notes, recurs throughout much of contemporary Irish literature. While in no way intending to diminish the importance of the connection between landscape and the novel's exploration of the problems of the Irish nation, the following discussion focuses on the relationship between nature and Marcus's personal identity.

Marcus's perception of nature aligns closely with the Romantic pastoral tradition, a more subjective and individualistic mode of writing than that found in Irish pastoral narratives where nature primarily functions, according to Frawley (2005, p. 3), as "a site from which to express the longing for lost culture or […] unrecoverable past."[4] Romantic representations of rural landscape serve a different purpose; as Michael Ferber (2010, p. 9) notes, Romantic depictions are used "for exploring one's self and its relationship to others and to nature," offering private and poetic insights into the subjective experience of reality. Marcus's perception of nature and its sublime qualities shapes his sense of self, and it can be argued that Marcus's search for stability, as emphasized by Flynn (2018), belies the fact that he remains acutely aware of the world's fragility and the persistent disruptive threat which chaos poses to its apparent order. This acceptance of the inherent instability of the natural world which permeates Marcus's perception of life suggests that the binary opposition between the permanence of nature and the volatility of human

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[3] See, for example, Harrison (2022), Huang (2022), Jarząb-Napierała (2019), or Flynn (2018).

[4] This connection between the Irish pastoral and McCormack's novel is highlighted by Flynn (2018, p. 47) who notices how Marcus's narrative "is linked to nostalgia, to the past, to tradition, a time before the crash where he felt stability."

society that Flynn (2018) identifies in the novel, is continually undermined by Marcus's narrative voice.

As Marcus's posthumous memories reveal, his personal identity and understanding of his place in the world were profoundly shaped by his early encounters with the sublime in nature. A memory of a sailing trip with his father on the open sea evokes

> […] [his] childhood conviction that there was nothing greater than the sea, no other width or breadth which could surpass or encompass it because the older I got and the more I had advanced in my work as an engineer the more certain I had become that out there, on the blue bay was where my sense of scale and ratio was established during my childhood […]
> watching the land recede into the distance […] I came to a full sense of the world in its broadest span, the sky overhead and the calm surface of the sea spreading out… the swelling immensity of the bay… (pp. 99–100)

The idea of the vastness of the natural world that humans inhabit and must learn to navigate, much as Marcus's father had learnt to navigate his boat across the immense surface of the sea, initiates what Liam Harrison (2023) describes as "the almost spiritual affinity [that Marcus] possesses with his local environment" (p. 1726). Viewing nature as a manifestation of a transcendent force that governs the world's order, he comes to see his father's life – as a farmer and fisherman – as the ideal of human existence: a daily coexistence with land and sea that reflects harmonious participation in that order. This ideal later becomes the cornerstone of his profession of an engineer; throughout his career, Marcus strives to preserve harmony between the landscape and the human interventions of roads, bridges and buildings which he designs and supervises.

While the awe inspired by the vastness of the sea awakens a sense of divine order in Marcus – one which he later mirrors in his role as God's "fellow engineer" (p. 263) – a contrasting childhood experience also instils a lifelong fear of the disorder, chaos and collapse to which all things are ultimately susceptible. Watching his father dismantle a tractor, a symbol of human capacity to partake in the divine order by farming the land, he is "terrified at the sight" of the broken-down machine, "gutted of its most essential parts" (p. 21):

> […] I recoiled at the thought that something so complex and highly achieved as this tractor engine could prove so vulnerable, so easily collapsed and taken apart by this single tool and so frightened was I by this fact it would be years afterwards before I could acknowledge the engineering elegance of it […]
> this may have been the first moment of anxious worry about the world […] (p. 22)

Instead of admiring his father's technical skills – the power to dismantle and reassemble the machine – or appreciating his father's curiosity about how the machine is constructed, Marcus intuitively sees the scene through a metaphysical perspective. The ordinary scene in his father's hayshed spirals outward into a darkly sublime image of a collapsing universe:

> […] my imagination took fright and soared to some wider, cataclysmic conclusion about how the universe itself was bolted and screwed together, believing how heaven and earth could come unhinged when some essential cottering pin was tapped out which would undo the whole vast assemblage of stars and galaxies in their wheeling rotations and send them plummeting through the void of space towards some final ruin […] (pp. 22-23)

By revealing the inherent vulnerability of the world, the dismantled tractor awakens Marcus's awareness of mortality, producing a subliminal anxiety and fear of chaos that Marcus tries to suppress for the rest of his life. This fear resurfaces with far greater intensity when the adult Marcus watches a dismantled turbine being hauled through the streets of Louisburgh. Once again, a manifestation of the ordinary – a machine designed to allow humans to coexist with nature – is incorporated into a metaphysical, even apocalyptic, image. However, on this occasion Marcus's mind takes him beyond the image of a collapsing universe to the idea of the ultimate demise of its divine engineer. The dismantled machine appears to him

> so lonely and monumental it might well have been God himself or some essential aspect of him being hauled through our little village on the edge of the world, death or some massive redundancy finally caught up with him so now he was being carted off […] to some mid-Atlantic abyssal, down between tectonic plates, all these redundant gods lying crushed and frozen in the blackest depths with no surface. (p. 27)

Collapse, which Rob Doyle (2016) has described as the "the leitmotif of [McCormack's] novel," thus reaches far beyond the historical reference to the ignominious end of the Celtic Tiger's boom years and functions instead as a key haunting element of Marcus's mind that shapes his adult personality. His attempts to find a sense of stability in simple daily rituals (as his father had done) testify to his effort to grapple with the inevitability of mortality. The daily ritual of listening to "the news on Midwest Radio [which are] followed by the death notices for the area" (p. 87) fills his existence with a tension between life, whose various energies are mapped by the news, and death, which has extinguished the life energies of those whose names are announced. The daily rituals, the rhythms of the village that he lives in and the awareness that there are "millions of men everywhere" (p. 87) participating in the same rituals, grant Marcus a peace of mind which although soothing, is ultimately only transitory. In perceiving the human world from a broader perspective, albeit as just a tiny element of the sublime unity of the natural world, he cannot help but steer his stream-of-consciousness towards a reflection on the shared fragility of both:

> […] just before the world collapses mountains, rivers and lakes acres, roods and perches into oblivion, drawn down into that fissure in creation where everything is consumed in the raging tides and swells of non-being, the physical world gone down in flames mountains, rivers and lakes and pulling with it also all those human rhythms that bind us together and draw the world into a community, those daily rites, rhythms and rituals upholding the world like solar bones, that rarefied amalgam of time and light whose extension through every minute of the day is visible from the moment I get up […] (p. 85)

This apocalyptic fantasy which emphasizes the essential interconnectedness of the human and natural worlds – each supported by the "solar bones" of its own kind – becomes a reality, though on a much smaller scale, when the local water supply becomes polluted and the life of the community is put at risk. The serious illnesses which many, including Marcus's wife, suffer as a result of the ecological crisis reignites Marcus's "childhood ability to get ahead of [himself] and reason to apocalyptic ends" (p. 28). Although Marcus approaches the crisis calmly and rationally in conversation with his children, even suggesting the possibility of a rapid solution, the reader's insights into his private train of thought – such as his reaction on the dismantled turbine – reveal the melancholic and gloomy character of his metaphysical musings. The image of the dead God – evoked by the dysfunctional machine "being hauled through [the] little village on the edge of the world" (p. 27) – embodies his fear of the collapse of order and the impending destruction of the once-harmonious coexistence with nature, which, poisoned by human activities, now poses an existential threat. Symbolically, the dismantled turbine represents the demise of the divine force that had guaranteed the natural order of things, leaving the village and its human community abandoned, unprotected and cast into chaos.

The metaphysics of Marcus's life-long engagement with the threat of collapse – perceived in both the social and the natural sphere – culminate in the image of his own death: a personal collapse caused by a heart attack. When recalled by the ghost narrator, however, death, the ultimate disorder of human existence is not experienced as a fall into an abyss of oblivion. In Marcus's posthumous memories, dying – this ultimate journey into oblivion – is perceived as a return to nature through the body's "[picking] up the rhythms of decay" (p. 263), the shedding of the social identities of "father, husband, citizen" and the reduction to an essence shared with "animal, mineral, vegetable" (p. 264). Through its presentation of Marcus's death as a pathway to true unity with nature that resolves his existential tensions between order and disorder, life and death, mortality and immortality, the novel affirms its immersion in the Romantic sensibilities that permeate McCormack's representation of Marcus's identity.

3. The Pastoral Legacy: Landscape, Shepherds and Protection of Order

Scholars of the pastoral, such as Peter V. Marinelli (2018/1971) and Terry Gifford (1999), generally agree that the figure of the shepherd has remained an integral element of the pastoral tradition throughout the centuries of its development. In its early phases, originating in the works of Greek and Roman poetry, the shepherd and his flock occupied such a crucial position that, as Gifford (1999, p. 1) observes, Leo Marx's quip that "No shepherd, no pastoral" aptly summarizes the pastoral narratives that draw on the works of Theocritus

and Virgil. In classical texts, the shepherd is an allegorical figure; in his simple farming life in the rural landscape of "golden Arcadia," far removed from the social and political turbulence of courtly and urban life, he embodies the pastoral ideal of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The Romantic pastoral narrative, a development of the Romanticists' critical dialogue with classical models, challenged Arcadian images of rural life by introducing more realistic portrayals of the toil of the farming life. Nevertheless, a certain level of idealization – particularly of the simplicity of rural life and the farmer's special relation with nature – remains central to the Romantic vision. This is perhaps most evident in the titular labourer of Wordsworth's seminal pastoral poem *Michael*, who, as Martha Hale Shackford (1923) notes, is "[c]lose to the very substance of earth and stone, almost one with sun and wind and rain" (p. 275).

In *Solar Bones*, the characters of Marcus and his father evoke traditional representations of the shepherd figure, allowing us once again to trace Romantic echoes in McCormack's engagement with the pastoral and to emphasize the centrality of neoromantic sensibilities in his stream-of-consciousness narrative. We also argue that while Marcus's father, the farmer and fisherman, aligns conventionally with the pastoral tradition, Marcus, the engineer, can also be conceived of as a shepherd figure through his critiques of the threat which the urban world poses to rural existence and his search for harmony through a personal and social coexistence with the natural order.

As we noted in the previous section, Marcus's sense of being in the world is deeply shaped by his perception of his father's harmonious coexistence with nature, reflected in his farming and fishing activities. The idea of his father's unity with nature reemerges repeatedly in Marcus's stream of consciousness, often in the form of symbolic images, such as the scene in which his father appears to merge with the land as he drives his tractor across a field: "getting smaller and smaller in the dim light before man and machine disappeared into a dip in the land as we watched from the gable of the house…" (p. 23). At other times the line of thinking appears in Marcus's more focused reflections, such as his admiration for his father's ability to navigate without modern equipment, using "the triangulating system he had used to navigate by, the old method by which three landmarks were aligned from sea […]" (p. 103). From these memories, the father emerges as an embodiment of the wisdom that only a life lived in close contact with nature can provide. Yet at other moments, the father is remembered for introducing Marcus to the world of politics, offering a social commentary grounded in common-sense truths. This further underscores his connection to the traditional shepherd figure, particularly as portrayed in Renaissance interpretations of the classical archetype.[5] Once again, Marcus

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[5] See, for example, Gifford's discussion of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and its portrayal of "the old shepherd Meliboe" (1999, pp. 28–29).

cannot help but admire his "father's ability to comprehend the whole picture across all those contours and cycles in which our lives were grounded – family, farming and fishing and most memorable of all, politics…(p. 106).

From the idealizing perspective that Marcus adopts in these recollections, the father resembles the ideal of human life embodied by the "[classical pastoral] shepherd, the simplicity of whose life is the goal towards which all existence strives" (Marinelli 2018/1971, p. 4). Nevertheless, while the classical pastoral tradition presents the shepherd as "first and foremost an emblem of humanity, a general rather than a specific type," whose "afflictions and joys are universal" (Marinelli 2018/1971, p. 4), McCormack's depiction of Marcus's father adopts a more individualized focus, aligning more closely with Wordsworth's reimagining of the pastoral figure in the poem *Michael* – "a realistic and broader portrait of an actual person in an actual village" (Gifford, 1999, p. 7). Marcus's memories thus reveal a more realistic image of farming life, a declining means of existence whose hard toils are now unable to provide sufficient means for survival; Marcus's father is ultimately forced to seek additional work beyond the pastoral landscape and advises his son "to get an education" (p. 98), which ultimately leads Marcus to pursue a career in civil engineering.

If Marcus's father, the embodiment of the ideal of life of simplicity and order, initially appears aligned with the classical shepherd – who represents "an emblem of humanity" (Marinelli 2018/1971, p. 4), this image gradually gives way to that of an individual increasingly diminished by his old age, ultimately stripped of his natural wisdom, common sense and, ultimately, his life. In contrast, McCormack's portrayal of Marcus follows a different trajectory. As a shepherd figure, he seems more closely aligned with the Romantic pastoral tradition, which, according to Marinelli (2018/1971), "begins with the individual figure, concentrates upon his hard lot in life, and then magnifies him, almost insensibly, into a figure of titanic proportions, an emblem of general Humanity" (pp. 5-6). While the opening pages of his stream of consciousness introduce Marcus as a simple, ordinary man – husband, father, and member of a small rural community to which he feels deeply connected – he gradually emerges, through various pastoral, religious and metaphysical connotations, as aligned with the "modern shepherd [who] unites sublimity and reality" (Marinelli, 2018/1971, p. 2). Although, as Marinelli (2018/1971, p. 2) notes, the portraits of the "actual shepherd of the modern times" – created by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* and *Michael* to challenge the "fanciful creatures of the old pastoral" – are still rooted in images of farming life, later developments of the modern pastoral often replace the farmer with "some relatively simple figure, sometimes worker or a child" (Marinelli, 2018/1971, p. 5)

At first glance, Marcus's profession as a civil engineer would appear to represent a decisive break from the centuries-long connection with the land of his farming forebears, a clear shift from the rural to the urban. As Marcus himself ponders, "[…] all I have done since I signed up to this job in my mid-twenties and

which, year by year, I have lent my name to, projects which if taken all together, would amount to a fully serviced metropolis with adequate housing for a hundred-thousand souls […]" (p. 205). Nevertheless, Marcus's professional life, like his entire character, remains deeply rooted in the simple daily rhythms and rituals of rural life. His frequent conflicts with local developers and politicians over the engineering projects in which he is involved in rural West Mayo create part of his personal battle against disorder – a struggle that ultimately becomes a symbol of the heroic human effort to confront the vulnerability of existence. Filled with the idea of transcendence – first introduced to him through the childhood perception of the sublime sea and later affirmed through his understanding of his father's life as a form of participation in a higher order which lies beyond human design – grants him a kind of immunity from the fear of "being pressured from one side by politicians and the other by developers, both of them squeezing out all engineering and environmental considerations" (p. 135). After devoting his professional life to preserving harmony between the natural landscape and human construction, and to protecting the safety and lives of those who use the roads, bridges and buildings which he oversees, Marcus comes to see his profession as a "religious vocation with its own rituals and articles of faith" (p. 205). Guided by his religious feelings – first explored unsuccessfully through his abortive theological studies – and by the common-sense wisdom of his father's farming life, Marcus transforms his secular vocation into a form of priesthood. In doing so he aligns himself with the ultimate shepherd figure of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine protection for humankind against the threat of disorder, chaos and collapse in the world. Marcus's engineering thus unites the realistic and the sublime aspects of human life in a way that draws attention to the "happy coincidence of meanings in the word *pastor*, shepherd and priest," which, as Marinelli (2018/1971, p. 8, original emphasis) observes, helped to turn the classical shepherd into a key figure of the Christian pastoral tradition.

Both Marcus's connection with God the Creator, as depicted in his self-perception as "God's fellow engineer" (p. 263), and his association with the protective aspect of God the Shepherd emphasize the crucial ethical dimension that McCormack's protagonist shares with the Romantic version of the shepherd figure created by Wordsworth in his poem *Michael*. McCormack's character, like Wordsworth's, appears to possess "a maturity, integrity and dignity that is both produced by work and extends beyond it" (Gifford, 1999, p. 6). They both show the ability to preserve these qualities throughout lives permeated by disappointment and existential fear. Although Marcus himself had turned away from the hard toil of farming life, he experiences a similar sense of disappointment in his son – who like Michael's son, abandons the land of his forefathers in search of new life overseas – and similar feelings of defeat when a lifetime of effort is interrupted by the moment of death. While Michael's inability to finish the construction of his fold leaves his sheep unprotected, Marcus's premature death prevents him from completing his

efforts to protect the children whose lives will be at risk if the structural faults in a school building are left unaddressed. Although the lifelong efforts of both shepherds – Wordsworth's literal and McCormack's symbolic – might appear as futile attempts to resist the gravitational pull of disorder in the natural and human worlds, it is their ability to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature and the universe that lends their human existence a heroic aura. In the end, Marcus achieves the status that Gifford (1999) attributes to Wordsworth's shepherd: "the 'honourable gain' of moral responsibility and a fulfilled vitality as a human being that connects him with the lifeforce itself" (p. 7). Marcus's ghostly return on All Souls' Day to reflect on his fulfilled and unfulfilled responsibilities – as son, father, husband, and engineer – suggests that it is the moral dimension of our interactions with both the natural and human worlds that McCormack's novel highlights as having the potential to transcend the crude materiality of our existence.

4. Conclusion

Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* offers a compelling example of contemporary Irish fiction's engagement with the legacy of earlier literary traditions. While the novel's revival of experimental modernism has received considerable critical attention, its engagement with the pastoral tradition remains largely underexplored – an oversight which this article has sought to address. As we have argued, the novel's pastoral motifs reveal a metamodern structure of feeling, as defined by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), particularly through its revival of Romantic sensibilities. This revival is most evident in the portrayal of nature as the sublime force that shapes Marcus's personal development and in the parallels between his character and that of the Romantic shepherd – a figure whose personal confrontation with vulnerability and mortality expands into a universal meditation on the human condition. The novel's engagement with the pastoral also reveals that Marcus's stream of consciousness is marked by a persistent oscillation between his life-long yearning for order and harmony and his acute awareness of the forces of disorder pulling his life and his world towards collapse.

This tension between order and chaos, life and death, permanence and impermanence not only profoundly shapes Marcus's worldview, but also renders him a ghost narrator who participates in the "metamodern discourse," marked by the tension between "a modern desire for *sense* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all" (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, p. 6). Although Marcus's sudden and premature death highlights the futility of his endeavours and ironizes his search for a deeper meaning in life, his posthumous narrative voice nonetheless affirms that such meaning can be created through engagement in life's ethical dimension. From this perspective, McCormack's ghost narrator emerges as a "metamodern subject" that represents "an aesthetical commitment: a refusal to accept the current state of

the world, asking readers instead to think critically and defiantly about the ways in which world events are connected and how their own involvement figures in such a world" (van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen, 2019, 52).

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MIGRATION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION: LOVE AND FAMILY AMONG TURKISH RESIDENTS IN HUNGARY AND TÜRKIYE

Abstract: This study examines the conceptual categories of love and family among Turkish residents in Türkiye and Turkish migrants in Hungary in order to explore how migration shapes core cultural concepts. Using a free-listing task with 219 participants, the research identifies both shared cultural foundations and context-specific variations. Contrary to earlier literature that often emphasizes negative or conflictual aspects in Turkish conceptualizations, both groups primarily described love and family in positive terms. Nevertheless, notable differences emerged in the salience of traditional and collectivist elements. These findings indicate that conceptual categories are flexible and responsive to new social and cultural environments, supporting the view of culture as dynamic rather than fixed. The study concludes that migration functions not only as a social and political phenomenon but also as a cognitive process that reorganizes central human concepts.

Keywords: love, family, migration, conceptual categories, cognition, free-listing

1. Introduction

Culture, language, and cognition evolve through individual and collective experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consequently, meaning is not a fixed or universal concept but is constructed by how people and cultures interpret their lives (Lemmens, 2015). Words serve as pointers to concepts and reflect the underlying cultural and cognitive frameworks through which those concepts are built (Palmer, 1996). Concepts such as love and family are fundamental human experiences, stemming from universal needs for attachment, care, and belonging (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006). However, the specific meaning and conceptualization of these terms are far from static or universal (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992; Weigel, 2008). Therefore, understanding the cultural variation in these core concepts is essential for a comprehensive view of human cognition and language.

Cognitive linguistics provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding this conceptual diversity, positing that language is a critical window into cognition and culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Concepts such as love and family are particularly well-suited for comparative cognitive research as they combine a universal foundation with rich cultural particularity. However, a significant gap exists in the empirical research on these domains, as studies have historically relied on a narrow participant base, primarily drawn from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich et al., 2010; Kim & Tjuka, 2024). This overreliance risks presenting culturally specific tendencies as universal human traits, leaving vast areas of human conceptual experience underexamined. Moreover, these studies often treat culture as a monolithic entity, thereby overlooking the complex experiences of migrants who actively co-construct their conceptualizations through continuous intercultural interaction (Lu, 2017; Wang, 2024). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of human cognition, it is therefore essential to move beyond WEIRD samples and incorporate the experiences of diverse populations.

This study seeks to address this critical gap by examining how the concepts of love and family are understood in a dynamic context. The focus is on Türkiye, a country where rapid globalization and urbanization have contributed to significant shifts in values (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Concurrently, persistent political and economic crises have fuelled a continuous wave of migration, particularly among skilled young people, making "brain drain" a subject of national concern (Giannoccolo, 2009; Taşçı, 2024). As these highly educated individuals build lives abroad, questions arise about the evolution of their cultural values and whether their conceptual frameworks remain aligned with those in their country of origin. This context of rapid social change and international mobility makes Türkiye an ideal case study for investigating the flexibility and resilience of cultural concepts. This research, therefore, has two primary aims: (1) to investigate the flexibility of conceptualizations and cultural categories in a non-WEIRD context, and (2) to examine the extent to which migration alters these categories. Using a free-listing task, this study analyzes how Turkish residents in Türkiye and Turkish migrants in Hungary categorize the concepts of love and family. By examining their associations, the research explores how the experience of migration influences these conceptual categories and how such changes are reflected in language. Ultimately, this study offers critical, empirically grounded insights into the relationship between life-changing experiences, cognition, and conceptual categorization, thereby contributing to a more inclusive cognitive linguistic framework.

2. Meaning through a Cultural Lens

Meaning emerges from conceptual structures that organize perception and knowledge (Riemer, 2015). Two concepts are at the core of this process: cognitive schemas and categories. Schemas provide interpretive templates for experience, while

categories link individual instances to broader classes of understanding (Langacker, 2014; Rosch, 1975). Conceptual structures are constantly renegotiated in response to new experiences (Sharifian, 2011, 2017). Far from being static, they are shaped dynamically by social interaction and cultural practices, which explains the variation in meaning across different contexts (Piaget, 1971; Shore, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

This cognitive framework views culture as a system of shared meanings and practices that guides social interaction (Hofstede et al., 2010; Shore, 1998). Such a system gains its coherence and continuity from the recurrent, collective experiences that stabilize cognitive schemas within a community (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, this stability is not absolute; the system must remain flexible to accommodate new information and circumstances (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011). Migration is a powerful catalyst for this cognitive flexibility, forcing individuals to reorganize their conceptual categories through the active negotiation of their heritage and host cultures (Lu, 2017; Wang, 2024). Consequently, intercultural encounters often reshape basic concepts and produce hybrid categories (Sharifian, 2017).

3. Love and Family as Cultural Concepts

While love and family are universal experiences grounded in fundamental human needs for attachment and belonging (Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006), the forms they take are culturally mediated practices (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992; Palmer, 1996). Although the capacity for love is universal, the value placed upon it and its expressions vary widely across cultures and even among individuals (Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006; Heshmati et al., 2019). This inherent variability has led to long-standing difficulties in establishing a singular, cross-cultural definition of the concept (Fehr & Russell, 1991). The concept of family is similarly resistant to a single definition. While its core often revolves around emotional bonds such as trust and care, structural features, such as co-residence or blood relations, are frequently considered secondary (Weigel, 2008). Culture provides the primary framework for defining who counts as family, what love entails, and how these crucial relationships should be maintained (Sharifian, 2011).

The culturally grounded nature of these concepts also makes them inherently fluid. This conceptual dynamism is not only present across different societies but also within them, where the meanings of love and family can vary by generation, social position, or identity (Kuchynskyi, 2022). Migration is a powerful force that increases this variability, as it compels individuals to balance the cultural norms of their home country with those of their new country (Lu, 2017). This process can trigger a range of cognitive and affective responses, including nostalgia (Ward et al., 2001), the extension of existing conceptual categories (Kharkhurin, 2010), the reorganization of core schemas (Lu, 2017), and the blending of distinct cultural models (Shore, 1998).

4. Free-Listing

Cultural Domain Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach used to investigate the structure of cultural knowledge by examining how people group related items into shared conceptual domains (Stausberg, 2021). A key technique within CDA is the free-listing task, which provides insight into shared cultural schemas by revealing how individuals organize items within a given concept (Bernard, 2006). In this task, participants are asked to list all items that come to mind for a specific domain. These responses are then analyzed to identify salient features and underlying cognitive structures that reflect cultural understandings (Bernard, 2006; Sharifian, 2011). The frequency of listed items helps identify culturally central elements, while idiosyncratic responses can illuminate individual or context-specific variations (Bernard, 2006).

While this method is powerful, abstract domains such as love and family are known to yield highly diverse responses, which can present analytical challenges (Manoharan & de Munck, 2017; Sabloff et al., 2017). Despite this limitation, the method's ability to capture both universal elements and cultural experiences in conceptualization makes it an effective tool for exploring cross-cultural (Taşdemir & Naji, 2024) and intra-cultural (Kuchynskyi, 2022) variations, thereby making it ideal for this study.

5. Methodology

This study employed a free-listing task to examine the conceptual categories of love and family among Turkish residents in Türkiye and Hungary. The research was guided by two primary questions: (1) What similarities and differences exist in how Turkish residents in Türkiye and Hungary categorize love and family? and (2) How does the experience of migration shape these conceptual categories among Turkish residents in Hungary? In line with previous cross-cultural research, it was hypothesized that both groups would share a common cultural foundation regarding the central features of love and family. The primary hypothesis was that the Türkiye-based participants would emphasize more collectivist values, whereas the Hungary-based participants would incorporate more individualist and context-specific elements reflecting their migration experience and exposure to the host culture.

Data were collected over three months via Qualtrics, an online survey platform. All instruments were administered in Turkish. The primary instrument was a free-listing task, which prompted participants with two open-ended questions: "What words or phrases do you associate with love?" and "What words or phrases do you associate with family?" Participants could provide as many responses as they wished without a time limit. In addition to the main task, a demographic survey collected data on age, gender, cultural background, and language use. This survey

also included a single-item measure for religiosity, asking participants to rate the importance of religion in their lives on a 6-point scale (1 = not at all important, 6 = very important). As summarized in Table 1, these demographic variables were collected to aid in interpreting how social and cultural factors might shape the conceptualization of love and family.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

	n	Gender Distribution (%)	Age (Min–Max)	Age (M, SD)	Religion & Spirituality (M, SD, Var)
TR-HU	101	Male 41% Female 57%	18–50	36.20, 13.58	2.79, 1.34, 1.79
TR-TR	118	Male 44% Female 50%	18–48	33.52, 8.56	3.75, 1.31, 1.73

Note. TR-HU = Turkish residents living in Hungary; TR-TR = Turkish residents living in Türkiye. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Var = Variance. Religion & Spirituality were measured with a single item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 6 (very important*).*

The study involved two distinct participant groups. The first group (TR-TR) comprised 118 residents of Türkiye (ages 18–48) who were born and raised in Türkiye to Turkish parents and had not lived abroad for more than 2 months. This group was primarily recruited from teachers in Ankara and İstanbul using snowball sampling via personal networks and Facebook. The second group (TR-HU) consisted of 101 individuals (ages 18–50) who shared the same background but had been living in Hungary for at least two years for work or study. They were recruited in Budapest through posters in Turkish supermarkets and via Turkish-language Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

While the gender distribution was similar across both groups, the TR-HU participants were, on average, slightly older and rated religion and spirituality as less important compared to their TR-TR counterparts. Additionally, the TR-HU group answered questions specific to their migration experience, reporting moderate engagement with Turkish culture, stronger engagement with Hungarian culture, and moderate use of the Hungarian language in daily life. They also indicated infrequent thoughts of returning to Türkiye. These findings were consistent with previous research on Turkish communities in Hungary (Kars & Çakmaklı, 2023; Vatansever, 2024).

Table 2: TR-HU Group: Experience in Hungary

Variable	M	SD
Experience of Turkish Culture	2.79	0.87
Experience of Hungarian Culture	3.44	0.93
Frequency of Thinking about Returning to Türkiye	2.01	1.16
Frequency of Using Hungarian in Daily Life	2.92	1.25

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Range: 1.00-5.00; N =101

The analysis of the free-list data began with a systematic cleaning and standardization process, following the methodologies established by Bernard (2006) and Fehr & Russell (1991). Initially, all responses were compiled and alphabetized in a spreadsheet to facilitate the identification of patterns, repetitions, misspellings, and morphological variations. The subsequent standardization involved several steps: suffixes were removed to reduce redundancy, and synonyms or closely related terms were merged into single, coherent conceptual categories.

To ensure the reliability of this categorization, two independent coders reviewed the standardized data. Any disagreements between the coders were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. This process resulted in a more consistent and analytically viable dataset. A summary of the initial and cleaned data, including the total words collected, mean words per participant, and the final number of distinct items for each concept and group, is presented in Table 3. An initial observation was that participants in both groups listed more items for the concept of love than for family.

Table 3: Number of different words listed by participants.

	Concept	Total Words	Mean Words per Participant	Words After Standardization	Distinct Words
TR-TR	Family	822	7.32	675	82
	Love	864	6.97	655	71
TR-HU	Family	571	7.88	444	69
	Love	796	5.65	315	60

After standardization, the data was analyzed based on item frequency. Items mentioned more frequently were considered central to the conceptual domain (Bernard, 2006; Fehr & Russell, 1991). The standardized items were then organized into broader themes that emerged inductively from the data. Unlike Fehr & Russell (1991), idiosyncratic items (i.e., items mentioned by only one participant) were not removed. Instead, they were retained and grouped within the emergent themes, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of both shared and peripheral aspects of the concepts (Bernard, 2006).

6. Findings on Love

For the concept of love, participants in Türkiye listed 71 distinct words, while Turkish participants in Hungary listed 60. An analysis of the most frequent items (Table 4) revealed a shared emotional foundation between the two groups, alongside differences potentially shaped by migration experiences. In both groups, love was predominantly described in affirmative terms. This contrasts with some cultural studies that have highlighted persistent pain and negativity in the Turkish conceptualization of love (Aksan & Aksan, 2012; Gündoğdu, 2019). "Affection,"

"happiness," and "loyalty" were the most frequent items in both groups, which have been widely recognized as universal elements of love (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006). Similarly, items such as "togetherness/unity," "respect," and "sharing" appeared in both lists, reflecting values in Turkish culture that emphasize collectivist ties (Gelfand et al., 2011; Ozeren et al., 2013; Yoldaş & Becerik-Yoldaş, 2015). Consistent with Fehr's (1991) work, participants often linked love with "trust," "caring," "friendship," and "compassion." In addition, as in previous studies, these elements were further combined with "passion" and "sexuality" (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Manoharan & de Munck, 2017).

Table 4: Top 10 love-related words listed by the participants.

	TR-HU Association	Freq.	(%)	TR-TR Association	Freq.	(%)
1	Affection	38	8.5%	Affection	64	9.4%
2	Happiness	34	7.6%	Loyalty	55	8.1%
3	Loyalty	27	6%	Happiness	55	8.1%
4	Passion	25	5.6%	Trust	33	4.8%
5	Trust	19	4.2%	Respect	32	4.7%
6	Sex/Sexuality	18	4.0%	Passion	31	4.5%
7	Excitement	18	4.0%	Excitement	19	2.8%
8	Togetherness/Unity	16	3.6%	Sharing	19	2.8%
9	Sharing	15	3.3%	Togetherness/Unity	17	2.5%
10	Respect	14	3.1%	Marriage	16	2.3%

The results suggest that conceptual categories are flexible and context-dependent (Kuchynskyi, 2022). Despite a shared emotional foundation, the migration experience appears to have fostered a more liberal approach to love among the Turkish participants. A notable example of this difference is the diverse views on marriage and sexuality. While "marriage" was a common item in the TR–TR group, it was mentioned by only three participants in the TR–HU group. Conversely, "sex/sexuality" ranked sixth in the TR–HU group but was almost absent from the TR–TR responses. The theme of migration was also prominent for the Turkish group in Hungary, who listed idiosyncratic items tied to their daily lives, such as "nostalgia," "longing," and "missing home". Their conception of love was linked with specific cultural references, including Turkish foods such as "muhallebi" (a dessert associated with new lovers) and romantic literary figures like "Leyla and Mecnun". Participants also cited renowned poets such as Turgut Uyar, Nâzım Hikmet, and Cemal Süreya. For the TR–HU group, the daily use of English in Hungary may have made switching to their native Turkish during the task feel like a marked, culturally evocative moment. This suggests that language choice during free-listing tasks can significantly shape the conceptual content (Palmer, 1996). To account for both frequent and idiosyncratic items, further analysis revealed differences within broader themes, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Love Clusters

Frequency of Thematic Clusters of LOVE by group
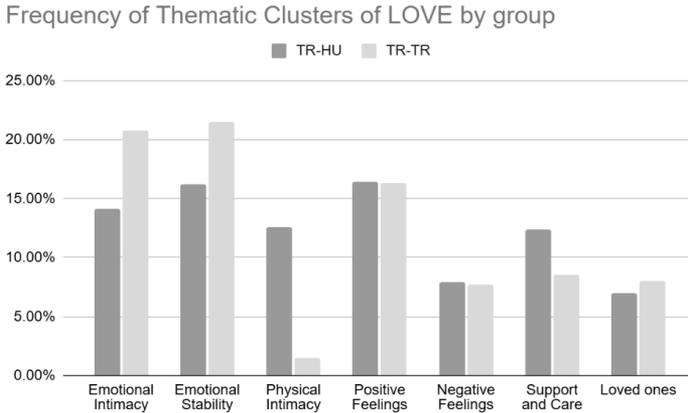
Within the emotional stability theme, both groups emphasized "loyalty" and "trust". However, the content differed: in TR-TR, moral qualities such as "honesty," "patience," "courage," and "sincerity" appeared more often, while TR-HU participants stressed "harmony," "tolerance," and "effort". This suggested that love in Türkiye was framed more through moral ideals. Emotional intimacy was also central, with "affection" and "passion" common in both groups. In Türkiye, "belonging" and "dependency" were frequent, while in Hungary, "romance," "closeness," and "attachment" were more prominent. The most substantial difference appeared in physical intimacy. In Hungary, "sexuality," "kissing," "hugging," and "touching" together made up 12.6% of responses, while in Türkiye they represented only 1.4%.

Within the cluster of support and care, TR-HU stressed "togetherness," "solidarity," and "unity" pointing to the role of social networks for migrants who relied heavily on emotional support (Ward et al., 2001). In Türkiye, "sacrifice" and "selflessness" were more common, echoing collectivist traditions (Hofstede et al., 2010; Saylık, 2019). Negative emotions added another interpretive layer. Both groups listed "longing" and "sadness," but TR-HU continued with "nostalgia" and "loneliness," reflecting their lives as migrants. In Türkiye, "sadness" and "longing" were followed by "chaos/fight," "madness," and "pain".

Finally, the words for loved ones highlighted cultural contrasts. TR-HU often mentioned "pets" alongside "family," "spouse," "child," and "lover," while in Türkiye the most frequent were "lover," "spouse," "family," and "soulmate". The frequent mention of "pets" in TR-HU responses suggested that pets were seen as meaningful figures of attachment, expanding the category of love to include non-human companions. "Pets" did not appear in TR-TR data but was noted as a universal category in Fehr's empirical research (1991). In Fehr's study, participants were entirely Western, and the inclusion of pets reflected the individualistic cultural setting in which non-human companions could be central to emotional life. In the present

study, both groups were Turkish, but only those living in Hungary included pets in their categorization of love. Following Shore's (1998) cultural mapping, this can be identified as an accommodation in which intercultural experiences reshape existing cultural frames or create new ones. Participants living in Hungary were exposed to a society where pet ownership is common and socially valued, and over time, their categories of love expanded to include pets. In this case, TR-TR participants reflected the stronger human-centered and collectivist framing of love in Türkiye.

7. Findings on Family

For the concept of family, participants in Türkiye listed 82 distinct words, while participants in Hungary listed 69. A strong cultural consensus emerged in terms of emotional, structural, and moral elements (Koşaner & Çimen, 2024). Core concepts such as «love,» «parents,» «trust,» and «support» were frequently listed by both groups (see Table 5). However, the TR-TR participants placed stronger emphasis on moral values, with «respect» and «loyalty» as prominent elements. Conversely, these values were less pronounced in the TR-HU data. Instead, the TR-HU list featured «food and beverages» and «longing» in its top ten, suggesting that the migrant experience evokes nostalgia and an awareness of the absence of familiar cultural elements. The findings for the TR-TR group align with Weigel›s (2008) central features of family and are consistent with previous research on Turkish culture, which has outlined collectivist values, strong kinship ties, and gendered roles (Çelik-Abay, 2023; Gelfand et al., 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Table 5. Top 10 family-related words listed by the participants

	TR-HU Association	Freq.	(%)	TR-TR Association	Freq.	(%)
1	Parents	44	8.7%	Love	48	7.3%
2	Love	32	6.3%	Parents	45	6.8%
3	Happiness	31	6.1%	Trust	41	6.2%
4	Trust	31	6.1%	Support/Solidarity	31	4.7%
5	Support/Solidarity	29	5.7%	Happiness	31	4.7%
6	Home	23	4.5%	Togetherness/Unity	29	4.4%
7	Peace/Serenity	23	4.5%	Child	28	4.2%
8	Child	18	3.5%	Home	28	4.2%
9	Food/Beverage	17	3.3%	Peace/Serenity	28	4.2%
10	Longing	15	2.9%	Loyalty Respect	25	3.8%

When grouped into clusters, three broad categories emerged: Emotional Bonds & Intimacy, Support & Responsibility, and Family Structure & Roles (Figure 2). In the TR-HU group, the three clusters were nearly equal in size, whereas in the

TR-TR group, Support & Responsibility was dominant (30.7%). For the TR-TR group, this category showed a strong emphasis on obligation and duty, consistent with Koşaner & Çimen›s (2024) findings. Within Emotional Bonds & Intimacy, both groups emphasized «affection,» «compassion,» and «comfort».

Figure 2. Family Clusters
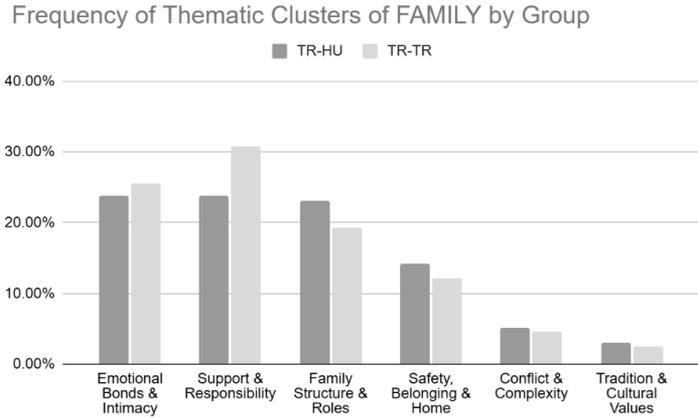
The most evident difference emerged in the Support & Responsibility cluster. Both groups viewed family as a source of support. However, TR-TR participants expressed this through moral and value-related terms such as "solidarity," "unity," "forgiveness," "loyalty," "respect," "responsibility," "effort," and "sacrifice". TR-HU participants also emphasized "support/solidarity" and "unity", but their cluster was less varied and carried a weaker moral framing compared to the TR-TR group.

Finally, the Family Structure & Roles cluster showed broad similarities. Both groups emphasized "parents" and "child" as central figures, followed by "siblings" and "spouse". Mentions of "grandparents" and "marriage" appeared in both groups but were less frequent in Hungary. Furthermore, TR-HU participants more often included extended kinship terms such as "biology" and "blood relation", while TR-TR participants frequently referenced items related to raising children. Overall, both groups shared a cultural consensus on family; however, participants in Türkiye placed greater emphasis on moral responsibility, whereas those in Hungary reflected their migrant context through themes of longing and cultural absence.

8. Discussion

The results confirmed the study's expectations and addressed its central questions. Turkish residents in Türkiye (TR-TR) and in Hungary (TR-HU) showed strong agreement in their associations with love and family, reflecting

both universal aspects of these concepts (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Weigel, 2008) and a shared cultural base (Sharifian, 2011, 2017). At the same time, the differences highlighted the flexible nature of meaning and how categories adapt to social settings and personal experiences (Lemmens, 2015; Palmer, 1996). Both groups described love and family in positive, supportive terms, a finding that contrasts with earlier research highlighting conflict, pain, and burden in Turkish conceptualization of love (Aksan & Aksan, 2012; Gündoğdu, 2019) and family (Koşaner & Çimen, 2024). Furthermore, the migration from a collectivist to a more individualist context appears to have facilitated a shift from obligation-centered to more flexible, emotion-centered understandings.

Individual and unique associations offered further insight into how migration reshapes conceptual categories. Participants from the group TR-HU mentioned cultural items such as food, literary figures, poets, and frequently expressed feelings of nostalgia as well as longing. They were more likely than their counterparts in Türkiye to associate love with physical intimacy and to extend the concept to include pets. These patterns, which were absent in the Türkiye data, align more closely with Western conceptualizations of love (Fehr & Russell, 1991). These findings can be contextualized within the political and social dynamics of Turkish migration. Many TR-HU participants expressed little desire to return to Türkiye, a sentiment consistent with previous research on Turkish communities in Hungary (Kars & Çakmaklı, 2023; Vatansever, 2024). This community often reflects the ongoing "brain drain" from Türkiye, where educated individuals migrate in response to political and economic dissatisfaction (Giannoccolo, 2009; Taşçı, 2024). Consequently, the more liberal and individual-centered responses of the TR-HU participants may reflect both the influence of their host society and the pre-existing values that motivated their decision to migrate. However, this is where the free-listing method introduces a significant methodological challenge. The method is effective at capturing what people associate with a concept, but it cannot explain why they make those associations. Therefore, interpreting the underlying reasons for these conceptual shifts is inherently complex and requires more direct methods, such as in-depth interviews. Despite limitations, the free-listing method remains a valuable tool for revealing meaningful differences within and across cultural contexts (Sabloff et al., 2017; Stausberg, 2021).

Overall, this study demonstrates how cognition, language, culture, and the environment interact to shape the way concepts are understood (Langacker, 2014; Lemmens, 2015; Palmer, 1996). Furthermore, it reinforces the idea that categories are not fixed but flexible, varying across individuals and contexts (Rosch, 1975, 1978). Methodologically, the findings affirm the value of free-listing for capturing both shared understandings and intra-cultural diversity (Bernard, 2006; Kuchynskyi, 2022; Manoharan & de Munck, 2017; Stausberg, 2021). Theoretically, the results support the Cognitive Linguistics view that cultural categories are dynamic and context-dependent, shifting through processes such

as migration and intercultural contact (Kharkhurin, 2010; Sharifian, 2017; Shore, 1998). Furthermore, the observed shift in conceptual categories underscores the need for caution in cognitive studies, since culture is often treated as a monolithic entity despite evident variability within it.

9. Conclusion

The findings raise a critical question: are the differences between the TR-TR and TR-HU participants the result of migration itself, or do they reflect pre-existing values among those who chose to migrate? The study suggests that both processes are involved. Intercultural contact in Hungary appears to have expanded the participants' conceptual categories. The TR-HU group reorganized existing categories by incorporating elements of the host culture, which helps explain why themes such as sexuality and pet companionship appeared more frequently in their responses. These topics are more openly discussed and socially accepted in Hungary. On the other hand, methodological factors must be considered. The TR-TR group was partly recruited through snowball sampling within conservative networks, which may have created social pressure to avoid sensitive topics related to physical intimacy. In contrast, the TR-HU participants were recruited more randomly and anonymously, which may have encouraged openness. While free-listing is a powerful tool for capturing spontaneous associations, particular care is needed when studying domains tied to sensitive cultural values in conservative contexts.

This study shows that even within a single ethnic group, core concepts such as love and family can vary widely across social environments. Such conceptual flexibility challenges earlier cross-cultural approaches that treat cultural identity as relatively fixed. Beyond its theoretical contributions, the research has practical value. Understanding how migrants conceptualize love and family provides insight into broader processes of identity, belonging, and adaptation. These results are relevant not only to cognitive linguistics and cross-cultural psychology but also to migration studies and policies. Embassies, cultural centers, and NGOs could use such insights to understand better how migrants navigate between the cultural models of their home and host societies. Future research could compare different host societies, examine intergenerational differences among migrants, and consider the effects of varying lengths of stay within the same generation. Additionally, demographic factors such as the region of origin, political views, and religiosity could be explored to understand how they shape conceptual categories. Such work would deepen our understanding of how migration reorganizes cultural models across contexts and over time. Ultimately, this study highlights the cultural flexibility of the human mind and demonstrates that migration is not only a political or social process but also a cognitive one.

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ALGERIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMMON GROUND IN BUILDING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY IN HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITIES

Abstract: In the context of the increasing cultural diversity in Hungary, common ground remains largely unidentified, thereby hindering the development of strategies that create a meaningful intercultural communication between Algerians and Hungarians. The current research investigated how shared experiences, values, and cultural practices are perceived to shape interactions. Drawing on the results of a questionnaire distributed to 40 Algerian individuals studying in Hungary, and through a mixed-method approach, the collected data were treated using SPSS and MAXQDA software. Additionally, via thematic analysis, the study examines instances of cultural convergence and divergence, stereotypes, and practices for overcoming communicative challenges. The findings accentuated the significance of identifying and leveraging shared understanding as a foundation for fostering empathy and mutual respect. However, they ascertained that language barriers are not the main factor affecting intercultural communication virtuosity. Eventually, this research elaborates on the complex interplay between identity and strategy where embracing diversity is a proof of existence of both core and emergent common ground conceptions. To sum up, it provides valuable insights into the cultivation of cross-cultural comprehension across diverse contexts for further discussion.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Algerian, mixed-method, common ground

1. Introduction

According to Clark (1996), common ground is a prerequisite for a conversant to perceive knowledge from another individual (as cited in Kesckes, 2013). As a matter of fact, this concept is viewed in different approaches among which is the same theory, supporting the notion as specialized mental representations existing a priori, that is essential for prosperous communication. However, on the other side, Kesckes and Zhang (2009) highlighted a more dynamic view of common

ground as an emergent property, where it is conceptualized not as fixed knowledge but as constantly evolving during interactions. Therefore, communication involves continuous adjustments and co-construction by participants, emphasizing a more trial-and-error process in intercultural dialogue. By considering these perspectives on common ground, one can observe its crucial role in intercultural communication by providing a basis for communal understanding, facilitating effective dialogue, and creating a shared context for interaction. The continuous updating and revision of common ground during communication help establish a coherent and meaningful exchange across cultural boundaries.

Clark and Brennan (1991) proposed the theory of grounding in communication to highlight the importance of mutual understanding when cultural and linguistic differences exist. Therefore, this common knowledge forms the basis for repair which is vital in intercultural settings where language and cultural backgrounds differ. In Hungary, the latest census data signify that the foreign-national population increased significantly, growing from 350,000 to nearly 430,000 over recent years, with nearly one quarter of the capital's population being non-Hungarian (Sarkadi, 2024). Also, the official quotas for Algerian students were raised from 35 to 100 student (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad, 2023). In direct response to this change, an association to represent the community was created by members who have been in Hungary for more than 15 years. Their aim is to support integration by sharing their experience and teaching the language as well. Despite this escalating diversity and the presence of sizeable communities, from Algeria and beyond, the intercultural connection that relates the different communities remains underexplored while common ground can serve as a foundation for successful social coherence (Bajzát, 2023).

The current paper elaborates on the shared common ground by analyzing the strategies employed to build a constructive intercultural communication. Accordingly, this study takes a narrower scope of intercultural pragmatics using a qualitative analysis targeting Algerians who are residing in Hungary for the purpose of studying. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, 40 students participated to express their perceptions and share experiences in managing misunderstandings and building rapport. This aligns with the broader understanding in intercultural pragmatics that successful communication requires awareness of diverse cultural norms and communication patterns. At the end, this theory provides the conceptual tools to analyze how communication succeeds or fails due to the presence of common ground in such a socially and culturally diverse country like Hungary.

2. The role of common ground in shaping intercultural communication

The socio-cognitive approach emphasizes that common ground is a dynamic construct which is mutually constructed by interlocutors throughout the communicative process. The core and emergent components join in the construction

of common ground in all stages although they may contribute to the construction process in different ways, to different extents, and in different phases of the communicative process (Kesckes and Zhang, 2009).

People tend to interpret things based on their own experiences which influence interaction. In other words, interlocutors, being egocentric, depend merely on their individual perception rather than what they have in common (Kim, 2023). During the interaction, they apply cooperation as a driving force to react to non-understanding for instance (Mustajoki, 2023). Ultimately, cooperation and egocentrism are both present in all stages of communication to a different extent. Therefore, the socio-cognitive approach is a necessity in revising the notion of common ground with a view that pays equal attention to the aforementioned aspects. The interplay of both with the adaptation of new perceptions result in a highly dynamic communication (Diedrichsen, 2023). Under the same track, intention is considered a dynamically changing phenomenon that is the main organizing force in the communicative process. It is not only private, individual, pre-planned and a precursor to action, but also emerging and social (Kesckes and Zhang, 2009).
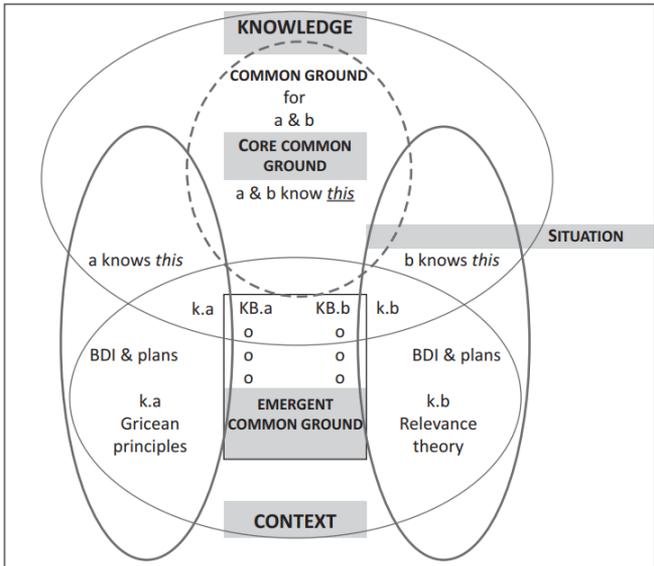

Figure 1. Core and emergent common ground with shared knowledge (Nolan, 2023)

Kecskes (2013) claimed that by integrating the pragmatic and cognitive approaches and incorporating varying sources, there are two sides of common ground: core common ground and emergent common ground. The former refers to the relatively static, generalized, common knowledge that belongs to a certain speech community as a result of prior interaction and experience, whereas the latter

pertains to the relatively dynamic, particularized, private knowledge created in the course of communication that belongs to the individual.

Based on Figure 1, core common ground is depicted through what a and b know and presume they share. In the case of intercultural encounters, it is typically limited which depends on the individual knowledge base, and this is the source of potential misunderstanding. Therefore, interlocutors work to move the individual boxes k.a and k.b into the emergent common ground to locate egocentrism and cooperation together. That is why this study uses a socio-cognitive basis to investigate mechanisms by which participants include in their new situations (Nolan, 2023).

3. The socio-cognitive approach

Salience is understood as the dominance of certain signs, entities, and phenomena relative to others, a phenomenon deeply intertwined with language, culture, and perceptual contexts. Through three distinct characteristics, the Socio-cognitive Approach (SCA) diverges from previous and contemporary perspectives on salience. It highlights the reciprocal relationship between language, production, and comprehension. Thus, speakers' and listeners' linguistic behaviors are influenced by salience in both processes. Eventually, this approach extends the scope of salience beyond linguistic factors, acknowledging the significant role of perceptual salience. The interaction between linguistic and perceptual salience shapes both production and interpretation of language. Hence, the cultural and linguistic specificity of salience emphasizes that its influence is contingent upon individuals' experiences, encounters, and linguistic backgrounds (Kecskes, 2010).

Several studies, among which the current study, have attempted to answer the questions of how people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds act and react in intercultural discourse; how common-ground or intercultural understanding is established, and what new discourse structures result from intercultural communication (Lee-Wong, 2002; Shea, 1994; Ningsih, 2019). Henceforth, the researcher considers it appropriate to place this investigation within an intercultural pragmatics framework, though a socio-cognitive view was necessary for the current theoretical approach.

The Algerian and Hungarian participants arrive with distinct cultural senses and formulaic repertoires that constrain expectations and lexical-pragmatic interpretations. According to Allan (2023), in momentary exchanges, grounding, clarification or metapragmatic marking generate emergent common ground that can override or reframe initial mismatches.

Many apparent failures stem not from the lack of linguistic competence but from divergent core assumptions or what we call culture sense. As interlocutors begin with egocentric presumptions, they tend to adjust them via grounding operations including acknowledgment, verification, and repair to build transient shared meaning. Ultimately, this will result in successful mutual understanding falling under emergent

common ground (Nolan, 2023). Common ground as a cognitive object contributes to the interpretation of the Algerian Hungarian case by locating, within the experiences, how common ground originates to specify the operations through which participants accommodate their previous knowledge to the new evolving one.

4. Research methodology

The main problem of a floundered communication is that interactants have very little common ground. They need to co-construct it in the conversational process (Kecskes, 2013). Hence, the study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the views and perceptions expressed by Algerians studying in Hungary in connection with establishing common ground for effective intercultural communication?

2. What are the key factors affecting intercultural communication mastery?

3. In what ways do the strategies used by Algerians students facilitate intercultural communication?

The primary objective of any research is to address research questions by utilizing a specific research approach. There are primarily two approaches to research: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to test hypotheses or make statistical inferences. Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses on collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as words, images, and observations to gain insights into the meanings and experiences of individuals or groups. In recent years, there has been an increasing use of mixed-method research, which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem.

On the one hand, what best achieves the research aim is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure the credibility and validity of the results, providing breadth and depth to understand and analyze strategies of intercultural interactions. Essentially, this emphasizes the significance of directing attention towards identifying patterns of misunderstanding, and also the way cultural backgrounds influence these patterns. The research not only quantifies data extracted from the open-ended questions but also uses them to support the numerical frequencies in order to achieve its aim (Karasz & Singelis, 2009).

a. Participants

Sirwan (2025) suggests that a range of 20 to 40 participants is sufficient for studies on community attitudes, as this sample size helps capture a wide spectrum of perspectives. Referring to Algerian students' messenger groups and the

researcher's academic community, an online questionnaire was sent; to which 40 students responded. The target population is specific and hard to sample randomly. The convenience sampling design was chosen due to the selection of respondents based on the easy accessibility and known contacts (Kumar, 2019). As a result, its use presents significant challenges for representativeness and generalizability. In other words, as the study falls under an exploratory nature, the research results' quality is prioritized over generalization although transparency about its limitations is maintained. It is among the pioneering studies in the field, and it can be tested with more randomized sampling in the future with specific immigrant communities.

b. Data elicitation techniques

An online semi-structured questionnaire was designed, a mixture of closed and open-ended questions, via Google Forms. One aspect is that online questionnaires, as a tool to collect data, pave the way to meet the appropriate conditions to match an exploratory design of the study with the minimum efforts in terms of time, cost, design, and administration (Dörnyei, 2003).

To pilot the questionnaire, a sample group of 12 students participated to check for clarity of questions, coherence, and consistency of responses. Therefore, the designed online questionnaire included four main parts in the following order: The first section collected data about the sample's profiles, and the second section tackled the participants' intercultural communication experience. In addition, the researcher focused on the cultural differences and connections as perceived within the Algerian community. The final section was devoted to investigating Algerian perspectives on conventional Hungarian stereotypes. This structure was validated by two professors who are experts in intercultural pragmatics and discourse. Construct validity confirmed its usability and alignment with intercultural communication theory and framework. Content validity ensured that the methodological instrument covers all relevant dimensions of the research problem.

The demographic data alongside the personal perceptions from the questionnaire were analyzed using the 27th version of SPSS software. Due to the qualitative nature of the former, it is hard to measure them directly for interpretation. To reduce bias and subjectivity of these perceptions, they were objectified and captured using quantitative questions, specifically Likert scales and multiple-choice. This approach allows for a clear measurement but was essential for completing the study within a restricted timeframe due to the size of the sample. In addition to performing descriptive statistics, it was employed to visualize the findings. This involves inserting data from Google Forms into the software to create tables. Therefore, it converts the results into visual representations like bar charts and pie charts to illustrate the sample's answers. Such graphical output helps communicate quantitative findings effectively and make data more accessible and interpretable.

For a contextual depth, the questions that required extended answers were analyzed both thematically and using MAXQDA which was used to code the part where qualitative data were presented. That is to categorize and analyze textual data by data importation first. Afterwards, the step for coding after initial reading can describe what kind of data are illustrated. Assigning codes depends on the frequency of words and ideas which facilitates the division of concepts. Together, they handle perceptions on common ground to explore how these results arise according to different factors.

5. Analysis of the findings

Throughout this section, the results from the online questionnaire are organized, displayed, interpreted, and discussed starting with the quantitative elements moving to the qualitative ones.

5.1. The sample profiles

Based on the results shown in Figure 2, there are five different levels of proficiency in the Hungarian language reported among Algerian students: elementary, full professional, bilingual, professional working, and no proficiency. The majority of respondents (53.66%) indicated elementary proficiency, reflecting only a basic understanding of the language, while (36.59%) reported no proficiency, indicating a lack of knowledge or ability in Hungarian. A marginal percentage (4.88%) of participants reported full professional proficiency with minority share of students who have bilingual and professional working proficiency.
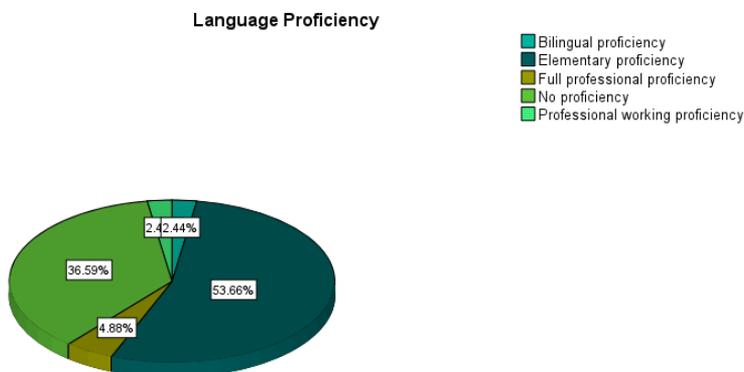

Figure 2. Hungarian Language Proficiency of Algerian Students

According to the data provided through a pie chart in Figure 3, it indicates that respondents differ in terms of their length of residence in Hungary. The majority

(41.46%) corresponds to students who have spent more than three semesters in the host country while (26.83%) indicated a duration of 2 semesters. Students who spent 1 semester only are in lower percentage of (21.95%). Finally, the smallest proportion (9.76%) corresponds to students who have spent more than one year in Hungary. These statistics offer insights into the distribution of lengths of stay among the surveyed population, with the majority having spent 2 years or more abroad.
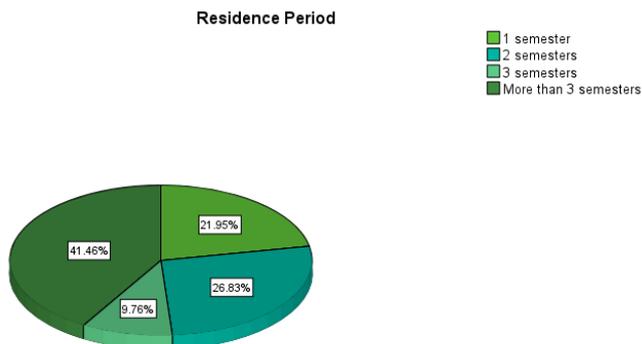

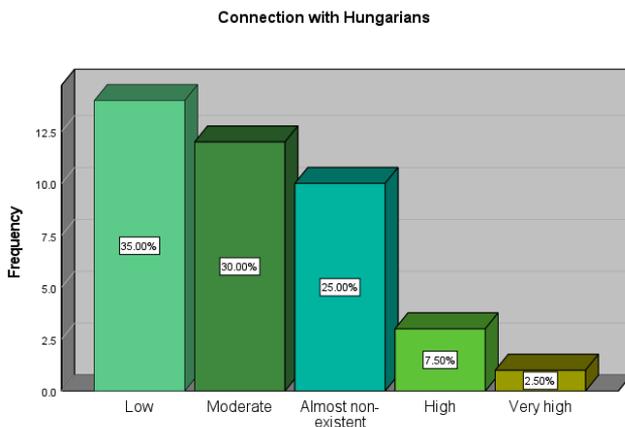Figure 3. Algerian Students Duration of Residency

Figure 4. Experiences of Algerian Students Regarding their Connection with Hungarians

Figure 4 demonstrates that respondents have varying levels of connection with Hungarian people during their stay in Hungary. Approximately, three-fifths of respondents described their connection as "low" and "almost non-existent," indicating a minimal or limited interaction with Hungarian individuals (60% of both). These findings were also supported by Németh et al. (2025) who also found that students' interactions with Hungarians are quite rare. Meanwhile, a lower proportion

194

(30%) reported a "moderate" level of connection, signifying a somewhat balanced level of interaction with Hungarian people. On the other hand, only (10%) of the sample reported a "high" to "very high" level of connection, suggesting a strong and significant connection with Hungarian individuals during their time in Hungary.

5.2. Influence of language on intercultural communication effectiveness

When comparing Figure 4 results of the contact with Hungarians and the findings in Figure 5, a conclusion can be drawn about the reasons that would hinder such a match. To elaborate on that, respondents perceive varying degrees of impact of their knowledge of the Hungarian language on their intercultural communication effectiveness. 10 students (25%) reported that their knowledge of Hungarian has a "fair" influence on their communication, indicating that Hungarian language proficiency impacts their intercultural communication effectiveness. Similarly, (25%) of the sample expressed a "neutral" stance, indicating neither a significant hindrance nor facilitation. Meanwhile, 20% of students pointed out a "moderate effect," implying that their language skills somewhat hinder their productiveness in intercultural communication. However, the two extremes received the minimal portion (15%). On the one hand, participants suggested that they are able to navigate intercultural interactions adequately using English only. On the other hand, the remaining (15%) was on the opposite side to support the significance of the language proficiency in such linguistic instances. These findings highlight the diverse perceptions regarding the role of language proficiency in intercultural communication depicting the fact that language is not the main problem hindering Algerian students from having an interculture within the Hungarian atmosphere.
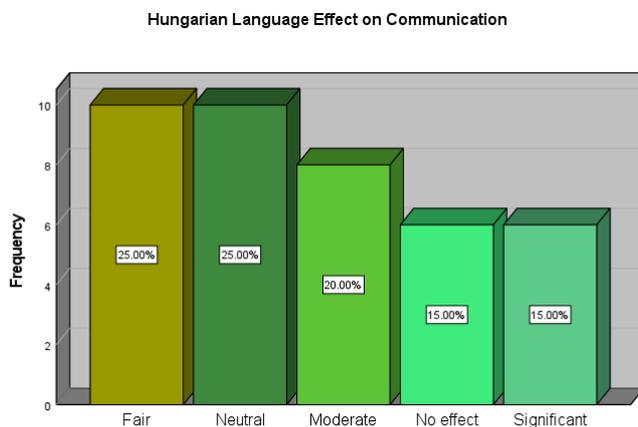

Figure 5. Algerian Students' Perspective on the Influence of Hungarian Knowledge on Intercultural Communication

5.3. Strategies for facilitating intercultural communication

According to Kecskés (2013), participants can use several strategies to build common ground, which were provided for Algerian students to choose from in a multiple-choice question. In Figure 6, the most frequently selected strategy is awareness of cultural differences (25.25%), meaning that students recognize the importance of understanding both self and the interlocutor's cultural background and communication style to balance egocentric and cooperative perspectives. Finding common ground (18.18%) and embracing diversity (18.18%) also emerge as significant strategies, indicating that participants adapt to differing personal and situational contexts of communicators, which influence language choices and interpretations. In addition, they do not rely solely on predefined shared knowledge, but they also co-construct emergent common ground. Situational factors (17.17%) further emphasize the importance of context. A lower proportion of the participants (14.14%) recognizes that identifying commonalities in promoting effective intercultural communication is as considerable as any other strategy as well. Matching interlocutors' understanding (7.07%) is the least frequently mentioned strategy, suggesting that while important, it may not be as widely prioritized as other strategies. Overall, these findings underscore the need for students to employ a range of strategies to navigate diverse contexts successfully.
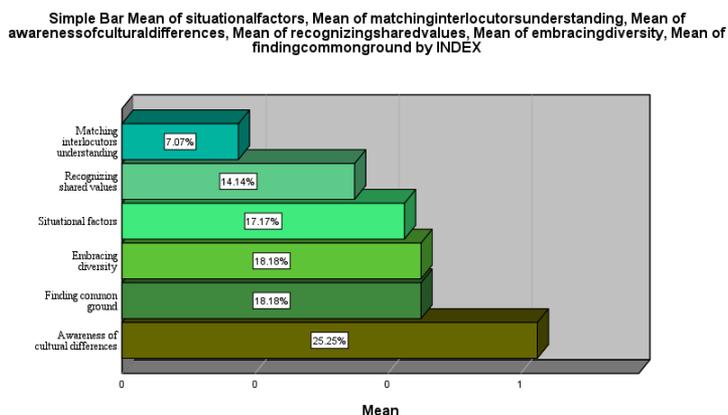

Figure 6. Algerian Students' Strategy Choice to Facilitate Intercultural Communication

5.4. Strategies for addressing and challenging preconceptions in interactions

It is evident from Figure 7 that being open-minded emerges as the most prevalent strategy (32.35%), highlighting the importance of fostering receptivity to diverse perspectives and actively challenging ingrained beliefs. Providing more resources to substantiate arguments (29.41%) represents another approach, suggesting the value

of empirical evidence in debunking stereotypes. Another notable trend depicted in figure 7 is offering firsthand accounts that defy stereotypes and foster empathy (20.59%). Meanwhile, setting boundaries appears to be a less common strategy (7.35%), indicating that while it might be chosen in sensitive situations, it may not be the primary method chosen for challenging stereotypes in such communication sets. Eventually, it makes it another supporting proof for the subsequent characteristics of Algerians. Respondents demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to how they are perceived by others, which is consistent with the fact that neglecting what people think is the least chosen choice to deal with preconceptions (4.41%).

Simple Bar Mean of beingopenminded, Mean of Narratingpersonalexperiences, Mean of Providingmoreresourcestoproveyourpoint, Mean of Settingboundaries, Mean of Neglectingwhatpeoplethink, Mean of Avoidingsuchconversations by INDEX
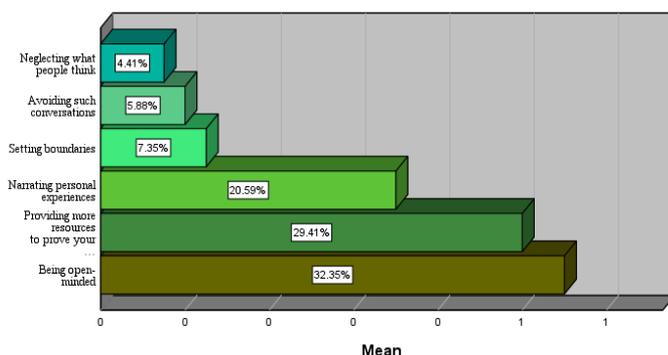
Figure 7. Algerian Students' Ways of Addressing Stereotypes

5.5. The contribution of cultural practices or traditions to the connection of both nations

A key observation from Figure 8 is that historical connections emerge as the most frequently cited shared value, with (30.77%) highlighting the significance of shared historical background and connections within the community. Culinary traditions follow closely behind, with (23.08%) of cases acknowledging the importance of food culture in shaping communal identity. Festivals and celebrations are mentioned by a smaller proportion, accounting for (11.54%), indicating a lesser but still notable aspect of shared cultural heritage. Interestingly, a significant portion of respondents (13.46%) chose mutual exclusivity, indicating that there are no shared aspects among the group and suggesting a diversity of perspectives within the community especially on religion. At the same level, participants pointed out resemblances in traditional music and dance (13.46%). Finally, multiple answers (5.77%) highlighted the shared concept of conventionalism under different illustrations. In the current case, such concept is related to how ethics are not

based on external reality but arise from conventions within a society. Norms and rituals, for instance, are grounded in social agreements through which Algerian and Hungarian create a consensus of expectations between individuals. Both conventionalism and mutual exclusivity were inferred based on the open-ended field in this multiple-choice question to convert them into numerical data.

Simple Bar Mean of HistoricalConnections, Mean of CulinaryTraditions, Mean of TraditionalMusicandDance, Mean of FestivalsandCelebrations, Mean of Theydonotshareanyaspecttogether, Mean of idontknow, Mean of Conventionalism by INDEX
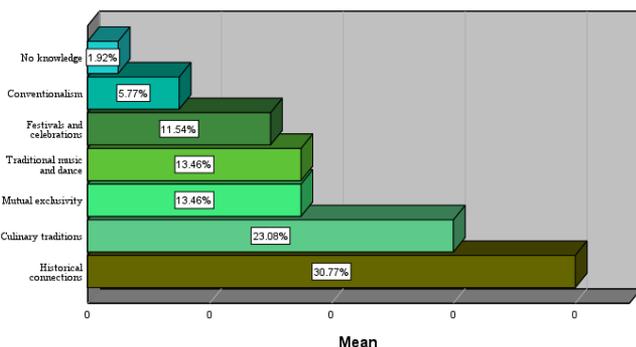

Figure 8. Students' Perceptions on the Cultural Practices that Connect Algerians and Hungarians

5.6. Algerian identity influence on communication
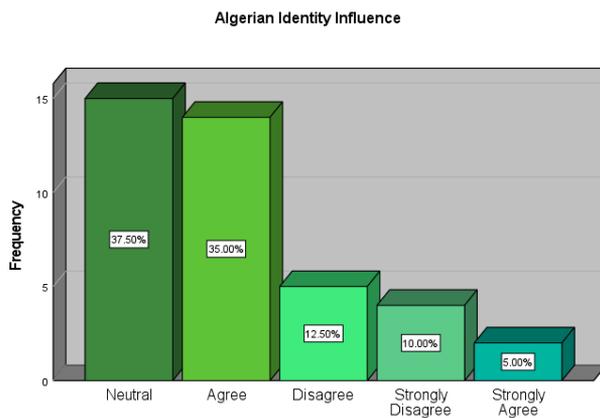
Algerian Identity Influence

Figure 9. Algerians Student's Opinion about the Identity Influence

Figure 9 displays remarkable findings on Algerian students' perceptions about the effect of their identity. While (40%) agreed that their Algerian identity does influence these aspects, a lower but still significant proportion (37.5%) expressed a neutral stance. This suggests that many respondents neither strongly feel their Algerian

identity affects their communication style and interactions nor strongly feel that it does not. Conversely, (22.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, implying a strong rejection of the notion that their Algerian identity plays a significant role in their communication style and interpersonal interactions in Hungary.

5.7. The different aspects of Hungarian and Algerian culture

General Cultural Differences	Seven Algerian students expressed a perception of stark contrasts between Hungarian culture and their own Algerian culture. Almost every aspect of Hungarian culture differs from theirs.
Language	The predominant difference mentioned by respondents is the language. While this does not directly relate to cultural practices, it significantly impacts their ability to engage with Hungarian culture fully.
Work Ethic	One respondent highlighted the Hungarian commitment to work as distinct from their own cultural norms, specifically differences in workplace behavior and social interactions.
Tradition, Cuisine, and Social Norms	Differences in tradition, cuisine, and social norms were observed by respondents, indicating variances in cultural practices, eating habits, and societal expectations. Six participants highlighted the prevalence of a drinking culture in Hungary, suggesting disparities in socializing and leisure activities compared to their country of origin. The perceived introverted tendencies among Hungarians were also mentioned by respondents, pointing to variations in socializing patterns and personality traits.

Table 1. Algerian Students' Perspective on the Differences Between the Two Cultures

5.8. Algerians' experience with sense of commonality in Hungary

A total of 11 responses indicated a lack of significant instances where the respondents felt a strong connection or commonality with Hungarians. This could suggest a perceived lack of meaningful intercultural interactions or shared experiences. However, other answers provided another perspective of this cultural context where there was a positive interaction with a Hungarian individual. Despite an accidental mishap, the respondent felt a strong sense of connection due to the responsible and respectful treatment received from the shopkeeper.

Another interesting connection is the existence of friendships. As an example, a strong bond was formed with a Hungarian friend who actively assists this Algerian student, shows genuine interest in their background, and respects cultural differences. Also, another instance was illustrated to explain the supportive nature of a Hungarian friend who helped a student in resolving a technical error that happened. It suggests that personal relationships play a crucial role in fostering intercultural connections. Not only that but also demonstrating care and concern for their well-being.

Being open to meeting new people can create opportunities to discover potential intercultural connections. One experience was where a shared meal led to an exchange of cultural knowledge and experiences, or a casual conversation in a coffee shop highlighting the potential for spontaneous interactions to foster a sense of commonality.

When individuals from different cultures find shared interests, values, or experiences, it provides a foundation for understanding and connection. Common ground allows for the bridging of cultural gaps and the development of a sense of familiarity and empathy.

5.9. Misconceptions and stereotypes about Algerians

Table 2 presents Algerian students' perceptions of Hungarians' misconceptions about Algeria.

Geographical confusion	Respondents noted that many Hungarians are unfamiliar with the location of Algeria and sometimes confuse it with other countries, such as Nigeria.
Race and wealth assumptions	Some Hungarians assume that Algerians or North Africans should be black, while others assume they are extremely rich. These misconceptions reflect underlying biases and lack of knowledge about the diversity of appearances and socioeconomic backgrounds within the Algerian society.
Language misconceptions	There's a common misconception that Algerians primarily speak French as their first language.
Dark side of stereotypes	North Africans were stereotyped for terrorism, economic migration, and strict religious beliefs mentioning not accepting friendships with others, reflecting a perception of cultural isolation and religious conservatism. These stereotypes perpetuate and contribute to prejudice and discrimination.
Perceptions of personality and intellect	Algerians or North Africans are lazy and not very smart, generalizing about the competences of individuals from these regions.

Table 2. Hungarians' Misconceptions about Algerians

Students use this one approach to correct misconceptions which is by providing accurate information about Algerian culture, heritage, and diversity. They explain the origins of North Africans, such as Amazigh, Arab, and Turkish influences, and highlight the cultural richness beyond simplistic racial categorizations. When faced with curiosity, some students choose to engage directly and respectfully with the person asking questions. They explain cultural differences without taking offense, recognizing that the other person might simply be seeking understanding. Another strategy involves sharing personal experiences and insights into Algerian life and the positive qualities of Algerians. This can help dispel stereotypes and foster mutual understanding and appreciation. In cases where derogatory remarks are

made, some individuals choose to respond with humor. By laughing off offensive comments like being called a terrorist, they disarm the situation and refuse to let such remarks affect them negatively. Eventually, these qualitative data match our quantitative results that tackled the Algerian students' strategies in addressing misconceptions when faced with Hungarians.

6. Discussion of the results

Algerian students positively perceive common ground as an effort to merge the mental representations of shared knowledge. They also have constructive attitudes to switch a negative situation based on misconceptions to a productive setting to facilitate interaction. This concept is present as memory that we can activate, shared knowledge that we can seek, and rapport that we can build, as well as knowledge that we can create in the communicative process (Kecskes and Zhang, 2009).

Although language is the most important means of communication, the first section of the study highlighted that the difficulty of intercultural communication goes beyond language. Some students have the Hungarian course as compulsory during their studies, and the majority of the sample have been in Hungary for more than one year. It is quite a short period to build a rapport for such distinct communities. However, they reported low to almost non-existent connection with the people. Still, this period is not enough for Algerians to adopt a language that is extensively different from Arabic, which is their mother tongue or Latin (languages they learned at school). To support this, Algerian students are allocated in dorms where only internationals reside, so this will lead to the lack of integration within the Hungarian community.

Another significant factor playing a role in the effect of Hungarian language on intercultural communication is the presence of English language alongside. As long as students have the chance to speak primarily in English, they would only use Hungarian on very rare occasions, which makes it more rational that some participants claim that lack of knowledge of Hungarian has no effect on their communication. However, since the highest percentage are people who have at least elementary proficiency, they know how Hungarian knowledge play a significant role in their communication.

According to the findings, other key factors in addition to language, be it English or Hungarian, affecting intercultural communication mastery can be depicted in participants' connection with each other. Since Algerians are experiencing from low to almost nonexistent connection with Hungarians, it results in difficulties having intentions to develop meaningful interactions.

When it comes to the intersection of identity, strategy, and common ground, the relationship can be elaborated in an interesting flow. As the awareness of cultural

differences is the most adopted strategy by Algerian students, it explains that they are culturally and psychologically conscious about the change they will undergo to be in a totally different country. Additionally, the biggest proportion of participants agreed that both cultures shared many aspects which added up to cooperation as interlocutors feel more connected having mutual thinking than egocentric when cultures diverge. Here, intercultural instances work by shifting salience from self-centric filter to an integrative angle.

Numerous components, like history and language, build an individual's identity, not to mention culture and religion. Algerian students are born and raised in a country where religious values shape their lifestyle and background. Therefore, they are mentally ready to see the contrasting nature of the surrounding they are going to, shifting from a Muslim to a non-Muslim nation. Their nature to seek acknowledgement is nationally known and depicted in choosing to be open minded for facing stereotypes. Their identity is highly related to the grounding elements they use to verify and repair in case of misunderstanding. The least they intend to do is neglect what the other interlocutors think about them as such opportunities allow them to express their patriotic sense.

Based on the answers, their explanation in such situations rely merely on clarification and willingness to narrate personal experiences using metapragmatic marking. This will eventually lead them to find the common ground in a linguistic context. It shows the link between sharing and narrating personal experiences with also providing more resources in an intercultural discussion and their opinion about historical connection between the two countries, which might be surprising for some.

These strategies underscore the importance of empathy, mutual respect, and leveraging shared understanding in fostering effective cross-cultural interactions. Factual, educational, collaborative approaches to facilitate communication are among the ways the participants use. However, there are other significant instances where humor was used to deflect. In other words, it is one strategy to de-escalate comments and prevent breakdowns. This is to include more reception to the new information allowing for the construction of new emergent common ground. This finding aligns with the theoretical understanding of common ground. In sensitive situations, humor functions primarily as a shield to avoid conflict, thereby preserving future interaction. Based on the socio-cognitive approach, humor lowers the egocentric barriers between interlocutors creating a positive context for emergent common ground. This is a highly adaptive communicative strategy to face challenges during intercultural linguistic exchange.

As the dialogue progresses, both parties' personal and socio-cultural contexts are incorporated for a collaborative meaning-making process (Kecskés, 2013). As this process might not be easy for people, participants struggle since it is a completely different context incorporating multiple backgrounds.

7. Limitations and recommendations

The limitations of the present study are crucial to help the readers avoid misinterpreting the research findings as they serve to elucidate some suggestions for further research studies. Starting with quantitative restrictions, the results are drawn upon perceptions from a relatively small sample size although it encompasses an in-depth qualitative analysis. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to broader Algerian-Hungarian relations. This is further compounded by the non-probability sampling strategy, convenience sampling specifically, to select participants. The latter were not easily accessible, which resulted in a not fully representative sample missing certain perspectives from the data. Eventually, this allows further research to expand the focus including the Hungarian sample in the orientation as well.

To follow up, for qualitative considerations and due to the nature of the study, questionnaires result in self-reported data that serve the participants' own experiences and attitudes. This allows for deeper, yet subjective angle limited by potential biases such as social desirability. The findings might be used as a start up for prospective research plans to align effectively with the actual behavior in real-time intercultural interactions, identifying articulated strategies for building common ground in different contexts.

8. Conclusion

This paper presented the findings of a narrow-scope study conducted on the role of common ground as a basis to have effective intercultural communication. The validity of the findings is supported by Zhou (2023) who reviewed what Kecskes claimed, and that common ground is inevitable in communication. The more common ground we activate, the better we are able to understand each other, and the more efficiently we achieve our desired goals. As Algerian students had the same opinion, they have chosen strategies that contribute to the development of such a background. In addition to the main findings, the research also sheds light on the influence of language proficiency, particularly Hungarian. From Algerians perspective during their studies in Hungary and supported by (Urhan Torun, 2016), language barriers are not the sole factor influencing effective communication, but also stereotypes about religion, ethnicity, and race.

The study illustrates the effect of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds on how individuals act and react in intercultural discourse. It also examines the strategies employed to establish common ground, such as finding commonalities, creating a sense of shared understanding, and seeking and activating shared knowledge. These strategies align with Kecskes' (2013) notion of emergent common ground, which is the dynamic, particularized knowledge created through the communicative process between individuals. To align with the findings of Michael (2017) about misconceptions, the paper discusses how Algerian students deal with cultural

differences and stereotypes from Hungarians, indicating the need to co-construct emergent common ground to bridge these gaps and foster mutual understanding.

Through the influence of Algerian identity and cultural practices on communication, the researcher showed how common ground is established demonstrating the interplay between cultural background and how it shapes interactions. Revealing the new discourse structures resulting from intercultural communication, the paper's exploration provides empirical support for Kecskes' (2013) theoretical framework, highlighting the dynamic nature of common ground in shaping cross-cultural interactions. The results supported the existence of shared history which eventually created the appropriate context for communication.

After cataloging what cultural differences and similarities exist between Algerian and Hungarian societies, the results demonstrate the pragmatic strategies including openness, empathetical skills, cognitive flexibility and adaptability students use for constructing effective intercultural conversations. Therefore, Algerian students tend to enlarge the central process moving from their individual knowledge base into a new constructed one. The study contributes to the contemporary theories on common ground and intercultural communication as a test on how interlocutors localize their non-existent core background to create a primary one based on communication. The results showed how participants are highly agentive in such situations which align with the conclusions of Kada Zair (2025). These mechanisms are not as linguistic as they seem, but embodiment and emotional regulation play a significant role in shaping such behaviors to base it on a cognitive model.

The research requires institutions like embassies and associations representing Algerians in Hungary, or worldwide, to integrate them through international events and activities where also Hungarians are provided the opportunity to have cultural understanding and flexibility. By incorporating them, students will have the opportunity to develop better attitudes towards adapting to a new setting with a clear purpose supporting diversity.

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