



COGNITIVE-STYLISTIC AND LINGUCULTURAL NATURE OF ENGLISH LITERARY APHORISMS

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Abstract. This article examines the cognitive-stylistic nature of English literary aphorisms by integrating cognitive-stylistic, linguocultural studies, and literary analysis. Although literary aphorisms have traditionally been regarded as concise expressions of philosophical wisdom, their cognitive mechanisms and conceptual organization have received comparatively less attention. Proceeding from the principles of cognitive stylistics, the article argues that literary aphorisms should be understood not merely as stylistically marked utterances but as compressed cognitive models that conceptualize reality and verbalize the author's worldview. The study outlines the theoretical foundations of cognitive stylistics and demonstrates how foregrounding, conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending, stylistic convergence, and conceptual opposition function as expressive and cognitive mechanisms in literary aphorisms. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between linguistic form and conceptual structure, showing how stylistic devices direct readers' attention, activate background knowledge, facilitate inferential interpretation and restructure conceptual representations. The article further explores the linguocultural dimension of literary aphorisms, arguing that they verbalize culturally significant concepts and values while preserving collective cultural experience. It is concluded that the cognitive-stylistic approach provides a comprehensive framework for explaining the semantic density and cultural significance of English literary aphorisms.

Keywords: cognitive stylistics, literary aphorisms, foregrounding, conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending; stylistic convergence; linguocultural studies; conceptualization; cultural values.

INGLIZ BADIY AFORIZMLARINING KOGNITIV-STILISTIK VA LINGVOMADANIY TABIATI

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Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada ingliz badiiy aforizmlarining kognitiv-stilistik tabiati kognitiv stilistika, lingvomadaniyatshunoslik va badiiy tahlil yondashuvlarini integratsiyalash asosida tadqiq qilindi. Badiiy aforizmlar an'anaviy ravishda falsafiy donolikning ixcham ifodasi sifatida talqin qilingan bo'lsa-da, maqolada ularning kognitiv-stilistik tamoyillari asosida adabiy aforizmlar faqat stilistik jihatdan belgilangan nutq birliklari emas, balki voqelikni konseptuallashtiruvchi va muallifning dunyoqarashini verbal ifodalovchi siqilgan kognitiv modellar sifatida talqin qilinishi asoslab berildi. Tadqiqotda kognitiv stilistikaning nazariy asoslari yoritilib, foregrounding (ilgari surish hodisasi), konseptual metafora, konseptual integratsiya, stilistik konvergensiya hamda konseptual qarama-qarshilik (oppozitsiya)ning badiiy aforizmlarda ekspressiv va kognitiv mexanizmlar sifatida qanday namoyon bo'lishi ko'rsatib berildi. Shuningdek, lingvistik shakl va konseptual tuzilma o'rtasidagi o'zaro bog'liqlikka alohida e'tibor qaratilib, stilistik vositalarning o'quvchi e'tiborini yo'naltirishi, avvalgi bilimlarini faollashtirishi, inferensial talqinni ta'minlashi hamda konseptual tasavvurlarni qayta shakllantirishi tahlil qilindi. Maqolada badiiy aforizmlarning lingvomadaniy jihatini ham ko'rib chiqilib, ularning madaniy jihatdan muhim konseptlar va qadriyatlarni verbal ifodalashi, shuningdek, jamoaviy madaniy tajribani saqlab qolishi asoslab berildi. Xulosa sifatida kognitiv-stilistik yondashuv ingliz badiiy aforizmlarining semantik zichligi va madaniy ahamiyatini izohlash uchun kompleks nazariy asos yaratishi ta'kidlandi.

Kalit so'zlar: kognitiv stilistika; badiiy aforizmlar; foregrounding (ilgari surish hodisasi); konseptual metafora; konseptual integratsiya; stilistik konvergensiya; linguomadaniyatshunoslik; konseptuallashtirish; madaniy qadriyatlar.

Introduction

Since ancient times, people have sought to express their observations about life, society, morality and human existence in concise yet meaningful forms. One of the oldest and most intellectually significant forms of such expression is the aphorism. Due to its brevity, semantic density and philosophical depth, the aphorism has attracted the attention of philosophers, literary scholars, linguists and more recently, cognitive scientists. Although aphorisms are remarkably concise, they can convey complex ideas, stimulate reflection and influence the readers' perception of reality. Their popularity across cultures and historical periods demonstrates their unique ability to compress extensive conceptual knowledge into memorable linguistic forms [Gross, 2003; Morson, 2003].

The term *aphorism* derives from the Greek "*aphorismos*" meaning "definition" or "concise statement". This term was first associated with the medical writings of Hippocrates, whose Aphorisms consisted of brief observations regarding diagnosis, treatment, and the practice of medicine. Over time, however, aphorisms evolved beyond their original scientific

function and became an independent literary genre that expresses philosophical reflections on universal aspects of human existence, including life, love, friendship, morality, freedom and death [The Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025; Gross, 2003]. Unlike proverbs or traditional sayings, which generally represent collective wisdom, literary aphorisms reflect the author's individual worldview, artistic creativity and conceptual interpretation of reality [Mieder, 2004]. From a linguistic perspective, literary aphorisms represent highly condensed discourse in which every lexical and syntactic choice contributes to meaning construction. Their semantic richness is achieved not through textual length but through the interaction of stylistic devices, conceptual structures and readers' inferential processes. Because much of their meaning remains implicit, readers must actively integrate linguistic information with their background knowledge, cultural experience and conceptual expectations to reconstruct the intended interpretation. Thus, literary aphorisms require a considerably higher degree of cognitive participation than ordinary declarative statements [Stockwell, 2002; Semino, 2008].

Traditional stylistic studies have primarily explained the expressive power of aphorisms by analysing stylistic devices such as metaphor, paradox, antithesis, irony, and parallelism [Leech & Short, 2007]. While such analyses successfully describe the linguistic organization of aphorisms, they often provide limited explanation of how these stylistic patterns influence readers' conceptualization and interpretation. Recent developments in cognitive linguistics have significantly expanded the study of literary language by demonstrating that stylistic devices function not merely as ornamental features but also as cognitive mechanisms that organize conceptual knowledge and guide the interpretation of discourse [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Stockwell, 2002; Simpson, 2004]. This theoretical shift has given rise to cognitive stylistics, an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from cognitive linguistics, stylistics and literary criticism to explain how literary meaning emerges through the interaction of linguistic form and cognitive processes [Gavins & Steen, 2003]. This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of literary aphorisms. Despite their concise form, literary aphorisms exhibit a remarkably high degree of conceptual complexity. Their interpretation depends upon the activation of cognitive mechanisms such as foregrounding, conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending, inference and knowledge structure. These mechanisms enable readers to move beyond the text's literal meaning and construct rich conceptual representations that reflect both the author's worldview and broader cultural knowledge [Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Stockwell, 2002; Semino, 2008]. Hence, literary aphorisms should be regarded not merely as stylistically marked

units but as compressed cognitive models that conceptualize reality through artistic language. In addition to their cognitive significance, literary aphorisms perform important linguocultural functions. They verbalize culturally significant concepts, preserve collective values, and transmit philosophical knowledge accumulated within a particular linguistic community. Through their interaction of linguistic form, conceptual content and cultural meaning, literary aphorisms become repositories of both individual and collective experience, reflecting universal human experience [Wierzbicka, 1997; Karasik, 2002].

The present article aims to investigate the cognitive-stylistic nature of English literary aphorisms by integrating cognitive stylistics with linguocultural analysis. Particular attention is paid to cognitive mechanisms underlying literary interpretation, including foregrounding, conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending, stylistic convergence and conceptual opposition. The article further examines how these mechanisms interact to construct meaning, express the author's conceptual worldview and verbalize culturally significant concepts and values.

Theoretical Part

The emergence of cognitive linguistics in the late twentieth century significantly transformed the study of literary language by shifting scholarly attention from the description of linguistic structures to the cognitive mechanisms underlying meaning construction. This development give rise to cognitive stylistics, an interdisciplinary field that integrates cognitive linguistics, stylistics and literary criticism to explain how readers construct meaning through the interaction between textual structures and conceptual processes [Stockwell, 2002; Gavins & Steen 2003; Simpson, 2004; Ashurova & Galieva, 2018]. Unlike traditional stylistics, which primarily focus on identifying expressive linguistic devices, cognitive stylistics investigates how these devices guide interpretation by activating conceptual knowledge, inferential reasoning and mental representation. From a cognitive-stylistic perspective, literary meaning is not regarded as an inherent property of the text but as the result of dynamic interaction between the author's linguistic choices and the reader's cognitive system. During the reading process, readers draw upon their background knowledge, conceptual schemas, frames and cultural experience to interpret both explicit and implicit meanings [Stockwell 2002 Semino 2008]. Consequently, stylistic analysis extends beyond the description of linguistics features to the investigation of the cognitive mechanisms through which literary texts shape conceptualization. Within this framework, stylistic devices perform not merely as aesthetic but also a cognitive function. Metaphor, paradox, antithesis, irony, parallelism,

lexical repetition and foregrounding serve as cognitive instruments that direct readers' attention, activate conceptual structures, reorganize existing knowledge and encourage inferential interpretation [Simpson, 2004; Stockwell, 2002]. Thus. Stylistic form becomes inseparable from conceptual content while literary discourse itself represents the author's conceptualization of reality. This approach is particularly applicable to literary aphorisms. Although aphorisms are characterized by extreme brevity, they possess remarkable semantic density and conceptual complexity. Their interpretation depends upon readers' ability to reconstruct meanings that extend beyond the explicit linguistic form by activating background knowledge and establishing conceptual relationships. In this sense, literary aphorisms can be regarded as compressed cognitive models that verbalize complex philosophical and cultural ideas through short linguistic structure.

Among the principal theoretical concepts of cognitive stylistics, foregrounding occupies a central position. Originating in the Prague Linguistic School, foregrounding was initially understood as the artistic prominence of linguistic forms achieved through deviation and parallelism. [Mukařovský, 1964; Leech, 1969]. Contemporary cognitive stylistics extends this understanding by interpreting foregrounding as a cognitive mechanism that enhances the salience of conceptually significant textual elements and facilitates deeper processing of literary meaning [Stockwell, 2002; Van Peer, 1986]. Since literary aphorisms deliberately concentrate semantic information within a limited linguistic space, foregrounding constitutes one of the principal mechanisms responsible for their cognitive and expressive effectiveness.

Equally important is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, according to which metaphor represents a fundamental mechanism of human cognition rather than merely a rhetorical ornament [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980]. Literary aphorisms frequently employ conceptual metaphors to explain abstract notions through more concrete experiential domains, thereby restructuring readers' conceptual understanding. This process is further complemented by Conceptual Blending Theory, which explains how new meanings emerge through the integration of multiple mental spaces [Fauconnier & Turner, 2002]. In literary aphorisms, conceptual blending often underlies paradoxical and ironic statements, enabling readers to construct meanings that cannot be derived from the literal interpretation of individual linguistic elements. Accordingly, cognitive stylistics provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for investigating literary aphorisms because it explains not only how they are stylistically organized but also why they produce such remarkable conceptual, aesthetic and interpretative effects. It

enables the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural perspectives, revealing literary aphorisms as intersections of artistic language, conceptual thought, and cultural knowledge.

Literary aphorisms are among the most condensed forms of literary discourse, in which complex philosophical ideas are compressed into concise, memorable linguistic structures. Despite their brevity, they possess remarkable semantic density because their interpretation extends beyond the literal meaning of words and depends on the interaction among linguistic form, conceptual structures, and readers' cognitive processes. From the cognitive stylistics point of view, literary aphorisms should therefore be regarded as compressed cognitive models that organize, conceptualize and communicate human experience through stylistically foregrounded language [Stockwell, 2002; Simpson, 2004]. Unlike ordinary declarative statements, literary aphorisms rarely communicate information directly. Instead, they encourage readers to reconstruct implicit meaning through inference, conceptual association and the activation of knowledge structure. Their effectiveness lies not only in what is explicitly stated but also in the conceptual structures that readers activate during interpretation [Semino, 2008]. So, stylistic devices found in literary aphorisms perform a dual function: they increase aesthetic expressiveness while serving as cognitive mechanisms that guide conceptualization.

One of the most characteristic of cognitive-stylistic features of literary aphorisms is foregrounding. Originally introduced by representatives of Prague Linguistic School, foregrounding refers to the artistic prominence of linguistic elements achieved through deviation and parallelism [Mukařovský, 1964]. Within cognitive stylistics, however, foregrounding is defined more broadly as a mechanism that directs readers' attention towards conceptually significant elements of a text, thereby facilitating deeper cognitive processing [Stockwell, 2002; Van Peer, 1986; Dzhusupov, 2020]. Since literary aphorisms are intentionally concise, they rely heavily on foregrounding to maximize semantic impact. Every lexical choice, syntactic structure and stylistic device contributes to highlighting the central conceptual idea. There are various means of foregrounding including semantic deviations, parallelism, convergence of stylistic devices, defeated expectancy, etc. [Short, 1996; Dzhusupov, 2024]. Oscar Wilde's famous aphorism illustrates one of these means: "*Experience is simply the name we give our mistake*" [Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1892]. At the linguistic level, the aphorism appears deceptively simple. However, its cognitive effect results from foregrounding the unexpected relationship between the concepts EXPERIENCE and MISTAKES. In fact, experience is associated with wisdom, knowledge and maturity. Wilde

deliberately replaces this conventional conceptualization by redefining experience through failure. The unexpected association between experience and mistakes creates semantic deviation, while the simple sentence structure makes this paradox especially noticeable. This encourages readers to rethink the concept of experience and view mistakes as an important source of learning. In this way, foregrounding functions as a cognitive mechanism that reshapes conceptual understanding. Foregrounding is also achieved through the convergence of stylistic devices. The interaction of several stylistic devices increases both the salience of the linguistic form and the complexity of conceptual interpretation. So, literary aphorisms rarely rely on single stylistic devices; instead, they achieve their expressive and cognitive force through multiple stylistic devices.

One of the defining characteristics of literary aphorisms which creates foregrounding, is the convergence of stylistic devices. Arnold (2002) defines convergence as the accumulation of several stylistic means within a relatively small textual space, each reinforcing the expressive function of the others. From the perspective of cognitive stylistics, convergence serves an additional function: it makes the main idea more prominent by activating multiple cognitive processes simultaneously. Instead of working separately, different stylistic devices work together to create a single conceptual meaning. A vivid example can be found in Oscar Wilde's aphorism stated in the story *The Nightingale and the Rose*: "Love is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace". The aphorism demonstrates the convergence of metaphor, epithet, personification, comparison, lexical repetition and syntactic parallelism. Stylistically, these devices create vivid imagery and emotional intensity, From the cognitive perspectives, however, they construct the conceptual metaphor together i.e. LOVE IS PRICELESS TREASURE. Precious stones, wealth, commerce and the marketplace activate the conceptual framework of material value, yet this frame is immediately negated by the impossibility of purchasing love. The contrast between material wealth and the impossibility of buying love encourages readers to rethink the meaning of value, showing that spiritual values are more important than material wealth. The convergence of stylistic devices, therefore, serves several functions. First, it directs readers' attention towards the key conceptual domain. Second, it activates culturally shared knowledge associated with wealth, exchange and value. Third, it generates emotional involvement by combining imagery with evaluative language. Finally, it facilitates inferential interpretation by encouraging readers to reconstruct meanings that remain only partially expressed in the text. Thus, stylistic convergence should be regarded not only as an accumulation of expressive devices, but

as an integrated cognitive strategy through which literary aphorisms achieve their semantic density.

Beyond their stylistic and cognitive characteristics, literary aphorisms possess considerable linguocultural importance. The function not only as artistic expressions of an individual author's word picture but also as linguistic representations of culturally shared knowledge, values and patterns of conceptualization. From the perspective of linguocultural studies, language serves as a repository of cultural memory through which societies preserve and transmit their intellectual, moral and aesthetic experience [Wierzbicka, 1997; Karasik, 2002]. Literary aphorisms constitute one of the most condensed forms of such cultural knowledge because they verbalize complex value systems in concise and memorable linguistic forms. The conceptual content of literary aphorisms is closely associated with the notion of the literary concept. Like cultural concepts, literary concepts represent structured mental formations that integrate linguistic, cognitive, emotional and cultural information. However, unlike general cultural concepts, literary concepts reflect the author's individual conceptualization of the world while simultaneously drawing upon collectively shared knowledge. Therefore, literary aphorisms may be regarded as verbal manifestations of literary concepts that conceptualize universal aspects of human experience while reflecting the author's individual world picture.

Analysis of literary aphorisms demonstrates that they consistently verbalize a relatively stable system of universal concepts, including LIFE, LOVE, DEATH, HOPE, FRIENDSHIP, FREEDOM, TRUTH, MAN and WOMAN. These concepts transcend individual literary works and represent fundamental categories through which people conceptualize both personal and social experience. Their frequent use in literary aphorisms reflects not only universal human concerns but also the author's personal interpretation of these concepts. For example, Emily Dickinson's aphoristic statement: *"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul"* verbalizes the universal concept HOPE through the conceptual metaphor HOPE IS A BIRD. From a cognitive perspective, the metaphor maps characteristics associated with birds (freedom, resilience, movement) onto the abstract concept of hope [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980]. From a linguocultural perspective, however, the image of the bird also embodies culturally recognized associations with spiritual endurance and inner strength. Thus, the aphorism reflects an individual poetic vision and a culturally shared conceptualization of hope. Similarly, William Blake's aphorism: *"It is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend"* verbalizes the moral concepts FRIENDSHIP, FORGIVENESS and

BETRAYAL. The stylistic opposition between enemy and friend foregrounds the ethical complexity of interpersonal relationships. Cognitively, it challenges reader's conventional expectations concerning trust and forgiveness. At the same time, the aphorism reflects one of the universal moral values shared across cultures that betrayal by those closest to us produces a deeper emotional impact than hostility from strangers. Hence, the linguocultural significance of literary aphorisms lies in their ability to unite individual artistic creativity with collective cultural wisdom. They preserve culturally important concepts while simultaneously reinterpreting them through the author's unique conceptual worldview. This interaction between individual cognition and collective cultural knowledge explains why literary aphorisms continue to retain their communicative relevance long after the historical circumstances of their creation have changed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study has examined the cognitive-stylistic nature of aphorism by integrating insights from cognitive stylistics, cognitive linguistics and linguocultural studies. The analysis demonstrates that literary aphorisms should not be regarded merely as concise stylistically marked units but as compressed cognitive models that conceptualize reality through the interaction of linguistic form, conceptual structures and cultural knowledge. The cognitive-stylistic approach shows that stylistic devices serve functions that extend far beyond aesthetic ornamentation. Foregrounding directs readers' attention towards conceptually significant information; stylistic convergence enhances semantic density through the interaction of several stylistic devices; conceptual metaphors structure abstract knowledge by mapping it onto concrete experience; conceptual blending generates new meanings through the integration of mental spaces while conceptual opposition stimulate inferential reasoning by restructuring readers' expectations. Together, these mechanisms enable literary aphorisms to convey extensive conceptual information in a highly economical linguistic form. The study further demonstrates that literary aphorisms possess considerable linguocultural value. By verbalizing concepts, they preserve culturally significant knowledge while reflecting the author's individual understanding of the world at the same time. The findings confirm that cognitive stylistics provides a productive methodological framework for investigating literary aphorisms since it explains not only their linguistic organization but also the cognitive and cultural mechanisms underlying their interpretation. Future research may further extend this perspective by undertaking comparative analysis of literary aphorisms across different languages and cultures.

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