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Semantics of the South: A Cognitive Semantic View of the Concept of South as Illustrated in Two North American Gothic Traditions: Davies's *Fifth Business* and McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to use Conceptual Metaphor Theory to interpret social and cultural issues coming from a comparative literary and cultural study named "Provincialism, Gothic, Grotesque: Davies's *Fifth Business* and McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*". The subject novels of the study have a set of common issues that can be connected by the fact that they are "products" of the two southern communities presented in these novels, one belonging to Southern Ontario and the other to the Southern States of the USA. Therefore, a cognitive semantic analysis of the concept of SOUTH contributes to the understanding of the problematic issues we meet in the novels. The paper begins with a general introduction and the discussion of the term SOUTH. After this, a semantic approach is proposed and SOUTH is connected to the concept of DOWN, which allows it to be subjected to further analysis. What follows is a set of illustrations coming from the previous analysis of the two novels – they illustrate links between DOWN and other concepts as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*.

Résumé

Cet article est un essai d'interprétation des questions sociales et culturelles émanant d'une étude comparative littéraire et culturelle nommée « Provincialisme, Gothique, Grotesque : *Fifth Business* de Davies et *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* de McCullers » par la théorie conceptuelle de la métaphore. Le sujet des romans de cette étude est un ensemble de questions communes qui

peuvent être connectées par le fait qu'ils sont un «produit» de l'une des deux communautés du sud présentées dans ces romans, l'un représentant le sud de l'Ontario et l'autre les Etats du Sud des Etats-Unis d'Amérique. Par conséquent, une analyse sémantique cognitive de la notion de SUD contribue à la compréhension de la problématique que nous rencontrons dans ces romans. L'article commence par une introduction générale et la discussion du terme SUD. Après cela, une approche sémantique est proposée – où SUD est lié à la notion de BAS – ce qui lui permet d'être soumis à d'autres analyses. Ce qui suit est un ensemble d'illustrations provenant de la précédente analyse des deux romans – ils illustrent les liens entre BAS et d'autres concepts tels que proposés par Lakoff et Johnson dans *Metaphors We Live By*.



Introduction

Many literary studies end up turning into studies of culture – this is an inevitable process which stems from the fact that (a vast majority of) literature actually comes from cultures and represents a response to various cultural, political, historical and social issues. This paper is the aftermath of something planned to be a comparative literary study of two novels. The Master's thesis entitled “Provincialism, Gothic, Grotesque: Davies's *Fifth Business* and McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*” was started in early 2008 with only one goal – to compare the two novels by the authors coming from two similar “Southern” genres – Southern Gothic (characteristic of the Southern states of the USA) and Southern Ontario Gothic. The results of the comparison demanded a cultural, political, historical and social analysis, which ought to have shed light on the reasons that influenced the similarities and differences between the two communities described in these novels. The main aim of this paper is to take the mentioned analysis to another level – that of semantics. The concept of *south* seems to be the main link connecting provincialism, gothic, grotesque, Robertson Davies, Carson McCullers, their novels and the places described in them, including cultural, political, historical and social issues. That is why a semantic analysis of this term can be very useful when we try to grasp the problematic nature of the two southern regions.

South

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term *south* as follows:

Towards, or in the direction of, that part of the earth or heavens which is directly opposite to the north; With reference to place or location; spec. (U.S.), in or into the southern states; That one of the four cardinal points which is opposite to the north; The southern part of a country or region; The southern lands of Europe; The southern states of America. (OED, 2002)

When used with the definite article and a capital S, *the South* usually refers to the region of the United States lying to the south of the Mason-Dixon line, i.e. the Southern United States and mainly the Deep South, in a general historical context. *The South* is also used for “the developing nations of the world”, i.e. The Third World. When comparing “the souths” of various countries, or at least comparing literature and other arts coming from those regions, another meaning of these terms might emerge. There are quite a few countries where *the South*, being the poorer part of the country, tends to develop certain traits specific to that piece of the land only. These countries include the USA, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Serbia and many others. The “souths” of these countries seem to share a number of features, some of which will be presented in this paper. For the purpose of illustrations that will follow in the final part of this paper, the list should also include Southern Ontario small-towns and villages in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ In these countries, we can identify a cultural “climate” that could be labelled *the southern cultural space*. This space seems to create a specific kind of atmosphere and a social and psychological framework for the development of issues encompassed by the term provincialism. When talking about the South in any of these countries, we usually refer to economically under-developed regions. This economic depravity, lack of financial stability and distance from the cultural centres affect all spheres of life and block the arrival of new knowledge, people and ideas. The presence of provincialism and other social and cultural issues caused by poverty and lack of education seems to have created fertile grounds for a number of literary genres and sub-genres. The authors belonging to these genres managed to draw inspiration from southern communities and, in the process, a large number of similarities between these authors have emerged.

¹ On the other hand, there is a set of countries (such as England, Germany, Uruguay or Sweden) where the southern part of the country is more developed – in these countries, *the southern cultural space* simply does not exist, or it represents something totally opposite to the one presented in this paper or in the thesis which inspired the paper.

After reading the biographies of Robertson Davies and Carson McCullers, one would say that the works of two people with lives so different could never bear too many similarities. However, drawing parallels between *Fifth Business* (Davies, 1970/1990), describing a Southern Ontario's community, and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (McCullers, 1940/2000), which describes a town in the South of the USA, brings the two writers closer to one another. Primarily, these similarities come from the fact that the authors picked similar environments to be the settings of their novels. Namely, both Davies's Deptford and McCullers's unnamed town are small and situated away from their cultural centres. They are both southern, one being placed in Southern Ontario, the other in the Deep South of the USA, which may be a pure coincidence, but the similarity of the issues present in both of them make the reader believe that the geographical position really has something to do with the appearance of various problems. McCullers belongs to Southern Gothic – a macabre writing style native to the South of the USA. Southern writers have interpreted and illuminated the history and culture of the region through the conventions of the Gothic narrative, which provided insight into the horrors institutionalized in societies and social conventions. Like its parent genre, it relies on supernatural, ironic, or unusual events to guide the plot. It uses these tools not for the sake of mere suspense, but to explore social issues and reveal the cultural character of the South. (Ringe, 1982; Punter, 1996; Lloyd-Smith, 2004; Stamenković, 2008) Davies, on the other hand, belongs to Southern Ontario Gothic – a sub-genre of the Gothic novel genre and a feature of Canadian literature that comes from Southern Ontario. Like the Southern Gothic of the USA writers, Southern Ontario Gothic analyzes and criticizes social conditions such as race, gender, religion and politics, but in a Southern Ontario context. Southern Ontario Gothic is characterized by the firm realism set against the stern small-town Protestant morality stereotypical of the region, and often has underlying themes of moral hypocrisy. Actions and people that act against humanity, logic, and morality are all portrayed unflatteringly, and one or more characters may be suffering from some form of mental illness. Some (but not all) writers of Southern Ontario Gothic use supernatural or magic realist elements. (Edwards, 2005; Stamenković, 2008)

A cognitive semantic approach

Meanings we tend to attach to certain social and cultural issues highly influence the manner in which we approach these issues in various spheres of life and the consequences of our moves are essential to the social modes of function – the way that we think contributes to the way that our society “thinks”. A suitable semantic way to move towards the issues embodied in the term “south” would be to view it from the perspective of *cognitive semantics*. In order to reach the point where we could start viewing “south” in a cognitive semantic manner, we should concentrate on *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT), which is one of the main vehicles of cognitive semantics. However, one should not forget that cognitive semantics cannot be reduced to the studies of metaphor – it is a much broader scientific field. (Taylor, 2002, 487; Antović, 2007, 150-151) According to Joseph Grady, the most fundamental notion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is ontological *mapping*. This term (borrowed from mathematics) refers to systematic metaphorical correspondences between closely related ideas. In CMT system, the features of the *term A* are said to “map” onto the ontological, cultural, political, historical and other kinds of features of the *term B*. Other elements of the conceptual domain of the *term A* (*the source domain*) are likewise “mapped” onto elements of the conceptual domain of the *term B* (*the target domain*). (Lakoff, 1993; Grady, 2007, 190-191) The constancy with which different languages employ the same metaphors, which often appear to be perceptually based, has led to the idea that the mapping between conceptual domains corresponds to neural mappings in the human brain. (Feldman and Narayanan, 2004, 385-392) According to CMT, metaphors provide rich evidence about the ways in which some aspects of our lived experience are associated with others, for reasons that reflect basic aspects of perception, thought and neurological organization. Within cognitive linguistics, the term metaphor is understood to refer to a pattern of conceptual associations, rather than to an individual metaphorical use or a linguistic convention. (Grady, 2007, 188-189) Lakoff and Johnson describe the essence of metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 5)

The first step in the cognitive analysis of the concept SOUTH will be to connect it to one of what most authors call the *primary metaphors*. (Grady, Taub and Morgan, 1996; Grady, 1997; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Grady, 2007) These metaphors are simple patterns which map fundamental perceptual concepts onto equally fundamental but not perceptual ones. According to Jerome A. Feldman, “these primary metaphors allow one to express a private internal (subjective) experience in terms of a publicly available event; this is one crucial feature of metaphorical language.” (Feldman, 2006)

Source concepts for primary metaphors include UP, DOWN, HEAVY, BRIGHT, BACKWARD, FORWARD and other simple concepts labelled as “force-dynamic”. (Talmy, 1988) These simple source concepts have corresponding target concepts such as DOMINANT, SAD, HAPPY, EASY, DIFFICULT, ILL, HEALTHY, GOOD, BAD, SUCCESS, THE PAST, COMPULSION, APPEALING, etc. (Grady, 2007) There is an obvious connection between the target concept of SOUTH and a source concept for primary metaphors – DOWN. According to Western conventions, the bottom side of a map is south and the southern direction has the azimuth or bearing of 180°. True south is the direction towards the southern end of the axis about which the earth rotates. However, in terms of Western conventions and mapmaking connected to it, SOUTH is inevitably considered DOWN, not only in the domains of geography, cartography and compass usage, where the arrow pointing to South is always turned towards the bottom, but also in the domain of our language. The way that we comprehend our use of language may not only lead us towards understanding the operational principles of the psychological structures and the biological functioning of the brain (Vidanović, 1989, 5), but it can also contribute to explaining the way that these psychological structures govern our acts in the process of building and maintaining social and cultural conventions. In many Indo-European we can find a phrase corresponding to the English phrase “down in the South”. Another example connected to the link between these two concepts is the one that can be found in economic terms – if one says that, for instance, “dollar demand pushes rupee further south,” this means that the demand for the dollar has pushed the value of the rupee further down. Moreover, this phenomenon exists in many non-Indo-European as well. In the region called Mesoamerica (the region extending approximately from central Mexico to Honduras and Nicaragua), we find a number of languages in which “south” actually means “down” (the same word is used for both). (Suaréz, 1983) All these facts tell us that humans tend to conceptualize SOUTH in a spatial arrangement that links it to a direction pointing downwards (at the same time making NORTH directed upwards and connected to the concept of UP). This spatial set-up brings about a number of consequences which all emerge from the fact that being linked to the concept of DOWN seems to be quite adverse when we come to analyzing cultural issues. Grady, Taub and Morgan (1996) have shown that complex metaphors are conceptual combinations of primary metaphors. Even if one chooses to use this approach (to view SOUTH as a complex metaphor), then DOWN seems to be one of the most important constituent primary metaphors in it.

Oriental metaphors and illustrations

In viewing the orientational metaphors connected to the concept of DOWN, we can see that DOWN (and therefore SOUTH) is permanently linked to a number of corresponding target concepts which represent real disadvantages in the domain of culture. The fact that there is a physical, social or cultural basis for each of these concepts (deeply rooted in our cognition) makes the re-definition of the concept of SOUTH practically impossible (SOUTH being one of these target concepts). Oriental metaphors are those in which concepts are spatially related to each other and organized in a manner in which a whole system of concepts is presented with respect to one another. Lakoff and Johnson describe these metaphors as follows:

We will call these orientational metaphors, since most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. These spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. Oriental metaphors give a concept a spatial orientation; for example, **happy is up**. The fact that the concept **happy** is oriented **up** leads to English expressions like “I’m feeling up today.”

Such metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary. They have a basis in our physical and cultural experience. Though the polar oppositions up-down, in-out, etc., are physical in nature, the orientational metaphors based on them can vary from culture to culture. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 14)

Lakoff and Johnson proceed with listing various orientational metaphors, predominantly linking UP and DOWN with other concepts, some of which are very important when we come to interpreting SOUTH as a concept closely connected to DOWN. In order to connect these metaphors with the cultural consequences relevant to the southern issues brought up in the two novels in question, we should notice the relations proposed by Lakoff and Johnson and then illustrate them with conclusions derived from the comparative analysis and the cultural and social study of the master’s thesis cited above. This should provide a clearer picture of how cognitive semantics can contribute to understanding cultural, social, and historical issues we find in literature. Lakoff’s and Johnson’s list of orientational metaphors can be divided into several groups, each of which can be illustrated with examples found in the novels’ analysis:



a) **HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN** I'm feeling up. That boosted my spirits. [...] Thinking about her always gives me a lift. I'm feeling down. I'm depressed. He's really low these days. I fell into a depression. My spirits sank. Physical basis: Drooping posture typically goes along with sadness and depression, erect posture with a positive emotional state. [...]

GOOD IS UP; BAD IS DOWN Things are looking up. We hit a peak last year, but it's been downhill ever since. [...] Physical basis for personal well-being: Happiness, health, life, and control – the things that principally characterize what is good for a person – are all up. [...]

VIRTUE IS up; depravity is down He is high-minded. She has high standards. She is upright. She is an upstanding citizen. That was a low trick. Don't be underhanded. I wouldn't stoop to that. That would be beneath me. [...] Physical and social basis: **good is up** for a person (physical basis), together with a metaphor [...] **society is a person** [...] To be virtuous is to act in accordance with the standards set by the society/person to maintain its well-being.[...]

HIGH STATUS IS UP; LOW STATUS IS DOWN He has a lofty position. She'll rise to the top. He's at the peak of his career. [...] He's at the bottom of the social hierarchy. She fell in status. Social and physical basis: Status is correlated with (social) power and (physical) power is up. [...]

HAVING CONTROL OR FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL or force is down I have control over her. I am on top of the situation. He's in a superior position. He's at the height of his power. [...] He is under my control. He fell from power. His power is on the decline. He is my social inferior. He is low man on the totem pole. Physical basis: Physical size typically correlates with physical strength, and the victor in a fight is typically on top. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 14-21)

In these metaphors, DOWN is linked to SAD, BAD and DEPRAVITY. That these links can be applied to SOUTH as well we can see both in *Fifth Business* and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. In these novels, we find locations where economic and cultural depravity is omnipresent – both Davies's Deptford and McCullers's unnamed town are small and situated away from their cultural and economic centres. In these small communities, only few people live easily and jobs are hard to find. All this, in turn, frequently makes the inhabitants of these towns sad and their opportunities bleak. This is particularly the case in the novel coming from the USA – the overall atmosphere created by McCullers in this novel is gloomy and almost depressive. While Davies tends to mix grotesque with humour, McCullers leaves no space for laughter, while most of her grotesque characters seem to be tragic and hopeless. The difference between the two “souths” makes us able

to see why one of them is labelled “Deep South.”² This region, located in the USA, is usually delineated as being those states and areas where things most often thought of as “Southern” exist in their most undiluted and concentrated form. This is easily seen when comparing McCullers’s town to Deptford. Whatever we find in Deptford exists in McCullers’s town in an extreme mode. The Columbus-inspired small town not only isolates those who differ, but it also goes as far as to fragment them on the inside. We can see this with Biff Brannon, one of the major characters, who is torn apart by the everlasting loneliness and sadness. Perhaps the major and the most terrifying difference between the Deep South and Canadian South is the presence of severe racism in the former. Racial discrimination in this region affects primarily African Americans and Native Americans. Although racial discrimination contradicts many of the United States declarations, we are stunned by the fact that racism in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is institutional. Although not racial, institutional discrimination is present in Deptford as well – Mr. Mahaffey, the magistrate of the town, degrades Mary Dempster. However, in the Deep South of the 1940s, as presented in McCullers’s novel, African Americans are still in the process of fighting for basic human rights. (Stamenković, 2008)

At one point, Jake Blount (one of the main characters of McCullers’s novel) attaches various attributes to the South, calling it “The strangled South. The wasted South. The slavish South.” (McCullers, 1940/2000, 296) In the dialogue which incorporates the mentioned lines, he gives a social overview of the South and claims that in terms of status, the South of the USA is far below the northern states. The fact that both authors chose to approach the communities in a gothic manner (including grotesque) contributes to the general adverse attitude that readers tend to build towards the communities in question. It places SOUTH even more DOWN in the presented frame.

b) **HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN** He’s at the peak of health. Lazarus rose from the dead. He’s in top shape. As to his health, he’s way up there. He fell ill. He’s sinking fast. He came down with the flu. His health is declining. He dropped dead. Physical basis: Serious illness forces us to lie down physically. When you’re dead, you are physically down. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 15)

One of the important gothic elements is the presence of physical and mental illness, so it can be considered quite normal that both writers dedicate large parts of their novels to sickness and death. Both of these southern communities face their own tragedies

² The fact that the attribute used to modify the original term “the South” is “deep” confirms the notion that SOUTH is firmly linked to the concept of DOWN. Thus, SOUTH has its position on the vertical axis and can move up or down, depending on its “southness”.

and deal with them in their own ways. Canadian Deptford, although a very small community, faces a number of strange events that are connected with sickness and death. First of all, the event that triggers the whole novel – Boy Staunton (the main character's friend and arch-rival) hitting Mrs Dempster with a stone-laden snowball – invokes at least four linked events: a) Mrs. Dempster's believed mental illness, which also has its own diagnosis and a special name in the Deptford world – “a condition to which the psychiatrists gave a variety of scientific names but which had been called simple in Deptford.” (Davies, 1970/1990, 222); b) Paul Dempster's premature birth; c) Dunstan's life-long sense of guilt (Dunstan is the main character); d) Mrs. Dempster's eventual death. Willie, the brother of the main character in *Fifth Business*, dies and is “resurrected” the same day. Prior to this event, we can see Willie sick for a long period. In the same novel, we also face the death of Leola and Boy Staunton, the death of side characters named Orph and Miss Shanklin, and many other deaths during Dunstan's military service in World War I. During the war, Deptford is struck by an epidemic of Spanish flu. The whole event is described in a manner that is reminiscent of horror movies: “The flu beat everything though. Spanish Influenza, they called it, but I always figured it was worked up by the Huns some ways. Jeez, this burg was like the Valley of the Shadda for weeks [...] people just dropped like flies.” (Davies, 1970/1990, 101-102)

McCullers's town seems to have an equally long sickness and death roll. Sickness, both of body and mind, as an essential gothic characteristic, pervades throughout the novel. The most memorable episodes dealing with sickness are the ones involving Doctor Copeland. He is the doctor of the poor and underprivileged, predominantly of African American ancestry, who live their lives in unbearable conditions. They are, thus, incapable of stopping the illness spreading around and the percentage of the population struck by various sorts of diseases is extremely high. Later on, Dr. Copeland himself is sent to live on a farm, as he is too sick to take care of himself. The section describing circumstances surrounding the death of Alice Brannon (the wife of Biff Brannon) is one of the more disturbing parts of the novel. Namely, Alice develops cancer, which seems to stay undiagnosed until after she dies. Spiros Antonopoulos, Mr. Singer's best friend (Singer being the central character of the novel) develops both a mental and a physical disease and is sent to an asylum. The episode concerning Willie's suffering in the state prison is another instance of the presence of sickness in its two forms: the mental sickness of the guard capable of leaving three human beings in a room where they almost freeze to death and the physical sickness caused in these three people (especially Willie, as gangrene sets in his feet) due to this action. Portia explains that “They quickly taken Willie and them boys to the sick ward and their legs were all swolled and froze. Gangrene. They sawed off both our Willie's feet.” (McCullers, 1940/2000, 254-255) Overall,

the descriptions found in both novels confirm that SICKNESS and DEATH, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson belong to (the) SOUTH.

The list of DOWN metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson presented in this paper could have been even longer. For instance, “RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN” and “CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 15-17) could equally be illustrated and linked to southern issues presented in these novels. Various events and characters bordering on reality and the authors’ use of dreams could easily confirm that whatever applies to down is at the same time connected to south.

Conclusion

The benefits of the parallel overview of the metaphoric links proposed by Lakoff and Johnson and illustrations from *Fifth Business* and *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* are two-fold. Firstly, the examples taken from the novels confirm that SOUTH is firmly bound to the concept of DOWN. Secondly, the set of metaphors taken from *Metaphors We Live By* help us understand *why* the concept of SOUTH has so many adverse concepts linked to it. The link in which SOUTH IS DOWN, makes SOUTH the target concept of DOWN (in this case the source domain). Other target domains of DOWN are SAD, BAD, DEPRAVITY, LOW STATUS, BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL, SICKNESS and DEATH. The target domains are mutually connected and reflect each other; in this manner, SOUTH seems to be the target domain which encompasses many other target domains of DOWN, at least in those cultures to which we can apply the notion of southern cultural space.

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