

THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC EXPLORATION OF *LAND* IN AMERICAN CAMPFIRE STORIES

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Abstract. Being transported to the New World, the English language underwent significant modifications to get adapted to the new environment. Linguistic innovations that developed in parallel to cognitive changes were to reflect transformations in the worldview of the speech community. The purpose of this article is to describe some peculiarities of American worldview and define linguistic means that express the concept of ‘land/space’. It is hypothesized that cultural and linguistic exploration of the land was determined by socio-historical conditions and cognitive preferences of the community. In American campfire stories, ‘land’ is a contamination of geographical and cultural space represented by means of oppositions (‘familiar - unfamiliar’, ‘beautiful – ugly’, ‘friendly – hostile’, etc.) achieved through the application of the cooperative ‘us’ strategy and competitive ‘them’ strategy. The research employs a complex of methods including contextual, structural, componential, and conceptual analyses. The findings support the hypothesis and reveal that the concept of ‘land’ has evolved and expressed due to a particular set of social practices leading to community consolidation, cultivation of patriotism, trust, endurance and ability to survive, feeling of social belonging and pride.

Keywords: campfire story, American variety of English, folktale, worldview, concept of ‘land’

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Introduction

The discovery of the New World by the Europeans was soon followed by their cultural and linguistic adaptation to the introduced environment. Those processes led to significant modifications of the transported worldview as a totalising version of migrants’ life, evaluations of space, time, society, etc. Other important results of the European migration to the new World included the spread of English beyond the territory of the British Isles and its increasing variation with further transformation into a pluricentric system of national varieties. American English has evolved as an essential part of American history, traditions and lifestyle (Bailey, 2012; Dillard, 1992; Finegan & Rickford, 2004; Fuchs & Holub, 2013; Müller, 2013; Nagle & Sanders, 2003; Wolfram & Schilling, 2015), natural and social setting, cultural values and preferences, as well as a mirror of American English speakers’ worldview.

Studies into the worldview theory considered various, at times conflicting, approaches to how human experience and knowledge were conceptualized and represented by language means, how they designed ethnic cultures and what impact they had on historical imperatives, philosophical themes, and naïve representation of life (*Andryuchshenko, 2015; DeWitt, 2011; Gordon, 2009; Naugle, 2002*). Theses and many other investigations introduced the approach according to which a naïve worldview is interpreted as an all-inclusive reference through which a speech community sees the world. Its structure includes many elements such as God, human, body, nature, family, the good, the evil, justice, life, space, time, etc.

According to the scientific literature, the concept of land is a noticeable constituent among the whole spectrum of American cultural concepts and values (*Benesch & Schmidt, 2005*) because it emerged from the history of colonization and modifications of worldview due to the geographical migrations from Europe. Having studied the diversity of the American culture, the researchers (*Franklin & Steiner, 1992*) discovered that living conditions were among most powerful factors that determined the way people cognize new places and environment. M. Thoene (*2015*) carried out a deep research into the interpretation of space by various written genres of American literature. In (*Fuchs, 2013*) and other studies on American literature, it is suggested that the multifaceted model of American worldview comprises several spaces.

Although much work has been done to date (*Thoene, 2015; Wilson, 1991*), more studies still need to be conducted to focus on how American land was explored by the first settlers, how it was envisioned in the literary narratives, and how beautifully American landscape blossomed in tales of adventure inspired by settlers' experiences in America. The purpose of the present research was to examine the conceptualisation of 'land' and its representation in American campfire stories, to analyse the variety of linguistic means encoding the unique beauty of American landscape, appreciation for nature and wilderness, emotional ties of speakers to nature.

The topic relating to the development of the concept of 'land' was considered to be of importance to historians, linguists and semioticians alike. Beyond its interest to those who focus on cognitive, semiotic and cultural aspects of ethnic worldview, the approach could be employed to analyze models of space and their linguistic encoding by members of various cultural and speech communities.

Materials and methods

To reveal the conceptual features of 'land' and linguistic means of their representation, we examined a collection of 12 American campfire stories (*Mathiews, 1933*) written between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. That was the epoch of nation formation, the growing start of industrialization processes, conflicts and animosity between two major social groups – Anglo-Americans and Europeans, on the one hand, and Africans and Native Americans, on the other hand. Due to social antagonism and developing industries in the USA, physical and spiritual dependence of people on nature was growing stronger.

The research procedure includes the following stages. First, the method of contextual analysis was employed to define the contexts containing descriptions of American nature and land. Second, the selected contexts were examined to identify most productive lexico-semantic means of the concept of 'land' representation. Third, the naming means were related to the key conceptual features. Finally, by means of conceptual analysis, we analysed the

perceptive and cognitive metaphors to make conclusions about the images of 'land' in American campfire stories.

Results and Discussion

In American campfire stories, geographical space is conceptualized in concrete terms and in many cases it is referred to with the help of concrete nouns with generalized meanings: *country* "land left in its natural condition" and "a political unit, an area that has its own government"; *land* "dry surface" and "ground used for particular purposes". For example, *tall country* (Virginia), *strange country* (Grand Cañon), *awful cut-up country* (Grand Cañon), *upland country* (Utah), *high country* (Virginia), *dry country* (Arizona), *good country* (Klondike); *no land is so grimly silent*. Other frequent names include the words *wilderness* "an outside area which has not been used and is natural and untidy" and *place* "an area or building; a suitable area": *there is something about the silence of the wilderness that discourages speech; apparently unpeopled wilderness in which they had been set down; don't know of a lonelier place anywhere on earth than that grand canon; the conviction grew upon me that the place had never before been visited by any human being*". These and other contexts clearly demonstrate the importance of antinomic principle in the formation of speakers' worldview and the concept of 'land' in particular. The contradiction obtained from physical and emotional experience of speakers leads to the implementation of the two strategies in the concept formation. In American campfire stories, 'land' appears both as the locus of human being, acculturated space (cooperative ('us') strategy) and as unknown, hostile space (competitive ('them') strategy). The first strategy intends to represent 'land' as the space familiar to humans, where complementary knowledges and skills help to manage the environment and provide successful survival: *in all attitudes suggestive of comfort the men disposed themselves in a wide circle about the fire; he accepted the pipe tendered him, and, sitting down beside the fire, he composed himself to the enjoyment; then he built a fire and cooked his meal; when he dozed off and the cold awakened him, he renewed the fire*. The other strategy intends to represent 'land' as the space unfamiliar to humans, dangerous and evil, that is to be conquered and taken the advantage of (*he marched along as if he owned the earth*). Application of these planes results in a number of oppositions relating to the key conceptual features expressed by linguistic means.

On the one hand, 'land/space' is understood as a beautiful place for a brave man who is a dare and determined explorer (*he'll be getting steadier as he rests from his fight with th' water; of course it was cold, for the wind off the open sea was damp, but they were not men to turn back; the passion of the man was intense; that endless, racking pursuit had brought out all the hardness the desert had engendered in him*). American campfire stories provide numerous precise descriptions of geographical areas detailed by reference to certain topographical features, landmarks, etc. For instance, forests are full of *pin*es, *cedars*, *birches*, *juniper bushes*; in Utah and Arizona one can find *sage*, *cacti*, *greasewood*, *cottonwood*, and *manzanita*. *Willows* grow near the water bodies. Western part of the country is filled with *rocks*, *cañons*, *dunes*, *cliffs* and *plateaus*. *Slopes*, *hills*, *open seas*, *mountains* are characteristic of the North. Forests hide *lakes*, *rivers*, *brooks* and *streams*. Birds and animals inhabit the wilderness: *bugs*, *crickets*, *bears*, *blue jays*, *squirrels*, *wisky-jacks*, *wolves*, *coyotes*, *lions*, *deer*, *skunks*, *jack rabbits*, *quails*, and *antelopes*. Such space is treated in a good way: *and suddenly he felt absolutely free, alone, with nothing behind to remember; the dry fragrance, the dreaming walls ...the strange loneliness – these were sweet and comforting to him*.

On the other hand, 'land/space' is understood as emptiness and wilderness, hazardous for humans. It is full of silence, dangerous animals, ghosts, monsters, mysterious spirits: *mysterious depths, a vision of a spectral nature, a strange place; grim manifestation of silent forces; the Great Spirit was in the river; no land is so grimly silent, so hushed and soundless, as the frozen North, lone cry of the wolf far down the valley only made the silence felt the more*. That explains why animals are sometimes included into the set of characters (*Mayor of the frog city, Uncle Bear, Frog Prince; demon horse ready to plunge into fiery depths*).

The two types of land/space exhibit shared features: the one appealing to the physical world – 'vastness' (*the grandest hill, vast upland, the tallest tree, huge sections of stone walls, big moose*) and the one appealing to the spiritual world — 'emptiness' (*it was, perhaps, a loneliness of vast stretches of valley and stone, clear to the eye, even after sunset; for days they marched through desolation, without glimpse of human habitation, without sight or trail, without sound of human voice to break the monotony; no sound like it to fix in lone camper's heart the great solitude and the wild*).

Poetic descriptions of the land are full of metaphoric expressions that highlight the beauty and power of the nature. For example: *whim of the greedy water, endless dance in the center of a whirling cloud, stars of white fire, waterfall of sand, water flung itself, snow began to move, echo laughing to itself, eerie forces that play pranks, wind toyed with, forest climbed, mountains rose grandly, cañon yawned, black water was dragging his fingers one by one from slippery edges, driftwood ducked under the water, noon found them floundering, wind bit cruelly, sun struck, the North had played him a devilish trick, the North had betrayed him*. One and the same place may turn out to be peaceful, beautiful as well as ugly, dark, mysterious: *dark shadows of forests through which they passed, beautiful green valley of the Mohawk, the roof of the forest dipping down to the river shores, Lake Erie roofed with foliage* (the North-East of the United States); *man and beast somehow resembled each other in that moment which was inimical to noble life*.

It is noteworthy that word-formation is efficiently employed to represent the contrasting features. Antonymic affixational morphemes are used to oppose the two facets of the land. For instance, *-ful* "full of" and *-less* "lacking, without" as in *beautiful, wonderful, gleeful, merciful, cheerful* and *motionless, soundless, merciless*; the use of prefix *un-* to derive antonyms as in *merciful – unmerciful*. The employment of the same derivational patterns and means also results in the successful explication of the contrast of senses 'active' and 'inactive': *gleeful, hopeful, forceful* and *awful, doubtful, fearful; motionless, soundless* and *dauntless, fearless, reckless, restless*.

American land is represented in a range of imagery. Direct and metaphoric meanings of lexical units appeal to different senses through the use of lexical items denoting colour, shape, size, texture, temperature, etc.

Visual images of 'land' are created with the help of colour terms such as *coral soil, red earth, gold rocks, green of pine, purple sage, reddish-yellow sand* (Grand Cañon); *grey January morning, grey cliff, pale moonlight, dimmed starlight* (Alaska); *turquoise blue* (the skies in Arizona); *red earth and gold rocks, colored cliffs and walls, a yellow cliff far way, towers gleaming red in the sun*. The same productivity is found in words with dimensional meanings, for instance, *the great canon, wide country, gigantic cliff steppes and yellow slopes*. Less frequent vocabulary includes the names of shapes and configurations (*ragged world of rock*), locatives (*uplifted in mesa, dome, peak, and crag*).

Other productive images of nature are created by auditory vocabulary. In most cases, they are complementary to the visual ones: *fire roar, jingle of bells, fire cracks, frost cracking*

under the feet, long streams of gravel rattle down. The threatening and scary silence of woods and forests (*quiet of the forest, forest silent as the lake itself, place of silence*) is contrasting with the voices of nature (*lone cry of the wolf only made the silence felt the more, lone cry of a bird, pert chirp of the birds, shrill scream of the blue jay, imprudent chatter of the red squirrel, the beat of hoofs, swift, sharp, louder-louder*). Thus, 'land' is portrayed as a secluded place, filled with unfamiliar sounds, voices of wild animals.

Tactile, olfactory and taste images of nature appeared to be unproductive. They are encoded by words denoting temperature and texture (*cold, soft, smooth, silken*), fragrance (*scent of pine, patches of sage, so pungent that it stung Slone's nostrils*), and taste (*sweet with frosty fragrance*).

The dominance of visual and auditory images provides a good evidence to the importance of straightforward seeing and hearing in the processes of space cognizing. Other senses seem to play a less important role, obviously, because obtaining tactile, olfactory and gustatory information is more challenging and requires experience with particular objects and phenomena.

Another type of imagery results from cognitive metaphors (*Lakoff & Johnson, 1984*) that include the following:

- spatial metaphors which result from our experience of space and representation of cognized entities in orientational terms ('up and periphery', 'down and center' – *in the widening below a rounded hill we came upon an adobe house; the men were up in the woods; base of the wildest; in the widening below a rounded hill we came upon an adobe house; the men were up in the woods*);

- container metaphors representing nature and land as a bounding surfaces (*in the prairie; out of the woods; through solitude, through desolation, into the wilderness, with nothing behind; ; his house on the edge of an open prairie; the camp stood in the middle of the clearing*);

- ontological metaphors that embrace (a) personifications and zoosemy of the land and nature - *red abdominal wound of a cañon, gizzard of the world, bowels of the earth, bosom of the lonely lake the snarl of the woods*; (b) representations of land in terms of artifacts (*roof of the forest*).

The evaluative aspects of the concept of 'land' are revealed through the expressivity of linguistic means encoding polar attitudes and representations of land as both American value and anti-value. These means are actualized on different levels of language structure: phonetical (alliteration, sound imitation, effective pronunciation), lexico-semantic (hyperbole, epithet, simile), syntactical (tautology, repetition, synonymic condensation). For instance:

- alliterations (*vast stretches of valley*), onomatopoeia and affective pronunciations for scary effects (*rain-doves, whut mourn out, "Oo-oo-o-o-o!" jes dat trembulous an' scary, an' de owls, whut mourn out, "Whut-whoo-o-o-o!" more trembulous and scary dan dat, an' de wind, whut mourn out, "You-you-o-o-o!" mos' scandalous, trembulous an' scary ob all. Dat a powerful onpleasant locality for a li'l black boy whut he name was Mose*);

- simile (*the wind cut like a scythe, cañon like a hunter's fable, snow like chalk, slopes like death, storm touch like a flame, rock like iron, fingers like the teeth of a rake, air like yeast*) and hyperbole to highlight that something is beyond the narrator's reach (***hundred years from*** *where he stood; I stood drinking in with all my soul the glorious beauty and the silence of mountain and forest*);

- metaphoric representations, in particular personifications, are graphically signaled by capitalizations (*things that Nature does not tell about in crowds; Nature had done amply well*

about the skunk; gamble with *Fate*) to add some colouring and elevation, create a romantic atmosphere;

- semantically opposite and distanced but positionally approximate epithets - *beautiful, wonderful, glorious, great, splendid* and *angry, extreme, hideous, eerie, doubtful, awful, murdering and wild* (*desert of heat and wind, awful cut-up country, wonderful region, beyond all comparison in its greatness* (canyon));

- tautologies, synonymic condensations and other types of repetitions to express a high degree of intensification, produce a scary effect, a feeling of awe (*The wildest of all wild creatures—a wild stallion, with the intelligence of a man!*”), or realize a suggestive intention of a story-teller (“*Maybe, like some men I know, he was too wise to work...I tell you, I’ve sat and looked into that dog’s eyes till the shivers ran up and down my spine and the marrow crawled like yeast, what of the intelligence I saw shining out; it was a lonely and apparently unpeopled wilderness*”).

Overall, it can be stated with certainty that in American campfire stories ‘land’ is represented as something of great value, an essential part of biological and social environment. When explored as elements of biosphere, geographical space and nature become integrated into the social space, receiving features attributed to them by the speakers due to the cultural preferences and socio-historical orientations of a speech community.

Concluding remarks

American culture is unique and diverse. It has evolved from the experience, traditions and worldview of pioneer immigrants, who arrived to explore and conquer the New World, and indigenous inhabitants of North America. Exploration of the continent took a lot of time and endeavour. Vastness and diversity of North America as well as a variety of newly introduced realia of life shaped the way settlers perceived, interpreted and evaluated the land, treated geographical and personal space. American campfire stories describe a new type of culture established in the process of colonization of North American continent. Being the intertwine of American folk tales, myths, legends, fables, etc. with literature written down by definite authors, campfire stories have become an expressive part of American cultural heritage. As they cover various themes, describe different parts of the United States, campfire stories can be regarded as a very strong tool to investigate the formation of the American nation, culture, and worldview.

The findings reveal the significance of antithetical approach to the conceptualization of the land and new environment. From the point of view of the ‘us’ strategy, they are cognized as something to which the community belongs, something familiar, explored and conquered while from the point of view of the ‘them’ strategy, ‘land’ is conceptualized as something unknown, hostile, and frightening. Such conceptualization reveals social practices and experience leading to community consolidation, cultivation of patriotism, trust, endurance and ability to survive, feeling of social belonging and pride.

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