

Linguistic and Semiotic Representation of Pessimism in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde

Svitlana Volkova ^a, Valentina Boichuk ^b,
Alla Pavliuk ^{c,*}, Nataliia Yefremova ^c

^a *Kharkiv Humanitarian University “People’s Ukrainian Academy”, Ukraine*

^b *Lutsk Pedagogical College, Ukraine*

^c *Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine*

Received January 26, 2023; Revised May 3, 2023; Accepted June 2, 2023

Abstract. This paper focuses on the indirect means of verbalising the phenomenon of pessimism in the texts of literary fairy tales from the point of view of linguosemiotics. The study aims to identify the linguistic and semiotic means that create the pessimistic discourse of Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Pessimistic discourse is treated as a person-centred type of discourse, represented by a complex system of means that reveals the speaker's pessimistic worldview and is characterised by its aims, style, and tenor. The study employs semantic and lingo-semiotic analysis of the ontological phenomenon of pessimism in fictional texts, using content analysis to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. Furthermore, the four-stage methodological procedure used in this research allows us to define a general literary context of the analysed works, select the research material, determine the frequency characteristics of the symbols as lingo-semiotic means that create the pessimistic tonality and discourse of Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. The research identifies the symbols of nature (seasons, flowers), the material world (colours, everyday objects), distance and death (as an ontological category) as verbal triggers of the author's pessimism implemented in the narrative through the contextual markers of basic, adjacent and related qualitative features of pessimism reflecting its social, psychological and cognitive aspects. The study contributes to the development of linguistic semiotics, psycholinguistics and discourse studies by enriching the knowledge of idiosyncrasies. The proposed methodology of the given research is considered promising within the framework of different genres.

Keywords: *English literary fairy tale, indirect indicators of pessimism, linguistic semiotics, pessimism, pessimistic tonality, verbal triggers of pessimism, symbols.*

Волкова Світлана, Бойчук Валентина, Павлюк Алла, Єфремова Наталія. Лінгвoseміотична репрезентація песимізму в текстах збірки О. Вайлда «Щасливий принц та інші казки».

Анотація. У статті досліджено непрямі засоби вербалізації феномену песимізму в текстах літературних казок з погляду лінгвoseміотики. Мета статті – виявлення й опис лінгвoseміотичних засобів, які сприяють створенню песимістичного дискурсу. Песимістичний дискурс є особистісно-орієнтованим типом дискурсу, який представлений

* Corresponding author. Alla Pavliuk,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6037-4819>  allapavliuk@vnu.edu.ua

комплексною системою засобів репрезентації песимістичного світобачення мовця й характеризується своїми власними цілями, стилем, комунікативними стратегіями та тональністю. Песимізм – це спосіб світосприйняття, який акцентує негативні прояви буття. На індивідуально-психологічному рівні феномен песимізму проявляється певними диспозиціями, атрибуціями, когнітивними стратегіями та настроєм, які визначаються когнітивними параметрами оцінки, мотивації, мети, очікування, самоефективності, надії, віри, волі й супроводжуються негативними атистюдами, психічними станами та емоціями. Дослідження базується на семантичному та лінгвoseміотичному аналізі онтологічного феномену песимізму в художніх текстах із застосуванням контент-аналізу для забезпечення достовірності та валідності отриманих результатів. Крім того, чотириетапна методологічна процедура, використана в цьому дослідженні, дозволяє визначити загальний літературний контекст аналізованих творів, відібрати матеріал дослідження, виявити частотні характеристики символів як лінгвoseміотичних засобів, які створюють песимістичну тональність і дискурс збірки Оскара Вайлда «Щасливий принц та інші казки». У результаті аналізу встановлено та проаналізовано символи природи (пори року, квіти), матеріального світу (кольори, речі повсякденного вжитку), дистанціювання, смерті (як онтологічної категорії) як вербальні тригери авторського песимізму, реалізованого в авторському наративі контекстуальними маркерами, які експлікують базові, суміжні й супутні якісні ознаки песимізму, що відображають його соціальні, психологічні та когнітивні аспекти. Дослідження лінгвoseміотичної репрезентації феномену песимізму на матеріалі збірки Оскара Вайлда «Щасливий принц та інші казки» сприяє розвитку лінгвoseміотики, психолінгвістики та дискурсології, збагачує систему знань про індивідуальні стилі письменників. Запропонована методологія є перспективною для дослідження дискурсів різних типів на матеріалі різножанрових літературних творів.

Ключові слова: англійська літературна казка, непрямі ознаки песимізму, лінгвoseміотика, песимізм, песимістична тональність, вербальні тригери песимізму, символи.

Introduction

Pessimism, a worldview paradigm of human existence, occupies an important place among the controversial problems of philosophical discourse. The pessimistic worldview indicates the predominance of suffering and the futile struggle between good and evil, the triumph of injustice, the absurdity of human life, and the historical process (Schopenhauer, 2015). It is imbued with hopelessness and despair; pessimistic philosophical concepts in the analysis of life and knowledge are based on the premise that the world is not arranged in the best way: it is controlled by natural forces, it is irregular, so there are many coincidences, the world is chaotic and meaningless (Dienstag, 2009). As a socio-philosophical concept, pessimism reflects the evaluative-volitional aspect of the worldview, which negatively determines the world, the state and a person's place in it (Lepskyi, 2006).

At the individual psychological level, pessimism as a way of perceiving the world that emphasises negative aspects of being is manifested by certain dispositions (dispositional pessimism) (Extremera et al., 2007; Milam, 2002), attributions (pessimism as attributional style) (Peterson et al., 1995), cognitive strategies (defensive pessimism) (Norem & Illingworth, 1993), and mood (situational

pessimism) (Keivom-Lockhart, 2013), determined by cognitive parameters of evaluation, motivation, goal, expectation, self-efficacy, hope, belief, will.

Linguistics offers fragmentary studies focusing on specific aspects of the phenomenon of pessimism, such as its verbal expression, strategic potential and communicative tonality. As a strategy, pessimism is considered by Brown & Levinson (1987) within the theory of negative politeness (strategy of being pessimistic). This strategy is one of the distancing strategies aimed at demonstrating to the interlocutor the recognition of his independence and personal autonomy. The speaker is willing to show that he has no intention of violating the boundaries that exist between him and the addressee. With the help of this strategy, the negative face of the addressee is preserved, as the speaker expresses doubts about the possibility of the addressee performing the action to which he is urged. This reduces the degree of influence on the addressee, which may contribute to the refusal to perform the proposed action (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Pessimistic tonality as a type of communicative tonality in diary discourse is studied by Ihnatieva (2013). It has been found that the types of communicative tonality contribute to the organisation of a more extensive communication model in diary discourse: auto-communication, polycommunication and radial communication. Furthermore, it was found that pessimistic tonality, in contrast to optimistic tonality, is focused on the communicant's despair.

Attempts to investigate the impact of pessimistically marked language means on the overall tone of income press releases were made by Davis et al. (2006) in "Beyond the Numbers: An Analysis of Optimistic and Pessimistic Language in Earnings Press Releases". The authors were the first to explore the role of language in providing investors with reliable information. Continuing the predecessors' work, Rombach (2011) uses the method of content analysis based on DICTION 5.0 software and statistical research methods to analyze optimistically / pessimistically marked vocabulary and concludes that there is an interdependence between the tonality of press releases and market profits.

Despite considerable advances in researching the phenomenon of pessimism in linguistics, there have been very few works that have provided studies on indicators of pessimism in literary texts in general, and no works on indirect indicators of this phenomenon in the texts of literary fairy tales from the linguosemiotic point of view.

Fairy tales remain the object of philosophical, sociological, psychological, literary, and linguistic studies due to their composition, structure, heroes, functions, and poetics. We consider the fairy tale as a linguosemiotic construct that consists of images being in trichotomy relations according to the theory developed by Ch. Pierce (1991). This relation may be iconic, indexic, or symbolic. All these images verbalized in the text are the containers of some cultural, ethnocultural, or sociocultural, codes. Here, we share our contemporary American semiotician Skaggs' point of view that "symbols are often the result of an explicit code, linguistic or otherwise, and always the result of either habitual or repetitive cultural practice" (Skaggs, 2017, pp. 58–59). So, symbols make culturally agreed-upon connections between the sign and its referent. Virtually all words in a language are symbolic (except onomatopoeic words

– they are iconic). In a symbolic relation, according to S. Skaggs, there is neither a resemblance nor physical/environmental connection, but simply an agreed-upon relation. Consequently, the interpretation of symbols and signs necessarily requires special knowledge about their relation to other units in the sign system. Symbolism expresses the relationship between objects, phenomena, and ideas and reveals the laws of connection of the material world with the supernatural one. Sandner (1991) explains that “Life symbols make of a culture what it is specifically, and govern the thoughts and feelings of the people who are part of it”. These ideas are not only relevant in a historical context. For, as Sandner (1991, p. 13) reminds us, referring to an American anthropologist White (1973), “All human behavior originates in the use of symbols”. Furthermore, “All civilizations have been generated, and are perpetuated, only by the use of symbols”.

Therefore, this research aims to identify the linguosemiotic means that create the pessimistic poetics of Oscar Wilde’s fairy-tales collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Even though his works are at the center of literary critics’ and linguists’ attention, little attention has been paid to the analysis of the symbolism in his fairy tales. Thus, recent studies have focused on the verbal systems of signs of O. Wilde’s “The Happy Prince” (Alsheikh, Alsady, 2022); the symbolic and decadent elements in O. Wilde’s lyrical dramas (Im, 2017); the symbols of Mirror and Portrait in teaching symbolism based on “The Picture of Dorian Gray” (Toirova, 2019); the symbolism of the Garden (Karpinska, 2018); the role of artistic details in the structure of the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” (Shtepa, 2018); the Biblical intertextuality of poetry in the prose work “The Master” (Hrabovetska, 2019), etc.

The following sections cover analysis and linguosemiotic interpretation of indirect indicators and contextual markers of Oscar Wilde’s pessimistic discourse, which are characterized by negative semantics. Causes, aspects, consequences, and various psychological and socio-cognitive features of pessimism are captured, confirmed, clarified, and explained through the system of symbols with pessimistic connotations in literary fairy tales by Oscar Wilde.

Methods

We focus our linguistic interest on the linguosemiotic poetics of pessimism in literary fairy tale texts. Thus, the paper provides a linguosemiotic approach to a literary text considered as an example of *pessimistic discourse*, which is considered as a person-centred type of discourse, represented by a complex system of linguistic means that show the speaker's pessimistic worldview and is characterised by its own goals, style and tenor.

In addition to the method of quantitative analysis according to the four-stage algorithm, the study also uses semantic and textual analysis methods.

In the first stage, the definitional and componential analyses of the lexical units *pessimism*, *pessimist*, *pessimistic* and *pessimistically* (dictionary definitions from 16

explanatory dictionaries of modern English were analysed) are applied. It was found that the semantic structure of these words contains integrative and differential semantic components that identify psychological, social and cognitive aspects of pessimism. These semantic components are the basis for identifying the basic qualitative features of pessimism: "sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "uncertainty", "failure", "distrust", "disbelief", "pain", "despair". Implicitly, these features of pessimism correlate with neighbouring emotional entities of different intensity, which are implemented in the semantics of the word by relevant differential semantic components. For example, for the basic qualitative feature of pessimism 'sadness', the adjacent features are 'bad mood', 'depression', 'gloom' and 'grief'. The basic feature of pessimism 'uncertainty' correlates with such adjacent features as 'doubt' and 'indecision'. The adjacent feature for the basic feature of pessimism "pain" is "suffering". The analysis proves that within the semantic structure of the words, the semantic components indicating basic and adjacent qualitative features of pessimism attract semantic components indicating the accompanying emotional reactions and mental states experienced by the pessimist and their consequences. Our observations confirm that related qualitative features of pessimism are "anxiety", "irritation", "disappointment", "fear", "boredom", "lack of enthusiasm", "dissatisfaction", "complaints", "confusion", "passivity", "nervousness", "lack of interest", "loneliness", "negative attitude", "lack of will", "agitation", "apathy", "lack of purpose", "lack of optimism", "deterioration", "lack of motivation". To identify the corpus of lexical units designating the phenomenon of pessimism, 7 dictionaries-thesauruses of the modern English language (Macmillan Dictionary and Thesaurus, Merriam-Webster Online Thesaurus, Online Thesaurus, Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus, The Collins English Thesaurus, Webster's New Thesaurus, Webster's New World Thesaurus) were analyzed. These dictionaries contain lexical units entering the synonymic series of the direct thesaurus, the synonymic series of the reverse thesaurus, and the synonymic series with secondary dominants (in which any member of the synonymic series of the direct thesaurus is dominant). The componential analysis was applied to clarify the inner structure of the selected 611 lexical units – indicators of pessimism, the semantic structure of which represents semantic components that point out basic, adjacent, and related qualitative features of pessimism.

The second stage involves selecting the textual fragments of Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* which imply pessimistic connotations indicated in the text either by the above-mentioned lexical units designating the phenomenon of pessimism or by the indirect indicators of the pessimistic narration – the contextual markers of pessimism. These are fragments of literary texts, which with the help of language means, characterized by negative semantics of their elements, capture, confirm, clarify, complete, and explain causes, aspects, consequences, and ways of expressing pessimism. Again, they were selected and analyzed using the *Tropes V8.4* software. This program allows the analysis of large volumes of data by compressing the text into multiple content categories. The use of the *Scenario* function and the option of *Reference Fields* made it possible to single

out fragments containing lexical identifiers of pessimism and contextual markers of pessimism in the analyzed texts.

The third stage of the study reveals the linguosemiotic means of verbalizing the *pessimistic tonality* in the narration of a literary fairy tale. *SentiStrength Software 2.2.* made it possible to identify the intensity and emotionality of text fragments in terms of negative or positive potential. The average value of positive (+ve) / negative (-ve) tonality is the total tonality of the narration.

The fourth stage of the investigation is aimed at establishing the frequency characteristics of the symbols designating the phenomenon of pessimism in Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Modern linguistics distinguishes several procedures for the distribution of linguistic units by frequency. The most common classifications of such units are based on the absolute and relative frequency of use. Absolute frequency is the number of observations in a given statistical category. In any set of lexical units, according to Dewey (1923), there is always a small group of words with a high frequency of use (the nucleus) and a large number of low-frequency words (the periphery). But between these subsets, there is a transition zone in which the differences between nuclear and peripheral elements are uncertain. Though, as the frequency decreases, the number of units that are in the same interval increases (p. 6). In our research, we adhere to Perebyinis' (1970) point of view, according to which the nucleus includes the elements which make up 75% of the material. The transition zone includes the elements which make up (together with the nucleus) 90%, and the rest (10%) belong to the periphery (p. 165). To indicate the nucleus, the transition zone, and the periphery, we have calculated the relative frequency, that is, the percentage ratio of the absolute frequency to the number of units in the system under consideration, based on the absolute frequency indicators.

Results and Discussion

The research revealed that symbols as linguosemiotic markers of the pessimistic narrative in Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* could be classified into the following groups: symbols of nature (seasons, flowers), symbols of the material world (colours, everyday objects), symbols of distance and ontological symbols.

The symbolism of the seasons is deeply rooted in the world literary tradition and thus represents the temporal code of culture. Autumn is a highly symbolic season because it heralds the beginning of the end. In *The Happy Prince*, Oscar Wilde uses this symbol to represent the end of the relationship between the Swallow and his beloved Reed:

When the autumn came they [other Swallow] all flew away. After they had gone he felt lonely and began to tire of his lady love (Wilde, 1888, p. 5).

The results of the sentiment analysis confirm that the lexical tonality of this fragment ranges from +1 to -2 (the average lexical tonality is -1), which indicates a

negative tonality of the narration, supported by the contextual realisation of such qualitative features of pessimism as "sadness", "hopelessness" (basic); "suffering", "gloom" (adjacent); "boredom", "dissatisfaction", "lack of interest", "loneliness", "apathy" (related).

Winter is an element of the fairy tales in the collection, except for *The Remarkable Rocket*. The season signals the end of the year and the death of summer. This symbol is used to represent some of life's most painful experiences, like solitude, death, grief, and depression:

During the spring, the summer, and the autumn he was very happy, but when the winter came, and he had no fruit or flowers to bring to the market, he suffered a good deal from cold and hunger, and often had to go to bed without any supper but a few dried pears or some hard nuts. In the winter, also, he was extremely lonely, as the Miller never came to see him then (Wilde, 1888, p. 64).

The sentiment analysis shows that the lexical tonality of this fragment ranges from +1 to -4 (the average lexical tonality is -3). The negative tonality of the narrative is achieved by implementing in the text basic, adjacent and related features of pessimism: "sadness", "misfortune", "failure", "despair", "depression", "suffering", "gloom", "dissatisfaction", "passivity", "loneliness", "lack of will", "apathy", "deterioration", "lack of motivation".

The symbolic language of flowers also supports the symbolic realisation of the author's pessimism. In the Victorian era, flowers carried messages that could not be spoken aloud. Oscar Wilde was no exception, using flowers in his collection of tales to implement a biomorphic cultural code.

The rose is the most popular but complex floral symbol (Tresidder, 2005). According to legend, this "queen of flowers" grew in paradise without thorns, but received them after a man's fall. A red rose can represent love and passion. However, its thorns symbolise pain, blood and martyrdom, which are considered to be the basic ('despair'), adjacent ('suffering') and related ('anxiety', 'nervousness') features of pessimism (average lexical tonality score -1):

You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine (Wilde, 1888, p. 33).

The symbol of withered flowers extends the pessimistic narration, indicating the basic ("sadness", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "failure"), adjacent ("suffering") and related ("loneliness") qualitative features of pessimism:

... a young man in a garret... is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side, there is a bunch of withered violets... He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write anymore. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint (Wilde, 1888, p. 14).

Sentiment analysis proves that the lexical tonality of this extract ranges from +1 to -2 (the average number of lexical tonality -1), which testifies to the pessimism of the narration.

The results of the content and sentiment analyses of the symbols of nature as linguosemiotic indicators of pessimistic discourse are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Symbols of Nature as Linguosemiotic Markers of Pessimism

Symbol	Basic features of pessimism	Adjacent features of pessimism	Related features of pessimism	The average number of lexical tonality
Seasons	sadness, hopelessness, misfortune, failure, despair	depression, suffering, gloom	boredom, dissatisfaction, passivity, lack of interest, loneliness, lack of will, apathy, deterioration, lack of motivation	autumn: -1; winter: -3;
Flowers	sadness, hopelessness, misfortune, failure, despair	suffering	anxiety, nervousness, loneliness	rose: -1; withered flowers: -1;

Not only the symbols of nature but the symbols of the material world (colours, things of everyday use) are often used as the examples of the objective code, indicating pessimistic tonality.

The role of symbolic colours in Oscar Wilde's tales is great as it is one of the main semiotic tools of his aesthetic worldview. In *The Nightingale and the Rose*, the nominative meaning of *crimson* has the connotation of approaching *death*, thus implementing the author's pessimism. Having originated from Celtic mythology, where the end looks like a red rider (Tresidder, 2005), the red colour dominates in the texts of English folk and literary tales. Dominating red colour implements a biomorphic code (cultural code that reveals the idea of fauna and flora). The author deliberately uses the symbol of crimson to show the death of the rose and to reveal the range of relative qualitative characteristics of pessimism - basic ("sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "disbelief", "pain", "despair"), adjacent ("depression", "suffering", "gloom", "grief") and related ("loneliness", "apathy", "lack of optimism"):

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew

her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb. And the marvelous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky (Wilde, 1888, p. 38).

Though due to the results of the Sentiment analysis, the given fragment has positive strength 1 and negative strength -3 (the average number of lexical tonality - 1), the positive connotation refers mainly to the lexeme *marvelous*. At the same time, the rest of the text shows a negative tonality.

Black, another in number symbolic colour that helps to create the pessimistic poetics of Oscar Wilde's tales, is the colour of hostile forces and sad events. It is associated with death and evil. As it is entrenched in contemporary English idioms, *black* is synonymous with *misfortune* (Tresidder, 2005). As shown by the results of the analysis, Oscar Wilde uses black colour as a symbol of the implementation of the spiritual and cultural code, which reflects basic ("sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "uncertainty", "pain"), adjacent ("depression", "suffering", "gloom", "grief") and related ("fear", "boredom", "dissatisfaction", "loneliness"), "apathy") qualitative features of pessimism, which create a general pessimistic tonality of the narration:

He flew into dark lanes and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets (Wilde, 1888, p. 19).

The night was so black that little Hans could hardly see (Wilde, 1888, p. 81).

...he walked at the head of the procession in a long black cloak, and every now and then he wiped his eyes with a big pocket handkerchief (Wilde, 1888, p. 83).

The average lexical tonality ranges in the examples above from -2 to 0, indicating the pessimistic discourse.

One more colour symbol, which adds to the pessimistic tonality of the narration, is *grey*. Though the frequency of its use is low, it creates an atmosphere of renunciation, humility, and melancholy and is sometimes associated with death and mourning, thus implementing a range of qualitative features of pessimism – basic ("sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "uncertainty", "pain", "despair"), adjacent ("depression", "suffering", "gloom", "sorrow") and related ("anxiety", "dissatisfaction", "nervousness", "loneliness", "negative attitude", "apathy"):

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey (Wilde, 1888, p. 20).

He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice (Wilde, 1888, p. 48).

Only true lovers could drink out of this cup, for if false lips touched it, it grew grey and dull and cloudy (Wilde, 1888, p. 91).

Thus, rendering the spiritual code, the symbol of grey colour furnishes the narration with negative lexical tonality, which ranges from -2 to 0, reflecting the pessimistic expectations of the author.

Apart from the colours, pessimistic symbols of the material world in Oscar Wilde's literary fairy tales are represented by the things of everyday use. Seif (2019, p. 124) notices that there is a distinction between what we observe through our senses as *things* and what we perceive as *objects*. According to the American semiotician Deely (2009), the quasi-error of routinely mistaking objects for things leads to confusion about the external reality which lies inside thoughts and within objective reality. The opposite error of mistaking things for objects leads to the conclusion that things are the whole reality (Deely, 2001), of which death is considered the most final. "Thing" in a literary work is understood as a set of artificial objects that are part of the world of literary work. This may be the character's costume, the interior of the house, personal items, and the like. A thing directly related to the individual's behavior and consciousness evokes a certain attitude and is a source of impressions, experiences, and reflections. Since literature reflects the world in its physical and concrete-subject forms, it is quite natural that things, invariably present in human reality become one of the components of artistically rethought reality.

Hence, the *cart-wheel* in *The Nightingale and the Rose* that destroys the rose after the Student throws it into the street is pessimistically symbolic of how little society values love:

Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful," said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it (Wilde, 1888, p. 40).

The cart wheel is a helpful utilitarian object for transportation and commerce, while the rose is an archaic symbol of romanticism. By crushing the flower with a wheel, Oscar Wilde represents how the practical considerations of Victorian society (industry and money) destroy romantic ideas and trample on sentimentalism, thus implementing in the fairy tale the range of various qualitative features of pessimism – basic ("sadness", "failure"), adjacent ("bad mood") and related ("anxiety", "irritation", "nervousness", "negative attitude", "agitation") - and creating negative pessimistic lexical tonality of the narration (the average number of lexical tonality -3).

The *Student's shoes* in the same tale symbolize social status and lack of wealth. When the Professor's daughter rejects the Student, and the Student calls her ungrateful, she retaliates by mocking his shoes:

I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don't believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has"; and she got up from her chair and went into the house (Wilde, 1888, p. 40).

The negative pessimistic tonality of the fragment (average lexical tonality -1) is supported by the verbal realisation of basic ("negative expectations", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "failure"), adjacent ("suffering", "gloom") and related ("anxiety", "irritation", "disappointment", "dissatisfaction", "complaints", "nervousness") qualitative features of pessimism. Table 2 demonstrates the correlation between

symbols of the material world, qualitative features of pessimism embodied in them, and the general tonality of pessimistic discourse.

Table 2

Symbols of the Material World as Linguosemiotic Markers of Pessimism

Symbol	Basic features of pessimism	Adjacent features of pessimism	Related features of pessimism	The average number of lexical tonality
Colours	sadness, negative expectations, hopelessness, misfortune, uncertainty, disbelief, pain, despair	depression, suffering, gloom, grief	anxiety, boredom, dissatisfaction, nervousness, loneliness, negative attitude, apathy, lack of optimism	fear, crimson: -1; black: -2 to 0; grey: -2 to 0
things of everyday use	sadness, negative expectations, hopelessness, misfortune, failure	suffering, gloom, bad mood	anxiety, irritation, disappointment, dissatisfaction, complaints, nervousness, negative attitude, agitation	cart-wheel: -3; the <i>Student's shoes</i> : -1

A *wall*, being both the symbol of the material world and the symbol of distancing, reflects the pessimism of narration, indicating a range of qualitative features of pessimism, such as basic ("sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "uncertainty", "distrust", "disbelief", "pain", "despair"), adjacent ("depression", "suffering", "gloom", "grief", "doubt", "indecision") and related ("fear", "lack of enthusiasm", "dissatisfaction", "passivity", "lack of interest", "loneliness", "negative attitude", "lack of will", "apathy", "lack of purpose", "lack of motivation"), qualitative features of pessimism.

In *The Happy Prince*, a very lofty wall around the garden, which protects the Prince from the tragic reality of life outside, is the pessimistic symbol of negative expectations, uncertainty, distrust, disbelief, gloom, indecision, passivity, loneliness, and apathy:

Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince (Wilde, 1888, p. 8).

The average number of lexical tonality of the given fragment (-2) enhances the pessimistic symbolism of narration.

In *The Selfish Giant*, the *wall* represents the Giant's heart closed to children. The pessimistic tonality of the utterance is supported by the average number of lexical tonality (-1), which renders a range of pessimistic feelings and attitudes: sadness, negative expectations, distrust, disbelief, gloom, loneliness, and negative attitude:

So he built a high wall all round it and put up a noticeboard. TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. He was a very selfish Giant (Wilde, 1888, p. 46).

The ontological symbol of *death* became one of the most vivid linguosemiotic markers of the pessimistic narration in Oscar Wilde's collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. The concept of *death* has a deep semiotic root, so its sense can be explained from a semiotic perspective. In his book "De-Sign in the Transmodern World", Seif states: "When we cross the world of the living to the world of the dead, our physical existence is no longer here and now, but our souls and thoughts are, and will forever be, 'living' life semiotically" (Seif, 2019, p. 124). The metaphysics of death having transmitted into the tragic European pessimism of the XIX century became a new form of cultural and moral identifications based on nihilistic pessimism, catastrophic worldview, metaphysics of the end, and aestheticization of death as a fundamental human and cultural positive value.

I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?" (Wilde, 1888, p. 21).

Death is a great price to pay for a red rose," cried the Nightingale (Wilde, p. 33).

Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb (Wilde, 1888, p. 37-38).

...the little boy may fall into the deep river and be drowned (Wilde, 1888, p. 101).

At last, he lost his way and wandered off on the moor, which was a very dangerous place, as it was full of deep holes, and there poor little Hans was drowned (Wilde, 1888, p. 82).

The average negative pessimistic tonality of the fragments is -1. It is supported by the verbal implementation of basic, adjacent and related qualitative features of pessimism ("sadness", "negative expectations", "hopelessness", "misfortune", "uncertainty", "failure", "pain", "despair"; "depression", "suffering", "gloom", "grief"; "disappointment", "fear", "nervousness", "loneliness", "negative attitude", "lack of will", "agitation", "apathy").

The linguosemiotic approach to a literary text, viewed as a sample of a pessimistic discourse, makes it possible to define symbols of distancing and an ontological symbol of death representing the pessimistic poetics of the narration (See Table 3).

Table 3
Symbols of Distancing and Ontological Symbols as Linguosemiotic Markers of Pessimism

Symbol	Basic features of pessimism	Adjacent features of pessimism	Related features of pessimism	The average number of lexical tonality
Wall	sadness, negative expectations, hopelessness, uncertainty, distrust, disbelief, pain, despair	depression, suffering, gloom, grief, doubt, indecision	fear, lack of enthusiasm, dissatisfaction, passivity, lack of interest, loneliness, negative attitude, lack of will, apathy, lack of purpose, lack of motivation	wall: -2
Death	sadness, negative expectations, hopelessness, misfortune, failure, pain, despair	depression, suffering, gloom, grief	disappointment, fear, nervousness, loneliness, negative attitude, lack of will, agitation, apathy	death: -1

Having applied the method of quantitative analysis we defined the frequency characteristics of the symbols designating the phenomenon of pessimism in the collection under study (See Table 4).

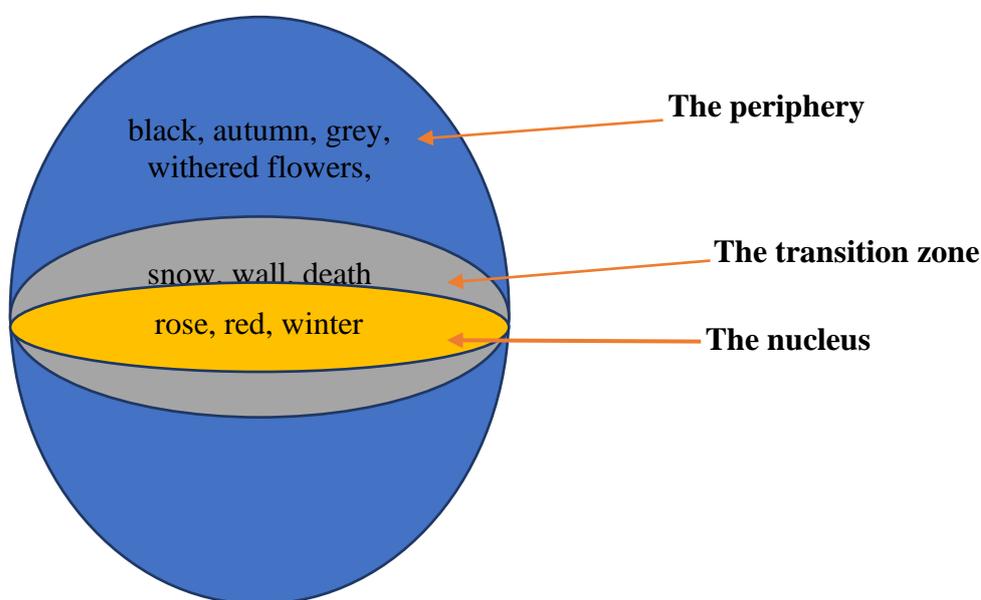
Table 4
Absolute and Relative Frequency of the Symbols Designating the Phenomenon of Pessimism

Symbol	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
rose	61	36.75
red	44	26.51
winter	15	9.04
snow	10	6.02
wall	9	5.42
death	8	4.82
black	5	3.01
autumn	4	2.41
grey	4	2.41
withered flowers	3	1.81
student's shoes	2	1.2
cart-wheel	1	.6
	166	100

As can be seen from the data the nucleus comprises the following symbols: **rose** (36.75%), which belongs to the group of *flowers*, **red** (26.51%), which belongs to the group of *colours* and **winter** (9.04%), which belongs to the group of *seasons*. Symbols of four groups of the material world (colours, seasons, things of everyday use, flowers) stand out on the periphery. As the border between the nucleus and the periphery is unclear, and amorphous, we can talk about a transitional group of symbols, which includes *snow*, *wall* and *death*. Thus, the quantitative distribution of elements between the nucleus, the transition zone, and the periphery are three, three, and six symbols, respectively (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Quantitative Distribution of the Symbols Designating the Phenomenon of Pessimism



The data given above, which demonstrate the quantitative evaluation of the frequency characteristics of the separate symbols designating the phenomenon of pessimism in Oscar Wilde’s collection *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, still fail to explain the general pessimistic markedness of the groups these symbols enter. The results of quantitative analysis which represent the relative frequency of the groups of pessimistically marked symbols are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Relative Frequency of the Groups of Symbols Designating the Phenomenon of Pessimism

Groups of symbols	Relative frequency
Symbols of nature: flowers	38.56
Symbols of the material world:	31.93

colours	
Symbols of nature: seasons	17.47
Symbols of distancing and ontological symbols	10.24
Symbols of the material world: things of everyday use	1.8
	100

Having indicated the relative frequency of the groups of pessimistically marked symbols, we can assume that the symbols of nature (seasons, flowers) have the highest general relative frequency – 56.03; the symbols of the material world show the decrease in the general relative frequency – 33.73. The general relative frequency of the group of symbols of distance and ontological symbols is 10.24.

Conclusions

Oscar Wilde's collection "The Happy Prince and Other Tales" is an example of pessimistic discourse, rich in linguosemiotic means of creating the poetics of pessimism. Symbols of nature (seasons, flowers), the material world (colours, everyday objects), distance and death are considered as indirect markers of pessimism through the textual implementation of basic, adjacent and related qualitative features of pessimism, reflecting its psychological and socio-cognitive aspects. The relative frequency of the groups of symbols denoting the phenomenon of pessimism indicates their potential for creating a pessimistic discourse with its negative tonality in such a way that the higher the frequency, the more pessimistic the author's narrative. Pessimistic symbols identified in Oscar Wilde's collection "The Happy Prince and Other Tales" are components of the semiotic fabric of literary prose text, endowed with significant information about the author's conceptual picture of the world and idiosyncrasy.

The proposed methodology has potential applications in psycholinguistics, linguosemiotics, cognitive semiotic linguistics, communicative linguistics and discourse studies. The obtained results contribute to the elaboration of the linguosemiotic study of ontological phenomena in fictional texts and to the enrichment of the knowledge of the author's idiosyncrasy. Furthermore, the application of semantic and linguosemiotic approaches to the interpretation of textual facts can make it possible to identify the indirect indicators and contextual markers of these phenomena in texts of different genres..

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Грабовецька О. С. Відтворення біблійної інтертекстуальності поезії в прозі “The Master” Оскара Вайлда в українському перекладі. Науковий журнал Львівського державного університету безпеки життєдіяльності «Львівський філологічний часопис». 2019. № 5. С. 35-41.
- Ігнатєва С. Є. Оптимістичний та песимістичний типи тональності у комунікативному просторі щоденникового дискурсу. Вісник Дніпропетровського університету. Серія «Мовознавство». 2013. Том 2. Вип. 19. № 11. С. 77–84.
- Карпінська Л. Л. Символіка саду у творах О. Уайльда та роль мовно-виражальних засобів у її зображенні. Науковий вісник Міжнародного гуманітарного університету. Серія: Філологія. 2018. Том 2. № 34. С. 24–26.
- Лепський М. А. Взаємозв’язок оптимізму та песимізму: проблема соціальної перспективи: автореф. дис. ... д-ра філософ. наук : 09.00.03. Ін-т вищої освіти. Академія пед. наук. Київ, 2006.
- Перебийніс В. С. Кількісні та якісні характеристики системи фонем сучасної української літературної мови: монографія. Київ: наукова думка, 1970. 272 с.
- Alsheikh, S., Alsady, R. (2022). Sings at work: a semiotic quest for Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358955273_sings_at_work_a_semiotic_quest_for_oscar_wilde's_the_happy_prince
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, A., Piger, J., & Sedor, L. (2006). *Beyond the numbers: An analysis of optimistic and pessimistic language in earnings press releases*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (Working Paper 2006-005A). <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e6bc/1639e56bef654a66f1910f88f5da523a1c55.pdf>
- Deely, J. (2001). The quasi-error of the external world: An essay for Thomas A. Sebeok, in memoriam. *American Journal of Semiotics*, 17(4), 477-509.
- Deely, J. (2009). *Purely objective reality*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Dewey, G. (2014). *Relative frequency of English speech sounds*. Harvard University Press.
- Dienstag, J. (2009). *Pessimism: philosophy, ethic, spirit*. Princeton University Press.
- Extremera, N., Duran, A., & Rey, L. (2007). Perceived emotional intelligence and dispositional optimism-pessimism: Analysing their role in predicting psychological adjustment among adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 42(6), 1069–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.09.014>
- Im, Y. (2017). “A seriousness that fails”: reconsidering symbolism in Oscar Wilde's “Salomé”. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45(1), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150316000486>
- Keivom-Lockhart, J. (2013). The Relationship between Situational Optimism / Pessimism and Donating Intentions. MSc thesis. The University of Canterbury.
- Milam, J. (2002). Adaptation to a life-threatening diagnosis: Dispositional optimism and pessimism and posttraumatic growth among patients with HIV. Ph.D. thesis. The University of Southern California.
- Norem, J., & Illingworth, K. (1993). Strategy-dependent effects of reflecting on self and tasks: Some implications of optimism and defensive pessimism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 822–835.
- Peirce, Ch.S. (1991). Peirce on signs: Writings on semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce. J. Hoops (Ed.). The University of North Carolina Press.
- Peterson, C., Maier, S., & Seligman M. (1995). *Learned helplessness: A theory for the age of personal control*. Oxford University Press.
- Rombach, M. (2011). *An analysis of optimistic and pessimistic language in Earnings Press releases*. GRIN Verlag.
- Sandner, D. (1991). *Navajo symbols of healing*. Healing Arts Press.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2015). *The essays of studies in pessimism*. Full Moon Publications.

- Seif, Farouk, Y. (2019). *De-Sign in the transmodern world: Envisioning reality beyond absoluteness*. Peter Lang AG.
- Shtepa A. (2018). The role of artistic details in the structure of the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. *Philological Sciences*, 29, 51–54.
- Skaggs, S. (2017). *FireSigns: A semiotic theory for graphic design*. The MIT Press.
- Toirova, N. (2019). The significance of the symbols of Mirror and Portrait in teaching symbolism on the basis of “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 4(4), 1073–1708. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.4424>
- Tresidder, J. (2005). *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*. Chronicle Books Publications.
- White, L., & Dillingham, B. (1973). *The concept of culture*. Burgess Publishing Company.

References (translated and transliterated)

- Hrabovetska, O. (2019). Vidtvorennia bibliinoi intertekstualnosti poezii v prozi “The Master” Oskara Vailda v ukrainskomu perekladi [Reproduction of the Biblical Intertextuality of Poetry in a Prose Work “The Master” by Oscar Wilde in Ukrainian Translation]. *Lvivskyi Filolohichnyi Chasopys*, 5, 35-41.
- Ihnatieva, S. (2013). Optymistychnyi ta pesymistychnyi typy tonalnosti u komunikatyvnomu prostori shchodennykovoho dyskursu [Optimistic and Pessimistic Types of Tonality in the Communicative Space of Diary Discourse]. *Visnyk Dnipropetrovskoho Universytetu. Serii Movoznavstvo*, 11(2). 77–84.
- Karpinska, L. (2018). Symvolika sadu u tvorakh O. Vailda ta rol movno-vyrazhalnykh zasobiv u yii zobrazhenni [Symbolism of the garden in the works by O. Wilde and the role of language and expressive means in its depiction]. *Naukovyi Visnyk Mizhnarodnoho Humanitarnoho Universytetu. Series: Philology*, 2(34), 24–26.
- Lepskiy, M. (2006). Vzaiezozv'iazok optymizmu ta pesymizmu: problema sotsialnoi perspektyvy [The Interrelation of Optimism and Pessimism: The Problem of Social Perspective]. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation. Academy of Pedagogical Sciences.
- Perebyinis, V. (1970). Kil'kisni ta jakisni xarakterystyky systemy fonem sučasnoji ukrajins'koji literaturnoji movy [Quantitative and Qualitative Characteristics of the Phoneme System of Modern Ukrainian Literary Language]. *Naukova Dumka*.
- Alsheikh, S., Alsady, R. (2022). Sings at work: a semiotic quest for Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358955273_sings_at_work_a_semiotic_quest_for_oscar_wilde's_the_happy_prince
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, A., Piger, J., & Sedor, L. (2006). *Beyond the numbers: An analysis of optimistic and pessimistic language in earnings press releases*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (Working Paper 2006-005A). <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e6bc/1639e56bef654a66f1910f88f5da523a1c55.pdf>
- Deely, J. (2001). The quasi-error of the external world: An essay for Thomas A. Sebeok, in memoriam. *American Journal of Semiotics*, 17(4), 477-509.
- Deely, J. (2009). *Purely objective reality*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Dewey, G. (2014). *Relative frequency of English speech sounds*. Harvard University Press.
- Dienstag, J. (2009). *Pessimism: philosophy, ethic, spirit*. Princeton University Press.
- Extremera, N., Duran, A., & Rey, L. (2007). Perceived emotional intelligence and dispositional optimism-pessimism: Analysing their role in predicting psychological adjustment among adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 42(6), 1069–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.09.014>
- Im, Y. (2017). “A seriousness that fails”: reconsidering symbolism in Oscar Wilde's “Salomé”. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45(1), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150316000486>

- Keivom-Lockhart, J. (2013). The Relationship between Situational Optimism / Pessimism and Donating Intentions. MSc thesis. The University of Canterbury.
- Milam, J. (2002). Adaptation to a life-threatening diagnosis: Dispositional optimism and pessimism and posttraumatic growth among patients with HIV. Ph.D. thesis. The University of Southern California.
- Norem, J., & Illingworth, K. (1993). Strategy-dependent effects of reflecting on self and tasks: Some implications of optimism and defensive pessimism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 822–835.
- Peirce, Ch.S. (1991). Peirce on signs: Writings on semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce. J. Hoops (Ed.). The University of North Carolina Press.
- Peterson, C., Maier, S., & Seligman M. (1995). *Learned helplessness: A theory for the age of personal control*. Oxford University Press.
- Rombach, M. (2011). *An analysis of optimistic and pessimistic language in Earnings Press releases*. GRIN Verlag.
- Sandner, D. (1991). *Navajo symbols of healing*. Healing Arts Press.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2015). *The essays of studies in pessimism*. Full Moon Publications.
- Seif, Farouk, Y. (2019). *De-Sign in the transmodern world: Envisioning reality beyond absoluteness*. Peter Lang AG.
- Shtepa A. (2018). The role of artistic details in the structure of the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. *Philological Sciences*, 29, 51–54.
- Skaggs, S. (2017). *FireSigns: A semiotic theory for graphic design*. The MIT Press.
- Toirova, N. (2019). The significance of the symbols of Mirror and Portrait in teaching symbolism on the basis of “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 4(4), 1073–1708. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.4424>
- Tresidder, J. (2005). *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*. Chronicle Books Publications.
- White, L., & Dillingham, B. (1973). *The concept of culture*. Burgess Publishing Company.
- .

Sources

- Wilde, O. (1888). *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Roberts Brothers.