

LINGUISTIC AND EXTRA-LINGUISTIC  
MEANS OF THE ACTUALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT “DEATH”  
IN E. DICKINSON’S POETRY

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The aim of the article is to study the poetry of E. Dickinson within the framework of Cognitive Poetics. Linguo-cognitive approach helps to reveal the implicit, hidden information of the text. The given article studies linguistic as well as extra-linguistic means of the actualization of the concept “death” in E. Dickinson’s poetry.

E. Dickinson, an American poetess of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the extraordinary figures in the world of poetry. Poetry was not a popular reading material until everyone saw E. Dickinson’s poems. This exceptional poetess greatly influenced the poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changing the poetic norms, the structure of the poems and the manner of writing. E. Dickinson’s works have been a model for perfection and originality of American poetry for many years. E. Dickinson, a smart and sensitive poetess, had a rich and colorful inner world. Reclusive in her father’s house, she kept exploring the essence of life, nature, love, death and eternal life. E. Dickinson wrote a great number of poems on various interesting themes and ideas, aspects dealing with different spheres of our life. The concept “*death*” is crucial in her poetry; in which E. Dickinson succeeded best of all and upon which she continually focused her attention and devoted her whole life and energy writing about it. More than 600 of her poems are talking about death, or subjects concerning death. In fact, she focused not only on death but also on the other side of the matter, the so-called opposite side which is *immortality*.

Dying and death follows the reader everywhere – in every word, in every line, in every full stop or dash. Death is E. Dickinson’s obsession. She suffered and changed a lot every time someone died, be it her cousin, her tutor, her friend or her pet. This might explain the choice of the theme.

E. Dickinson's preference for the subject of death has aroused great interest among scholars all over the world. M. Freeman has devoted many articles [1,2,3] to E. Dickinson. She has studied her lyrics from cognitive point of view. However, despite the great interest towards the writer, the latter has not been studied from linguo-cognitive perspectives. Overall linguistic investigation widens and enlarges understandings of Dickinson's unique world, her magnificent inner world which she tried to conceal from the whole world. No wonder, she did not publish any of her poems. They were not written for publication. If not her sister perhaps the world would never have known one of the outstanding poetesses of the American literature.

The aim of the article is to study the poetry of E. Dickinson within the framework of Cognitive Poetics [See: 5]. Linguo-cognitive analysis helps to illustrate how emotional qualities can be conveyed by poetry; and, as a more extreme instance, how "altered states of consciousness" are displayed by strings of words. Linguo-cognitive analysis of poems allows us to look beyond the surface. Thus, in E. Dickinson's writing, she maintains the importance of the "Self", a theme closely related to her disapproval of God. As E. Dickinson understood it, the mere act of speaking or writing is an affirmation of the will, and the call of the poet, in particular, is the call to explore and express the self to others. For E. Dickinson, the "Self" brings to understanding of identity according to the way it systematizes its perceptions of the world, forms its goals and values, and comes to judgments regarding what it perceives.

Most of Dickinson's death-themed poems are about the positive attitude towards death, the yearning for the eternal life and the curiosity of the world after life.

The following poem [6] with its further analysis serves to vividly illustrate the basic concept "death", which covers the frame "Self" together with the concepts "immortality" and "eternity" and further extra-linguistic and linguistic means of the actualization.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,  
A Service, like a Drum –  
Kept beating – beating – till I thought  
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down–  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –

In the given poem E. Dickinson follows her usual four-line stanzas and *abcb* rhyme scheme, the specific characteristic feature of her style, throughout the poem, except for the last stanza, in which she turns to the slant rhyme to make it more dramatic – another typical feature of her style.

The concept “*death*”, though used not directly, but metaphorically, accompanies the reader throughout the whole poem, even when there is no direct mention or use of the term “*death*”. However, “*death*” is the most obvious connotation with a funeral. The concept “*death*” is identified by the lexemes: **a funeral, a service, a box**. The frame gives us the whole idea, the entire understanding of a poem. So, the concept “*death*” in the given poem is only the *trace*, the so-called “*footprint*” of the frame, through which E. Dickinson tries to describe, or to emphasize her inner feelings and emotions, the chaos and confusion within her brain and soul, the process of dying of her Self - the death of her inner world: *her brain and her soul*. Thus, the entire poem has a metaphorical character because it describes not a real funeral, but the funeral inside the author’s mind, the “*inner*” funeral, the funeral of her brain and, to complete her thought, the funeral of her **Self**. Through this poem E. Dickinson expresses the loss of her Self, the chaos in her mind.

E. Dickinson describes the funeral as if it were her own, as if she watched herself in her coffin, alone, secluded, separated from other people. In fact, her feelings are natural, and her fears are natural, too. E. Dickinson not only imagines, but also describes the ceremony step by step, from the beginning to the very end.

It is worth mentioning that the key words of the poem, which bear the message of the author and her feelings and sufferings are capitalized: *Funeral, Brain, Mourners, Sense, Service, Drum, Mind, Box, Soul, Boots of Lead, Space, Heavens, Bell, Being, Ear, Silence, Race, Plank, Reason, World, Finished*. The key words may even be classified into two groups: those denoting the concept “**death**” such as *funeral, mourners, service* and others; and those which constitute the frame of the poem – “**Self**”: *Brain, Mind, Sense and Soul*. Another interesting feature is that all the capitalized words are nouns, except one – *Finished*. The verb is capitalized to attract the reader’s attention to something very significant that has happened; everything is finished at last.

Phonetic expressive means such as onomatopoeia **Kept treading – treading – till it seemed Kept beating – beating – till I thought**, repetition *treading – treading; beating –*

*beating, down and down*, are used to create the feeling of a funeral march that just goes on and on. Polysyndeton **and** (*And Being, but an Ear, And I, and Silence, some strange Race, And then I heard them lift a Box, And creak across my Soul And then a Plank in Reason, broke, And I dropped down, and down, And hit a World, at every plunge, And Finished knowing – then*) adds some emotional colouring, the sequential character to the funeral ceremony of the “brain”. Here alliteration plays a significant role. The whole poem is based on the repetition of the “unpleasant” sound [s] which symbolizes sorrow. It adds musical emotional accompaniment to her sorrow and loneliness.

And Mourners to and fro  
 Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
 That Sense was breaking through –  
 And when they all were seated,  
 A Service, like a Drum –  
 And then I heard them lift a Box,  
 And creak across my Soul  
 With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
 Then Space – began to toll  
 As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race,  
 Wrecked, solitary, here –

The whole poem is based on subtext. The first two stanzas bear the main conceptual information.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
 And Mourners to and fro  
 Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
 That Sense was breaking through –  
  
 And when they all were seated,  
 A Service, like a Drum –  
 Kept beating – beating – till I thought  
 My Mind was going numb –

Here the lexeme “**funeral**” is used metaphorically to emphasize the passing of the author’s mind from one state to another, from life to death, from sanity to insanity. Another metaphor in the poem is the lexeme “**mourners**”, which helps to express the pain and sorrow she suffers. What is interesting is that although she “feels a funeral in her brain,” there is no feeling on the part of the mourners. There are no sounds of crying, weeping, no sadness, no grief, no words at a service, as though she did not exist. The following lines are used implicitly:

Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
 That Sense was breaking through -  
 Kept beating – beating – till I thought

My Mind was going numb.

They are used metaphorically to express, on the one hand, the idea, that her Self is divided into two parts: one is still alive and the other is already dead, on the other hand, they serve to express her rising irritation with the people who came at her funeral, but never assisted during her life. The word “**beating**” is used deliberately in the sense of not only beating a drum, but beating a person, not physically but psychologically. And this process goes on until she can bear it no more and becomes “**numb**”. The lines describe her mental state; she is so fed up by the people that everything they do has lost any meaning.

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space – began to toll,

Conceptual information is vividly expressed in the first line of the third stanza **And then I heard them lift a Box**. It is used to emphasize the so-called breaking-point, the idea of passing from life to death. An interesting fact is that instead of using the word “**coffin**” which is directly associated with the funeral ceremony, E. Dickinson uses euphemism “**a box**” which has no denotative meaning of “**coffin**”. The author continues to develop the thought in the second and the third lines:

And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again.

These lines are used metaphorically to emphasize the burden of her soul, the heavy condition of her mind, which has become even heavier after death, while she expected it to bring her release. Here it is worth paying attention to the deictic phrase **With those same Boots**, the deixis **those** bears a great conceptual information, it indicates the existence of unfavorable people in her life who are present at her “**funeral**”. Her sufferings are at the hands of the same people who have caused her sufferings all along during her life, which is indicated by an adverb **again** (**creak my soul with the same Boots of Lead, again**). The ignorant, indifferent people came to her funeral, to be there with her for the last time, although they scarcely were able to help her, or at least to be with her in her life. They just fulfilled their social obligation to her and nothing more. She blames them for their ignorance. Of course, this is also hyperbole. The conceptual information reaches its climax in the last line of this stanza **Then Space – began to toll**.

The following stanza together with the previous line cover perhaps the most important subtext.

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here –

Such key words as “**drum**”, “**bell**” and “**toll**” are not used by accident. They indicate the turning point of the poem. Here the expression “**bell tolls**” signals the end – of a funeral, of her life. As we know, the bell tolls at the funeral when the grave-diggers immerse the coffin in the ground. This is the turning point when there is no way back. There is a saying that “there is always a chance until the sand touches the coffin cover”. The bell tolls so intensely that it seems to her that the whole “space began to toll and heavens were a bell”. This also symbolizes the chaotic condition of her mind.

In the line **The Heavens were a Bell** we deal with conceptual metaphor, where heavens serve as a signal, a warning. A subtext covers the following lines:

And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here.

The key word “**ear**” metonymically refers to people reduced to the level of being ears. It illustrates that they are made up of what they hear, they are dependent on the society and its norms, whereas she separates herself from other people in that **she and Silence** form a strange race and are, therefore, different from the people who are merely “Ears”. So different as to be a different race also emphasizes her loneliness. She does not only separate and isolate herself, but also shows that it is an unchangeable condition, as she belongs to another race and is “wrecked and solitary here”, that is, there is no hope for her, she is broken and alone. *Silence is her only friend*. The “**silence**” refers to her isolation and separation from the rest of the world. Although the people surround her, they are nameless, faceless. She cannot and, in fact, does not want to see and hear them. She is all alone in her silence.

In the last stanza we observe the degradation of the poem again with the help of a metaphor.

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped, down and down –  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –

These lines are used metaphorically as they describe a dreadful vision – the plank of her coffin breaks and plunges into the hole. This provides a vision of pain and finality.

The lines **And I dropped, down and down – And hit a World, at every plunge** portray her “dying” on different worlds in search of the right one, where she will find her Self. She goes on trying to survive and save herself at every possible opportunity. The lines also illustrate that she does not merely sink into the abyss, or drop into the grave, but suffers all the way down. The word “**hit**” intensifies her pain, describing that instead of passing worlds on her way down, she hit each one. The lines also illustrate that ignorant people not only pushed her over the edge, but also allowed her to fall until the very end of understanding. And her falling was not a brief instant, but a long continuous process in which she “**dropped down and down-**”. It is worth paying attention to such an extra-

linguistic means as dash. In this poem dash is most likely used in the sense that the thought is not complete, or that it goes on in the next line, or perhaps because something that is on her mind is not expressed on the piece of paper. The use of dash in the last line (**And Finished knowing – then –**) changes the whole sorrowful, mournful atmosphere of the poem. It gives hope – perhaps it is not the end. This is a hint at the idea of eternal life, that after death of a man, or his mind, something still goes on, he still continues to exist.

Thus, the frame of the poem is human “Self” with its sub-frames “brain” and “soul”, the two permanent and inseparable parts of one reality. The frame is actualized via concept “death” as well as a hint at the concepts “eternity” and “immortality”, which becomes clear in the last stanza of the poem.

*«Մահ» հասկացույթի լեզվական և արտալեզվական առկայացման  
միջոցները է. Դիքենսոնի պոեզիայում  
Բսահակյան Հ.Յ.*

Տվյալ հոդվածը նվիրված է «մահ» հասկացույթի լեզվական, ինչպես նաև արտալեզվական առկայացման միջոցների ուսումնասիրությանը է. Դիքենսոնի պոեզիայում: Գեղարվեստական տեքստի լեզվական նյութի վերլուծությունը լեզվաճանաչողական մոտեցմամբ հնարավորություն է տալիս բացահայտելու ներակա թաքնված իմաստային շերտերը:

*Лингвистические и экстра-лингвистические средства актуализации концепта  
"Смерть" в поэзии Э. Дикинсона  
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Данная статья посвящается рассмотрению лингвистических, а также экстралингвистических средств актуализации концепта "смерть" в поэзии поэтессы Э. Дикинсон. Лингво-когнитивный подход помогает выявить глубинные имплицитные смысловые слои концепта.

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