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## **Image Schema in Multi-Ethnic American Novel Covers**

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## Abstract

Book covers play a significant role as they send various messages not only through textual elements but also and most importantly through visual ones. It is noteworthy that it is the responsibility of the book cover designers, in coordination with the authors, to “represent the ideas of the author, reflect the content of the book, and attract customers to purchase the book” (Gallager, 2015). Based on the review of literature made, most researchers, if not all, focus on the content inside the book ignoring text in the synopsis and/or the visual content on the front cover. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse the visual content on the books’ front cover along with the written synopsis on the back cover. The data of this study is 20 novel covers written by American female feminist writers from different ethnic groups. Thus, it is analysed within the framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) by (Lazar, 2005) to explore the representation of women reflected through the covers. Additionally, this study applies the Image Schema Theory (Johnson, 1987) using the typology of (Evans & Green, 2006) and the modality markers proposed by (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, the study investigates the American ‘melting pot’ hypothesis, where the mainstream American culture has superseded all other secondary cultures. Results show a high degree of acculturation between the subcultures and the mainstream Anglo-Saxon American culture.

### Key words:

*Cognitive Semantics, Image Schema Theory, Feminist CDA, book covers, The melting pot hypothesis*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>0.1 Overview of the Multi-Ethnic American Literature .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>0.2 Significance of the Study .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>0.3 Objectives of the Study .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>0.4 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>0.5 Data Selection.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>0.6 Methodology .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>0.7 Review of Literature.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>0.7.1 Previous Studies Using Image Schema .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>0.7.2 Previous Studies Using FCDA .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>0.7.3 Previous Studies Using Multimodality .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>0.7.4 Studies Analyzing Book Covers.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter One Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.1 Chapter Overview .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.2 Image Schema .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.3 Properties of Image Schemas.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>1.4 Types of Image Schemas .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>1.4.1 CONTAINMENT .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>1.4.2 FORCE .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>1.4.3 BALANCE.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>1.4.4 LOCOMOTION .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>1.4.5 UNITY/MULTIPLICITY .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>1.4.6 EXISTENCE .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>1.4.7 IDENTITY .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>1.4.8 SPACE .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>1.5 Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>1.6 Motivation for Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>1.7 Aims and Principles of FCDA.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>1.8 Modality Markers and Colour.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Chapter Two Analysis of Anglo-Saxon American Novel Covers .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>2.1. Chapter Overview.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>2.2. Image Schemas in Synopses .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>2.2.1 FORCE (COMPULSION).....</b>	<b>81</b>

2.2.2.. EXISTENCE (OBJECT).....	83
2.3 Image Schema Analysis of Front Covers .....	84
2.3.1. SPACE (NEAR). .....	90
2.3.2Otherschemas.....	91
2.4.Modality Markers and Colour Analysis .....	94
2.4.1 Saturation, Differentiation and Modulation. ....	95
2.4.2 Illumination and Brightness. ....	96
2.4.3 Representation, Contextualization and Depth.....	96
2.5 Principles of FCDA .....	98
Chapter Three Analysis of African American Novel Covers.....	101
3.1 Chapter Overview .....	101
3.2 Image Schemas in Synopses .....	102
3.2.1 EXISTENCE (OBJECT) and (PROCESS).....	118
3.2.2 FORCE (COMPULSION).....	119
3.3 Image Schema analysis of front covers. ....	120
3.3.1 SPACE (FRONT). ....	126
3.3.2 SPACE (NEAR). ....	127
3.3.3 SPACE (BACK).....	127
3.3.4 SPACE (UP). ....	127
3.3.5 Other schemas.....	128
3.4 Modality markers and colour in front covers .....	129
3.4.1 Saturation, Differentiation and Modulation. ....	130
3.4.2 Illumination and Brightness .....	131
3.4.3 Representation, Contextualization and Depth.....	131
3.5 FCDA in African American Novels.....	132
Chapter Four Analysis of Chinese American Novel Covers.....	135
4.1 Chapter overview .....	135
4.2 Image schemas in the synopses .....	135
4.2.1 EXISTENCE (OBJECT). ....	160
4.2.2 CONTAINMENT (IN). ....	162
4.2.3 FORCE (COMPULSION).....	163
4.3 Image schema analysis of front covers.....	164
4.3.1 SPACE (FRONT). ....	170
4.3.2 SPACE (NEAR). ....	170
4.3.3 SPACE (BACK).....	171
4.3.4 Other Schemas. ....	171
4.4 Modality markers and Colour in Front Covers.....	172
4.4.1 Saturation, Modulation and Differentiation. ....	173
4.4.2 Illumination and Brightness. ....	174
4.4.3 Representation, Contextualization and Depth. ....	175

4.5. FCDA Key Principles .....	175
<b>Chapter Five Analysis of Latin American Novel Covers .....</b>	<b>178</b>
5.1. Chapter Overview .....	178
5.2 Image Schemas in Synopses .....	178
5.2.1 EXISTENCE (OBJECT) .....	199
5.4.2 CONTAINMENT (IN). .....	201
5.4.3 FORCE (COMPULSION). .....	201
5.3 Image Schemas in Front Covers.....	203
5.3.1 SPACE (NEAR). .....	209
5.3.2 SPACE (FAR). .....	210
5.3.3 SPACE (FRONT). .....	210
5.3.4 Other Schemas .....	211
5.4 Modality Markers and Colour in Front Covers.....	212
5.4.1 Saturation, Differentiation and Modulation .....	213
5.4.2 Illumination and Brightness .....	214
5.4.3 Representation, Contextualization and Depth.....	214
5.5 FCDA key principles .....	215
<b>Results and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Limitations of the Study .....</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Suggestions for Further Research .....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>242</b>

**List of Abbreviations**

CL Cognitive Linguistics

CS Cognitive Semantics

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

FCDA Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

MDA Multimodal Discourse Analysis

**List of Figures**

<i>Figure 1</i> .....	83
<i>Figure 2</i> .....	86
<i>Figure 3</i> .....	87
<i>Figure 4</i> .....	88
<i>Figure 5</i> .....	89
<i>Figure 6</i> .....	90
<i>Figure 7</i> .....	92
<i>Figure 8</i> .....	121
<i>Figure 9</i> .....	120
<i>Figure 10</i> .....	123
<i>Figure 11</i> .....	124
<i>Figure 12</i> .....	126
<i>Figure 13</i> .....	126
<i>Figure 14</i> .....	164
<i>Figure 15</i> .....	165
<i>Figure 16</i> .....	166
<i>Figure 17</i> .....	167
<i>Figure 18</i> .....	168
<i>Figure 19</i> .....	167
<i>Figure 20</i> .....	160
<i>Figure 21</i> .....	203
<i>Figure 22</i> .....	201
<i>Figure 23</i> .....	205
<i>Figure 24</i> .....	206

<i>Figure 25</i> .....	207
<i>Figure 26</i> .....	209
<i>Figure 27</i> .....	209
<i>Figure 28</i> .....	211

## List of Tables

Table 1.....	34
Table 2.....	62
Table 3.....	63
Table 4.....	65
Table 5.....	65
Table 6.....	68
Table 7.....	69
Table 8.....	70
Table 9.....	71
Table 10.....	76
Table 11.....	77
Table 12.....	81
Table 13.....	86
Table 14.....	87
Table 15.....	88
Table 16.....	89
Table 17.....	90
Table 18.....	91
Table 19.....	91
Table 20.....	104
Table 21.....	105
Table 22.....	106
Table 23.....	107
Table 24.....	108
Table 25.....	09-111
Table 26.....	112
Table 27.....	112-114
Table 28.....	115

Table 29.....	115- 117.
Table 30.....	119-120
Table 31.....	123-124
Table 32.....	124
Table 33.....	125
Table 34.....	126
Table 35.....	127
Table 36.....	128
Table 37.....	128-129
Table 38.....	137-138
Table 39.....	138-143
Table 40.....	144
Table 41.....	145-147
Table 42.....	147-148
Table 43.....	148-151
Table 44.....	152-153
Table 45.....	153-156
Table 46.....	156
Table 47.....	157-159
Table 48.....	159-161
Table 49.....	167
Table 50.....	168
Table 51.....	169
Table 52.....	170
Table 53.....	171
Table 54.....	171-172
Table 55.....	182
Table 56.....	183
Table 57.....	184

Table 58.....	184-187
Table 59.....	188
Table 60.....	188-192
Table 61.....	193-194
Table 62.....	195
Table 63.....	196-200
Table 64.....	200-202
Table 65.....	207
Table 66.....	208-209
Table 67.....	210
Table 68.....	210-211
Table 69.....	211-212
Table 70.....	212
Table 71.....	212.



## Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics is a modern school of linguistic thought and practice which is concerned with investigating the relationship between human language, the mind and socio-physical experience (Evans et al., 2007). In Cognitive linguistics, language has two functions: An interactive function and a symbolic function. The symbolic function of language arises from the assumption that language, as a means of encoding and externalizing thoughts, reflects patterns of thought. Language does that through using symbols which bear different linguistic forms, whether spoken, written or signed (Evans & Green, 2006, p.7). Additionally, one of the main areas investigated by Cognitive linguistics is Cognitive Semantics which is concerned with conceptual structures. Cognitive Semantics entails Frame Semantics and Image Schema, which was introduced by Mark Johnson in his book *The Body in The Mind* (1987).

In his book *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Lakoff (1987) stresses that human beings have a conceptualization capacity. This capacity consists of the ability to form symbolic structures, i.e., image schematic concepts that correlate with perceptual structures in everyday experience. In addition, humans have the ability to form complex concepts and general categories using image schemas as structuring devices (p.281). He also highlights that one of the important discoveries of cognitive science is that the conceptual systems used in languages make use of a relatively small number of basic image schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.42). Thus, image schemas play a significant role in decoding thoughts and consequently producing reliable cognitive analyses.

Most researchers focus on analyzing the content inside the work and little work has been done on the covers. According to Lickerman (2012), human beings are *visual creatures* because the visual area at the back of the brain comprises 30% of the Cortex which results in processing images faster than words. This can be traced in book covers as the cooperation