

## ОЛЬФАКТОРНЫЙ ПОРТРЕТ ГОРОДА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ ЯЗЫКОВОМ СОЗНАНИИ

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## THE OLFACTORY PORTRAIT OF THE CITY IN MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

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**Аннотация:** данное исследование посвящено рассмотрению образа города в англоязычной художественной прозе второй половины XX – начала XXI в. с точки зрения обоняния. Исследование проводилось на материале примеров, взятых из Британского национального корпуса, а также Корпуса современного американского английского языка. В фокусе рассмотрения оказались запахи, присущие городу, было уделено внимание социальной составляющей семантики одоративов, используемых для создания образа города, в том числе семантике положительной и отрицательной оценки, а также символике запаха в рассматриваемой лингвокультуре. В процессе изучения одоронимов были выявлены наиболее продуктивные для ольфакторного описания локуса лексемы, а также была осуществлена классификация одоративов с точки зрения словообразования (простые, сложные, аналитические), источника запаха (природные и имеющие отношение к человеку, его деятельности), а также особенностей восприятия запахов (приятные и неприятные, вызывающие отвращение). Результаты исследования показали, что ольфакторный портрет города данного периода представляет собой характеризующее высокой степенью субъективности сложное многокомпонентное образование, в котором преобладают негативно воспринимаемые запахи физиологического и техногенного характера, в то время как спектр позитивно воспринимаемых ароматов ограничен запахами еды и природными ароматами. Способность запахов служить триггером для воспоминаний человека нашла отражение в неоднократном обращении авторов к «феномену Пруста». Также были выявлены повторяющиеся типовые характеристики запахов и случаи синестетического переноса из двух областей сенсорного восприятия, а именно из сферы «слуха» и из сферы «осознания», существование которых подтверждает значимость одоронимов для отображения смыслового пространства концепта в языковом сознании.

**Ключевые слова:** сложный концепт, образ города, семантика, одороним, синестезия, ольфакторная картина мира.

**Abstract:** the article is concerned with the way the city is depicted in English language fiction of the XX–XXI centuries from the perspective of smell. The study was conducted on the material of examples taken from the British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English. Smells and odours adherent to cities were analyzed with the focus on the social element of the odoratives' semantics used to form the image of the city, including its positive and negative evaluation, as well as the symbolism of smells in the linguoculture concerned. In the process of studying odoronyms, the most productive lexemes for the olfactory description of the locus were identified, and the odorants were classified from the point of view of word formation (simple, compound, analytical), the source of smell (natural and man-related), as well as characteristics of the perception of smells (pleasant and unpleasant, disgusting). The results of the study showed that the olfactory portrait of the city of this period is a complex multicomponent formation characterized by a high degree of subjectivity, in which negatively perceived odors of a physiological and technogenic nature prevail, while the spectrum of positively perceived



odors is limited to food odors and natural ones. The ability of smells to serve as a trigger for human memories is reflected in the authors' repeated reference to the "Proust phenomenon". Also, recurring typical characteristics of smells alongside with some cases of synesthetic transfer from two areas of sensory perception, namely from the spheres of "hearing" and "touch" were identified, the existence of which confirms the importance of odoronyms for the description of the semantics of the concept in the linguistic consciousness.

**Key words:** complex concept, the image of the city, semantics, odoronym, synesthesia, olfactory worldview.

## Introduction

The concept "city" in modern cognitive linguistics is a complex phenomenon, the development of the semantic space of which is inextricably linked with a person in particular and the culture of the people as a whole. From the variety of individual concepts of native speakers, a national concept sphere is formed, a careful study of which makes it possible to identify the specifics of the perception and display of the surrounding world within a particular linguoculture.

Describing a city as a complex concept is a rather difficult task as the object of study is multidimensional and ambiguous. The construction and development of the image of the city largely depends on the sensory information a person gets. We should also mention that while portraying a city, people often tend to address to the visual perception, as such a way of description is the easiest one. The city, first of all, is perceived as a holistic visually designed spatial formation that has its own geometry and volume, color, size, lighting, etc. That is why in this work we decided to shift the focus to the specifics of olfactory perception of the city.

The human sense of smell is a powerful tool that can evoke strong emotions and memories, that is why the number of works devoted to this phenomenon is steadily growing. The physiological and psychological aspects of odor perception have already been studied in sufficient detail, and now attempts are being made to consider them through the prism of linguistic and cultural studies. Thus, N. S. Pavlova in her study of lexemes with the same "smell" speaks about the existence of typical Russian smells that determine the specifics of the Russian olfactory picture of the world and have cultural significance [1, p. 6]. E. G. Basalaeva describes the features of the odoric representation of a significant for a person space (Motherland, Russia, etc.) based on the material of the Internet discourse [2]. Many works are devoted to the study of an individual author's olfactory pictures of the world, for example, I. Babel [3], V. O. Pelevin [4], E. Safarli [5], as well as their reconstruction in translation [6]. As for the study of urban space, several attempts were made to create olfactory images of certain toponyms [7; 8], however, a comprehensive study of the olfactory portrait of the "city" in a specific linguistic consciousness has not yet been carried out.

## Research methods and principles

Examples from The British National Corpus [9] and the Corpus of Contemporary American English [10] were used to complete our research tasks. The texts belonging to fiction prose of the second half of the 20th century and early 21st century were examined. The focus of cognitive-contextual analysis carried out was on odor-related descriptive passages and attributive constructions containing the lexemes "city" and "town", as well as metaphors that included odoronyms by which we mean the names that incorporate a semantic element of smell [1, p. 7]. The theoretical framework was drawn from the works of Russian linguists specializing in cognitive science [11] and semantics [12], as well as studies on olfaction as part of semiotics [13] and culture [14; 15].

According to the thesaurus [16], a synonymic series of monolexemes with the dominant "smell" was compiled: *aroma, bouquet, emanation, essence, flavor, fragrance, incense, odour, perfume, reek, redolence, savour, scent, spice, stench, stink, tang, trace, trail, whiff*. Then, within the subcorpus consisting of fragments of modern English prose with the lexemes "city" (2751 occurrences) and "town" (2163 occurrences), a search was conducted for collocations by the synonyms of "smell" within  $\pm 10$  words from the lexemes "city"/"town". As a result, 358 contexts related to the olfactory description of the locus were handpicked for further analysis. The lexeme "smell" turned out to be the most frequently used one (84 contexts). (It should be noted that in the prose of the period under consideration, the lexemes *bouquet, emanation, essence, redolence, savour, spice, trace, and trail* were not actualized when depicting the smell of the city.)

## Main results and discussion

Olfactory impressions being expressed through language become an essential part of a national culture. The specificity of olfactory perception is that this process is characterized by a high degree of subjectivity and emotional involvement. This is mainly due to the complexity of identification, description and, accordingly, researching aromas. In addition, the perception of smell is always very individual, because, unlike visual and auditory sensations, standard or unified characteristics or parameters cannot be used to describe smells; the result can radically differ from recipient to recipient. And, apparently, just for this reason, the olfactory component of

the image of the city really helps create the atmosphere of a place (locus).

From the point of view of word formation, the odoronyms used to describe the image of the city can be divided into **simple** (*stinking (city), ammoniac (whiffs), sooty (smell)*), **compound** (*cinnamon-like, lotus-rose, high-octane*), and **analytical** ones (*odour of the dead, dank smell of ruined buildings, fragrance of the city's ordinary life*). From the point of view of the source of the smell, all the olfactory characteristics of the city can be attributed either to **natural** (*sweet flower scents, smell of leaves, heavy fragrance of a nearby lilac bush*) or **man-related** (*the smell of piss and cement, the smell from the brewery, the stench of the subways*). As for the characteristics of the perception of smells, they can be divided into **pleasant** (*perfume of the lemon groves and lavender fields, the pleasant smell of April, sweet, spicy fragrance of the city*) and **unpleasant, disgusting** ones (*the city reek of oil and coal, the stench of the city, stink of a town*).

Let's now turn to a more detailed examination of the olfactory portrait of the city. The study showed that in English linguistic culture the authors are unanimous that a certain smell is inherent in the city, even if they do not specify which one, they mention it as part of a city's image:

*Young as she was, everything had stayed in her memory – the sights, sounds and **smells of the city**.*

*<...> she knew there was no other place like New York. It had its own unique everything, right down to the **smell of the city**.*

*Essex is focused on building a new life, but she also speaks eloquently about New Orleans: "I can actually feel the vibrations of the city. I can actually **smell my city**. The rain doesn't even smell the same up here."*

The smell of the city is often complex and multi-component, it is a kind of a palette of olfactory impressions, which is designed to reveal the created image in as much detail as possible:

*<...> **the scent of the city**, which was – in equal parts – **diesel exhaust, rank mango from the pyramids stacked on the sidewalks, and the keen salty air that rose off the Pacific**.*

*What is most immediately striking about the city is its **smell**. <...> a **ripe, sweet, cinnamon-like odor, a blend of woodsmoke, garbage, jungle decay, diesel fumes, rotting bananas, charcoal and ash, sweat, dung, and tallow**.*

If we pay attention to the evaluative characteristics of olfactory impressions, the predominance of unpleasant odors becomes apparent. Maybe because a person tends to verbalize a negative olfactory experience, since a positive one is taken for granted. It is significant that in the image of the city, unpleasant odors act as a sign of a bad ecological situation, environmental pollution, and

are mainly of a man-related nature, which in turn can be divided into related to **human physiology** (*the rank dank smell of piss; A faint, stale aroma like the residue of sweat, etc.*) and related to **human activities** such as industry, waste/dumps, exhaust gases, etc. (*metal, grease, the low burn of exhaust fumes; city reek of oil and coal; diesel fumes; the stench of the subways; ammoniac whiffs from the town culvert, etc.*). Another category of unpleasant odors widely represented in the urban palette is the smell of decay and death.

*The curtain stirred and a **smell of the city** slipped in past the half-open window – **acidic, high-octane, with a touch of rot**.*

*<...> **the burning odors from the smelter crowded out the natural smells of pine and night air**.*

*<...> most of his life Dickens lived in a **city in which the odour of the dead emanated from metropolitan graveyards, where adults and children died of malnutrition or disease, where open sewers and cesspools spread their miasma into the foggy air...***

The smell of the city as a place unsuitable for life is often opposed to the smells of nature, which, as a rule, do not have negative connotations. (*She liked the grounds too, the little woods, far from the ugly clamour and harsh odours of the city.*)

The mention of a loci smell in a work of art requires context for the correct interpretation of the author's idea [7, p. 107]. So, for example, the smell of food mostly triggers positive associations in the mind of a reader, but sometimes even one word can change the meaning of a phrase to opposite and the same smell can acquire negative connotations for a person (compare: *a ripe, sweet, cinnamon-like odor* (positive) vs. *a musty, sweet, spicy fragrance* (negative)):

*The one thing rain never washes away from the city is the **smell of food – the unquenchable mixed blessing of enough garlic, onions, uttapam, and sesame sauce to keep eight million people from starving. The 300 block of Forty-sixth is especially fragrant**.*

*Outside the **smell from the brewery** hung over the town, **stifling as a warm pillow, making it difficult to breathe**.*

In addition to the smells of food that have already been mentioned, we can also include smells of nature origin, such as flowers, foliage/grass, earth and rain into the category of pleasant smells (*sweet flower scents, the lively smell of leaves, of wet rich earth, etc.*).

*When he turned away, the violet afterimage was slow to fade. Even the familiar **lotus-rose city aroma** had been enhanced for the occasion, **wafting overtones of vanilla, nutmeg, and musk**.*

A person is physically unable to store smells in memory, but he can store a memory of a smell, a kind of its passport, which, in turn, can trigger a chain of reminiscences of a specific place or event in a person's life. The

process of acquiring memories through smells was called the “Proust phenomenon” and became a literary topos, a source of endless individual variations among various authors [17, p. 7]:

*The certainty of place turns on the lights all over town, turns up the scent on the air. For a moment you are there, in the other country, knowing its name.*

***The city exuded a scent that evoked a distant memory in our minds.***

***Wet cement, the first city smell that Dennis, a country boy, remembers.***

The desire of a person to “regulate” the surrounding reality is reflected in the fact that vocabulary with olfactory semantics is used in the metaphorical description of abstract phenomena that are significant for a person and / or phenomena of objective reality that do not have any smell (*a working town's smell; a fragrance of the city's ordinary life; incense from the other side of the world*):

***"I'm not sure I like the smell of this town," Sam August Webster Two-Wolves said, laughing slightly. "I've smelled trouble before, but never an aroma quite like this!"***

***<...> a city fog, with a whiff of brimstone in it, a hint of the old sinner it used to be.***

Furthermore, during the study of olfactory metaphors, we found several cases of synesthetic transfers, the main sources of which to the sphere of “smell” were the areas of “sound” (*cacophony of smells, the muffled smell of the city*) and “touch” (*the warm, sooty smell of the city; the thick, accustomed smell of the city*), whereas the transfers from other spheres of sensory perception were not registered.

***The train smell sounded the A for Lamp town, and then a treble chord for frying hamburger and onions and boiling coffee was struck by Herman Bower's kitchen, with a Saustenoudos stale beer from DeLaney's back door. These were all busy smells and seemed a sixth to sick smell, a working town's smell, to be exchanged at the last factory whistle for the festival night odors of popcorn, spearmint chewing gum, barber shop pomades and the faint smell of far-off damp clover fields.***

### Conclusion

In the olfactory portrait of the city in the English prose of the period under review, unfortunately, unpleasant odors predominantly of a human-related nature prevail. Odors of natural and vegetative origin, as well as the aromas of food, drinks, spices and sweets are mostly perceived positively. The authors also willingly refer to the “Proust phenomenon” in English language fiction of the period under review. The presence of recurring typical characteristics of smell (such as hedonistic assessment, degree of impact on a person, comparison with a reference smell) as well as the use of synesthesia proves the relevance of odoronyms to

describing the semantic space of the concept “city”, as well as the olfactory reflection of the extralinguistic world in English language consciousness.

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