
Linguacognitive analysis of the concept of “Peace” through color imagery in *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Annotation

*This article presents a comprehensive linguacognitive analysis of the concept of peace in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). The study examines how color imagery – particularly the chromatic registers of blue and white – functions as a cognitive mechanism for structuring the protagonist Santiago’s perception of existential harmony. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and subsequently extended by Kövecses (2010), the research argues that peace in Hemingway’s narrative is not a passive condition but an active process of internal alignment between self, struggle, and nature. Through semantic, contextual, and metaphorical analysis of selected passages, the article demonstrates that blue encodes depth, continuity, and unity with the natural world, while white signifies purification, resolution, and transcendence beyond material defeat. The findings contribute to interdisciplinary research at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, literary studies, and cultural semantics.*

Keywords

*Cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, color semantics, peace, *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway, literary analysis*

“Chol va dengiz” asarida rang tasvirlari orqali “Tinchlik” konseptining lingvokognitiv tahlili

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- Annotatsiya** *Mazkur maqolada Ernest Hemingueyning "Chol va dengiz" (1952) asarida tinchlik konsepti lingvokognitiv jihatdan kompleks tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot rang tasvirlari – ayniqsa ko'k va oq ranglarning xromatik ko'rinishlari – bosh qahramon Santyagoning ekzistensial uyg'unlikni idrok etishini shakllantiruvchi kognitiv mexanizm sifatida qanday ishlashini o'rganadi. Lakoff va Jonson (1980) tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan va keyinchalik Kövecses (2010) tomonidan kengaytirilgan konseptual metafora nazariyasiga tayangan holda, mualliflar Heminguey asarida tinchlik passiv holat emas, balki inson, kurash va tabiat o'rtasidagi ichki muvozanatning faol jarayoni ekanligini ta'kidlaydilar. Tanlangan matn parchalarining semantik, kontekstual va metaforik tahlili orqali maqolada ko'k rang chuqurlik, uzluksizlik va tabiat bilan birlikni ifodalashi, oq rang esa poklanish, yechim va moddiy mag'lubiyatdan yuksalishni anglatishi ko'rsatiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari kognitiv lingvistika, adabiyotshunoslik va madaniy semantika kesishgan nuqtadagi fanlararo izlanishlarga hissa qo'shadi.*
- Kalit so'zlar** *Kognitiv lingvistika, konseptual metafora, rang semantikasi, tinchlik, "Chol va dengiz", Heminguey, adabiy tahlil*

**Лингвокогнитивный анализ
концепта «мир» через цветовую
образность в произведении
«Старик и Море»**

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- Аннотация** *В данной статье представлен комплексный лингвокогнитивный анализ концепта мира в произведении Эрнеста Хемингуэя «Старик и море» (1952). Исследование рассматривает, каким образом цветовая образность – в частности, хроматические регистры синего и белого – функционирует как когнитивный механизм, структурирующий восприятие экзистенциальной гармонии главным героем Сантьяго. Опираясь на теорию концептуальной метафоры, разработанную Лакоффом и Джонсоном (1980) и впоследствии расширенную Кёвечешем (2010), авторы утверждают, что мир в повествовании Хемингуэя является не пассивным состоянием, а активным процессом внутреннего согласования между личностью, борьбой и природой. Посредством семантического, контекстуального и метафорического анализа отобранных фрагментов статья демонстрирует, что синий цвет кодирует глубину, непрерывность и единство с природным миром, тогда как белый символизирует очищение, разрешение и трансцендентность, выходящую за пределы материального поражения. Полученные результаты*

вносят вклад в междисциплинарные исследования на стыке когнитивной лингвистики, литературоведения и культурной семантики.

Ключевые слова Когнитивная лингвистика, концептуальная метафора, цветовая семантика, мир, «Старик и море», Хемингуэй, литературный анализ

Introduction

In modern linguistics, particularly within the framework of cognitive linguistics, meaning is no longer viewed as a static property of words but as a dynamic process shaped by human perception, embodied experience, and conceptual structures. Abstract concepts such as peace are therefore understood not as fixed definitions but as complex mental constructs that integrate emotional, sensory, cultural, and narrative dimensions. This insight fundamentally transforms how scholars approach the study of literary language: rather than treating a text as a container of meaning, cognitive poetics regards it as a site of conceptual construction, in which the reader's mind actively participates through imaginative and inferential processes.

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) presents a particularly rich case for such analysis. The novella tells the story of Santiago, an aging Cuban fisherman who ventures alone into the Gulf Stream and engages in an epic struggle to land a giant marlin over the course of three days. On its surface, the narrative is simple – even austere. Yet beneath its minimalist prose lies a dense network of symbolic, metaphorical, and philosophical meaning. Hemingway does not define peace explicitly; instead, he constructs existential meaning implicitly through narrative minimalism, symbolic imagery, and the precise orchestration of sensory language.

Among these devices, color imagery plays a crucial role in encoding cognitive meaning. The colors blue and white recur throughout the text with a consistency and patterning that invites systematic analysis. They

are not decorative; they are conceptual. They do not merely describe the sea and sky – they construct, in cognitive terms, the emotional and philosophical architecture through which Santiago's experience of peace is built and sustained.

The central argument of this article is that peace in *The Old Man and the Sea* is constructed through a chromatic cognitive system, primarily organized around the opposition and interplay of blue and white. These colors function as conceptual anchors that guide both the protagonist's and the reader's understanding of existential balance, endurance, and inner harmony. Section 2 reviews the theoretical literature on conceptual metaphor theory, linguocognitive approaches to literary texts, and color semantics. Section 3 outlines the methodology. Sections 4 and 5 present the analysis of blue and white respectively. Section 6 examines the major conceptual metaphors of peace. Section 7 synthesizes the findings in discussion, and Section 8 draws conclusions.

Literature review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), first systematically developed by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Prior to this, metaphor was largely considered a rhetorical or poetic device – a figure of speech that ornamented language but did not fundamentally structure thought. Lakoff and Johnson overturned this assumption, arguing that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 3).

This insight has far-reaching implications. It means that abstract concepts – such as peace, love, time, or argument – are understood through more concrete, embodied experiences. Metaphor is therefore not merely a stylistic device but a primary cognitive mechanism that structures thought and perception. The classic example is ARGUMENT IS WAR: we speak of “defeating” an opponent’s position, “attacking” their arguments, or “defending” our claims (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 4). This reflects a genuine cognitive mapping between the source domain of warfare and the target domain of argumentation.

Kövecses (2010) has significantly extended CMT, emphasizing its cultural and experiential dimensions. In *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, he demonstrates that while many metaphors are universal – rooted in shared bodily experience – others are culturally specific, shaped by the values, histories, and symbolic systems of particular communities. He clarifies the architecture of conceptual metaphor: the source domain provides structure derived from concrete or familiar experience, while the target domain is the abstract concept being understood (Kövecses, 2010; 4-10). In this study, color imagery is the source domain, and peace is the abstract target domain structured through it.

Linguocognitive Approaches to Literary Texts

The application of cognitive linguistics to literary analysis has produced a rich body of scholarship over the past three decades. Scholars in cognitive poetics and cognitive stylistics argue that literary language provides privileged access to deep cognitive models that are often implicit or naturalized in everyday discourse (Stockwell, 2002; 1).

Stockwell (2002) argues in *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* that literature engages and stretches the reader’s cognitive resources, activating schemas, conceptual blends, and mental spaces in ways that ordinary communication rarely does. Turner (1996)

similarly demonstrates in *The Literary Mind* that narrative and figurative thought are not ornamental but fundamental to human cognition.

In this context, the recent work of Rakhmatova and Rakhmonova (2025) is particularly relevant. Their linguocognitive analysis of peace in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* demonstrates that peace is often conceptualized not as the mere absence of violence but as psychological resilience, adaptation, and the capacity for inner equilibrium in the face of external disorder (Rakhmatova & Rakhmonova, 2025; 7). This framing resonates strongly with the present analysis: in Hemingway’s novella, peace does not emerge despite Santiago’s struggle but through it.

Color Semantics and Cognitive Meaning

Color plays a fundamental role in human cognition and communication, serving as an anchor for emotional memory, cultural identity, and aesthetic experience. Wierzbicka (1996) argues in *Semantics: Primes and Universals* that color terms encode culturally specific meanings that cannot be reduced to physical properties of wavelength. In the Western literary tradition, blue has long been associated with depth, transcendence, and melancholy, while white has carried connotations of purity, absence, and the sacred (Wierzbicka, 1996; 287-291).

In cognitive linguistics, sensory domains such as vision are frequently mobilized as source domains for mapping onto abstract concepts. This aligns with the embodied cognition thesis advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1999): abstract conceptual structures are grounded in bodily and perceptual experience. Seeing deeply into the blue of the sea thus becomes a cognitive metaphor for introspection; the whiteness of a bare skeleton becomes a figure for purified, essential meaning. Analyzing color in Hemingway’s text reveals the cognitive architecture through which the novella constructs its central themes.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-method linguacognitive approach integrating four complementary analytical procedures. First, conceptual analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) identifies how peace is structured as a mental construct across the narrative. Second, componential analysis (Wierzbicka, 1996) examines the semantic features of color terms – blue and white – identifying their core, peripheral, and culturally conditioned meaning components. Third, contextual analysis traces the evolution of color meaning across the narrative arc, attending to shifts in intensity and semantic load as the story progresses from departure to return. Fourth, metaphor analysis maps linguistic expressions onto conceptual metaphor structures, identifying source domains, target domains, and the cognitive logic of mappings between them (Kövecses, 2010; 5-8).

The primary data consists of selected passages from Hemingway (1952), chosen for their density of color imagery and narrative significance. Passages are analyzed both in isolation and in relation to one another. The analytical framework draws on conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010), cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2002), literary semantics (Baker, 1972), and color semantics (Wierzbicka, 1996). Throughout, the aim is not to reduce Hemingway's art to a set of cognitive formulas but to illuminate, through systematic analysis, the conceptual depth his deceptively simple prose conceals.

The Semantics of Blue

- *Blue as Cognitive Space*

The color blue dominates the chromatic landscape of *The Old Man and the Sea* and functions as the primary cognitive environment of the protagonist. From the opening pages, the sea is not merely a physical setting but a mental space – a zone of being in which Santiago exists, thinks, and feels. Hemingway establishes this identification early and returns

to it with remarkable consistency throughout the narrative.

One of the most revealing passages is Santiago's reflection on his relationship to the sea:

"He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen spoke of her as el mar which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors (Hemingway, 1952; 30)".

Santiago's use of the feminine form *la mar* rather than the masculine *el mar* encodes a fundamentally different cognitive model of the sea. Where the younger fishermen conceptualize the sea as an adversary to be conquered or navigated, Santiago perceives it as a living presence with whom he stands in intimate relation. The sea is not external to his identity; it is integrated into it. Peace, in this cognitive model, is not achieved by mastering the sea but by belonging to it (Kövecses, 2010; 78).

- *Blue as Depth and Introspection*

Throughout the narrative, the blue of the sea is modified by descriptors emphasizing gradations of depth and darkness. These gradations track Santiago's psychological and spiritual states, encoding movement between surface perception and deep reflection:

"The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost black. The deep indigo was not the blue of the shore water but the blue of depth and distance (Hemingway, 1952; 35)".

The progression from blue to dark blue to almost black enacts a cognitive movement from the familiar to the profound. The sea's deepening color corresponds to Santiago's increasing distance from shore – and, by extension, from the social world with its anxieties and judgments. Hemingway distinguishes between the "blue of the shore

water” and the “blue of depth and distance” (Hemingway, 1952; 35). In cognitive terms, this activates the spatial metaphor DEPTH IS UNDERSTANDING (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 15–16). The deeper the blue, the deeper the cognitive engagement. When Santiago gazes into the darkening water, he is performing an act of contemplative deepening, moving into an awareness that the shore – with its noise, its pressures, and its expectations of failure – cannot provide.

- *Blue as Stability and Continuity*

The most important cognitive function of blue in the novella is its role as a source of stability and continuity. The sea’s blue persists through changing light and moods, through storm and calm, through victory and defeat. This constancy becomes a cognitive anchor for Santiago, a perceptual certainty amid the uncertainties of his ordeal.

This function is especially visible during the long hours of Santiago’s struggle with the marlin:

“He watched the dark water as he rowed steadily toward where the fish had been. He breathed deeply and regularly and felt the coolness of the night on his face (Hemingway, 1952; 47)”.

The regularity of his breathing mirrors the regularity of the blue water’s presence. Both are rhythmic, persistent, and rooted. Peace, in this construction, is not a heightened state of happiness but a baseline of endurance: the calm that persists beneath and through suffering. The cognitive stability offered by the blue sea externalizes and reinforces the internal stability that Santiago must maintain to survive – what Kövecses (2010; 82) calls the cultural model of a concept: the patterned way in which experience is organized around a conceptual center.

The Symbolism of White

- *White as Cognitive Pause*

If blue provides the dominant chromatic environment of the narrative, white functions as its interruptive counterpart – a color appearing at specific, strategically significant

moments to mark transitions in consciousness or emotional state. White imagery appears less frequently than blue, but its relative scarcity intensifies its impact.

One such moment occurs during Santiago’s observations of the sky:

“He saw the white clouds building over the mountains and knew that the wind would come from the northeast in the afternoon (Hemingway, 1952; 61)”.

On the narrative surface, this is a meteorological observation. But cognitively it functions as more. The white clouds are distant, elevated, and clean; they exist above the plane of struggle, belonging to a register of experience not yet contaminated by effort and pain. Santiago’s attention to them constitutes a momentary cognitive pause: a lifting of the gaze from immediate, grinding labor toward a wider horizon. These moments of white-marked pause are structurally important – not escapes from reality but brief recalibrations in which Santiago reorients himself, confirms his place in a larger order, and recovers the composure necessary to continue (Stockwell, 2002; 97).

- *White as Purification and Transformation*

The most powerful and semantically dense use of white occurs at the novella’s conclusion. After Santiago returns to shore – the marlin’s flesh stripped entirely by sharks during the long journey home – what remains is rendered in stark white terms:

“A great long white spine with a huge tail at the end... (Hemingway, 1952; 127)”.

The transformation of the marlin from a living creature of iridescent color to a white skeleton is one of the most cognitively and emotionally charged moments in the novella. The whiteness of the skeleton is not the whiteness of failure but the whiteness of essence – what remains when all that was incidental, all that was flesh and desire and surface, has been stripped away. In cognitive terms, white functions here as a marker of purification familiar from multiple cultural and religious traditions (Wierzbicka, 1996; 294).

A tourist who misidentifies the skeleton as a shark's misses its meaning entirely (Hemingway, 1952; 127). Santiago understands: the white spine is not evidence of defeat but of completion. Peace, in this final configuration, is the cognitive state of one who has accepted not victory but significance (Baker, 1972; 299).

- *White and the Luminous Past*

White also inheres in the novella's recurring dream imagery. The lions of Santiago's youth appear against beaches described in terms of brightness and luminosity:

"He was dreaming about the lions. They were playing on the yellow beach in the early dark and he smelled the sea and felt the cool darkness of the air and the surf rolling through the night (Hemingway, 1952; 25)".

The brightness and openness of this dreamscape create an experiential register proximate to the white imagery elsewhere in the text. These dreams are not nostalgic in a passive sense; they are forward-reaching, offering Santiago a cognitive image of peace not diminished by age, failure, or fatigue. They represent what Johnson (1987; 45) identifies as a fundamental schema for understanding continuity of self across time: the luminous past as a resource for present endurance.

Conceptual Metaphors of Peace

- *PEACE IS ACCEPTANCE*

The most philosophically significant conceptual metaphor in the novella is perhaps the most quietly stated. Near the narrative's climax, Santiago reflects:

"A man can be destroyed but not defeated. (Hemingway, 1952; 103)"

This single sentence encapsulates the Stoic philosophy of peace that runs throughout the text. The distinction between destruction and defeat is crucial: destruction is a physical reality that no act of will can prevent. Defeat, by contrast, is a cognitive and spiritual condition – a state in which one accepts the subordination of one's purpose to an external force. Santiago refuses this subordination.

In the conceptual metaphor *PEACE IS ACCEPTANCE*, peace is not achieved through victory but through the willing recognition of one's situation without resentment or collapse. This is a highly active cognitive and emotional achievement. As Baker (1972; 298) observes, Hemingway's deepest concern is with what he calls "grace under pressure" – the idea that true dignity consists not in immunity from suffering but in the manner in which suffering is endured. Santiago's acceptance is precisely this kind of dignity, and it is the ground on which his peace rests.

- *PEACE IS UNITY*

A second major conceptual metaphor structures peace as a relational condition – not a state of the isolated individual but a quality of connection between self and world. This metaphor is most explicitly encoded in Santiago's address to the marlin:

"Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends (Hemingway, 1952; 54)".

And, more strikingly, in his later reflection:

"You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother (Hemingway, 1952; 92)".

The address of the marlin as "brother" is a cognitive act of category dissolution: Santiago refuses to maintain the conceptual boundary between himself and his adversary, recognizing in the marlin a being of equal worth and equal claim to existence. This is *PEACE IS UNITY*: the condition of inner harmony that arises when the self no longer experiences the world as a collection of opponents to be overcome but as a community of beings with whom one stands in fundamental relation (Kövecses, 2010; 93). This relational model connects directly to the blue imagery analyzed in Section 4: the blue sea is Santiago's cognitive home, the medium in which his unity with nature is continuously enacted and confirmed.

- **PEACE IS MEMORY**

A third conceptual metaphor operates through the novella's treatment of time and recollection. Santiago's thoughts return repeatedly to the past: his youth in Africa, the great baseball players he admires, earlier expeditions, a hand-wrestling match won long ago. These returns are cognitive resources, not symptoms of regret.

The most structurally significant is the recurring dream of the lions:

"He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach (Hemingway, 1952; 25)".

The selectivity of this dream is cognitively meaningful. Santiago no longer dreams of struggle, competition, or loss. He dreams of place – the luminous beaches of his youth and the lions that inhabited them. In the metaphor PEACE IS MEMORY, the past is not a source of pain but of renewal: a cognitive reservoir from which the self-replenishes its capacity for endurance and equanimity (Johnson, 1987; 101). This metaphor connects to the white imagery of the text: the luminosity of the dream beaches belongs to the same register of purification and transcendence as the white spine and the white clouds.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that Hemingway constructs peace in *The Old Man and the Sea* through a minimalist yet highly structured and internally coherent system of cognitive meaning. By working primarily with blue and white rather than the full chromatic spectrum, he intensifies the cognitive impact of each color, investing it with a density of meaning that more variegated prose could not achieve. This chromatic restraint is itself a formal enactment of the novella's themes: just as Santiago achieves peace through reduction and acceptance rather than accumulation and triumph, Hemingway achieves cognitive depth through limitation rather than abundance – a characteristic

strategy of what he called his Iceberg Theory (Baker, 1972; 261).

Blue provides continuity, depth, and belonging: it is the color of the medium in which Santiago exists, the chromatic environment of his endurance and identity. White provides punctuation, purification, and transcendence: it marks moments of cognitive pause, thresholds of transformation, and the residual essence of what remains when struggle is completed. Together, these two colors construct a chromatic model of peace that is both sensory and philosophical.

The three conceptual metaphors – PEACE IS ACCEPTANCE, PEACE IS UNITY, and PEACE IS MEMORY – are not independent structures but interlocking components of a single coherent cognitive model (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 117). Peace is achieved when a being accepts its situation without surrendering its dignity (ACCEPTANCE), recognizes its fundamental unity with the world around it (UNITY), and draws on the resources of the past to sustain its present endurance (MEMORY). These three conditions are mutually reinforcing: acceptance enables unity, unity deepens memory, and memory sustains acceptance.

These findings align with and extend those of Rakhmatova and Rakhmonova (2025; 12), who argue that peace in contemporary literary discourse is frequently conceptualized as a psychological and existential achievement rather than a political or social condition. Hemingway's novella, written over seventy years before their study, anticipates this framing with remarkable precision.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that peace in *The Old Man and the Sea* is not a passive state of rest or the absence of conflict, but an active and continuously achieved process of alignment between a human being's internal reality and the external world in which he is embedded. Through the systematic analysis of color imagery and conceptual metaphor, this article has shown how Hemingway constructs

this process with extraordinary cognitive sophistication.

Blue, as the dominant chromatic register of the narrative, encodes depth, continuity, belonging, and the stable endurance that peace requires (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). White, appearing at crucial transitional moments, encodes purification, transcendence, and the recognition that what remains after struggle has stripped away the inessential is not loss but meaning (Wierzbicka, 1996). These two colors are not merely descriptive; they are conceptual – structuring the reader’s cognitive engagement with the text and guiding the perception of its central themes.

The three conceptual metaphors – PEACE IS ACCEPTANCE, PEACE IS UNITY, and PEACE IS MEMORY – articulate a philosophy of peace that is Stoic in its ethics, ecological in its ontology, and deeply human in its emotional

texture. Peace, for Santiago and through him for the reader, is the fruit of a life fully engaged with the world: a life that accepts its conditions without resentment, recognizes its kinship with the living things it encounters, and draws on the accumulated wisdom of experience to face each new challenge with dignity (Baker, 1972; 301).

Future research might extend this approach to other Hemingway texts – examining the chromatic construction of masculinity, grief, or courage in *A Farewell to Arms* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls* – or apply it comparatively to other modernist authors sharing Hemingway’s commitment to imagistic precision and semantic economy. What the present analysis ultimately demonstrates is that the old man’s peace – like the old man’s sea – is deeper than it appears. It is not given but won; not static but dynamic; not apart from struggle but constituted through it.

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