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TOPOGRAPHY OF TRAUMA: LINGUO-COGNITIVE MECHANISMS OF EMBODYING HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE IN RACHEL SEIFFERT'S 'A BOY IN WINTER'

The theoretical foundation of the study is interdisciplinary, drawing on theories from Trauma Studies, Cognitive Linguistics, and Memory Studies. The integration of these theories within the framework helps understand how psychological shock surpasses all linguistic abilities to represent it, how the mind uses space as a cognitive tool to think about the “unspeakable”, and how trauma memory is inscribed in the physical landscape. The basic assumption of this framework lies in the concept that extreme horror makes it impossible for the mind to process experiences.

Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth (1996), is an act of extreme violence that disrupts the temporal structure of cognition and narrative identity by virtue of being delayed. Trauma can be understood as an “unrecognized experience” that cannot be integrated at the moment of the occurrence (Caruth, 1996). This concept serves as the basis for explaining narrative silence and cognitive minimalism, allowing trauma theory to provide a model for understanding how traumatic acts elude linear narration. Trauma can be defined as a “liminal event” or a situation in which a person’s human qualities have been pushed to the limit and tested to the extreme, leaving the person vulnerable to “moral trauma.” According to LaCapra (2001), the language of trauma breaks down due to the disconnect between emotion and its verbalization. From the perspective of Embodied Cognition Theory, the mind and body are inextricably linked, and abstract psychological states are understood through physical experiences (Gibbs, 2006). In the context of severe trauma, this suggests that horror is not just psychologically recorded but somatically embedded, which forces victims to rely on their physical environment and “the psychological impact of trauma” (Bystrov, 2025) as a cognitive tool to process the unspeakable.

Cognitive linguistics explores how abstract mental experiences can be translated into the material world through language. In their work “Metaphors We Live By”, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson demonstrate that a metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but the very foundation of our cognitive system. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5) According to the conceptual metaphor theory, people mentally map complex concepts onto simpler domains of experience.

G. Fauconnier and M. Turner’s Conceptual Integration Theory is used to analyze highly complex semantic representations. Theory claims that human beings create advanced meaning subconsciously integrating multiple distinct “mental spaces.” Physical environments are not viewed as passive entities. Instead, they act as “conceptual blends” where the physical properties of a space are cognitively fused with abstract psychological states (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Unlike traditional Holocaust narratives centered on Polish camps, R. Seiffert’s text cognitively localizes trauma within specific geographic domains of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. The key cognitive model in the representation of Nemyriv and Vinnytsia is the metaphor TOWN IS A SLAUGHTERHOUSE. Historically, Vinnytsia was a site where Jewish inhabitants were incarcerated in mundane local brickworks. R. Seiffert verbalizes this localized betrayal through the cognitive frame of animalization:

(1) *They are herded; they are herded—Pohl can find no other word for it.* (Seiffert 2017: 9)

(2) *...as they are herded through a doorway.* (Seiffert 2017: 12)

In the case of R. Seiffert’s novel, the metaphor VICTIMS ARE LIVESTOCK is employed as a way of imagining how the known setting of a domestic environment becomes mentally transformed into a corral for death. The reiteration of the verb “herded” from the point of view of Pohl, the bystander in Germany, in example (1), and

Ephraim, the Jewish victim in example (2), engages in a shared cognitive framework. Genocide takes place on the well-known cobblestones of Nemyriv, and not within the faraway camp.

The construction of *Durchgangstrasse IV* is a metaphoric objectivation of INFRASTRUCTURE IS A WEAPON. Destruction of the mind and body is represented as a material thing that surrounds the body:

(3) *...mud-caked, their clothes mud-stiffened.* (Seiffert 2017: 96)

(4) *...mud [...] ploughed with spade marks and tyre prints.* (Seiffert 2017: 196)

This process of metaphorization is directly connected with the Embodied Cognition Theory and proves that the trauma of “extermination through labor” is somatically experienced. Gravel turns into an aggressive weapon and comes to life.

For the analysis of the specific features of this geographical trauma, Conceptual Integration Theory is used. The metaphoric process of FLESH IS EARTH creates the dynamic model. Input Space 1 presents the Human Body (Jewish slave laborers from Galicia and Podolia). Input Space 2 presents Ukrainian Landscape (frozen road and mud of D-IV). This combination produces the Blended Space called “The Imperial Scar”. In this way, this conceptual integration blurs the boundary between living and non-living things. The road was physically built from people’s bodies.

On the contrary, the evacuation towards the marshes of Pripyat Polissya becomes the trigger of the NATURE IS A SANCTUARY metaphor. In (5), the language acquires the spatial dimension:

(5) *Na bolota [To the marshes].* (Seiffert 2017)

In the literary space of the novel, the marsh is presented as a refuge, an environment that cannot be invaded by modern technologies such as tanks. Nonetheless, a comparative analysis shows that there is a cognitive dissonance because, unlike the literary Blended Space, historically, the marshlands were a zone of trauma where the SS Cavalry Brigade killed many Jewish women and children. It means that “Na bolota”

becomes the signifier of “crisis of representation” which changes the traumascape into a survival space.

In the Zhytomyr region, the concept of trauma extends beyond bodily harm to include mental combat, producing the conceptual framework WORDS ARE WEAPONS:

The expression “showering the population with paper” triggers the cognitive frame MIND IS A BATTLEFIELD. The sky over Zhytomyr transforms into a battleground for psychological coercion. Anti-Semitic propaganda pamphlets raining down on the citizens are portrayed as a physical agency that changes human conduct. The moment when Mykola “presents himself” before the auxiliary police based on the papers illustrates how men in other provinces of Volhynia and Zhytomyr were mentally coerced to commit crimes, thus verifying the hypothesis that in the context of the Holocaust in Ukraine, language was used as a weapon.

Ultimately, as much as the novel centers on an anonymous provincial town, the macrotrauma experienced in the nation’s capital, Kyiv (Babi Yar killings), is sublimated through metaphorization TRAUMA IS A SOUNDSCAPE:

(6) *...challenged by a man with a “Kievan” voice...* (Seiffert 2017: 85)

The “Kievan” voice of the auxiliary policeman goes beyond the confines of sound to become a reverberation of macro-trauma. This metonymic voice serves to bridge local trauma in the rural setting of the provincial town with institutionalized trauma, the massacre of 33,000 Jews in the Kyivan ravines.

This study shows that the Holocaust trauma in Ukraine defies traditional narrative representation, requiring sophisticated linguo-cognitive processes to express the unimaginable. This study demonstrates how R. Seiffert’s “A Boy in Winter” explicitly maps great psychological devastation onto the physical geography of occupied Ukraine through the integration of Trauma Studies, Cognitive Linguistics, and Embodied Cognition. In contrast to conventional narratives that focus on industrialized death

camps, R. Seiffert's writing cognitively localizes the horror, demonstrating that the environment is an active participant in the suffering.

The novel's portrayal of the SS supply line, Durchgangstrasse IV, most effectively conveys this spatial pain. The cognitive model FLESH IS EARTH is created when the distinction between the organic human body and inorganic matter is eliminated through the process of conceptual integration. The road is literally constructed from the bodies of the Jewish forced laborers, not just surrounded by the cold mud and gravel. This conceptual combination turns the infrastructure into a deadly weapon, producing "The Imperial Scar" that physically represents the anguish of labor-based destruction.

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RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE INFLUENCE ON MODERN UKRAINIAN YOUTH'S LINGUISTIC CULTURE

In the context of the transformation of Ukrainian society driven by digitalization, globalization, and wartime challenges, the issue of forming the linguistic culture of modern youth has become particularly relevant. Young people in Ukraine exist within