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COGNITIVE TRANSFORMATIONS IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MENTAL SPACES IN ELIZABETH BENNET AND MR. DARCY

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This article examines the cognitive transformations of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in Pride and Prejudice through the lens of mental space theory, developed by Gilles Fauconnier. By analyzing the evolution of their mental spaces - formed through biases, social norms, and personal experiences we demonstrate how cognitive dissonance, new information, and self-reflection lead to the dissolution of prejudice and the reconstruction of their worldviews. The study employs cognitive poetics and discourse analysis to explore how language serves as a space builder, influencing perception and narrative comprehension. Our findings reveal that Austen's novel presents not only a romantic conflict but also a profound psychological process of self-discovery and intellectual growth.

Keywords: «character development», «cognitive dissonance», «space builders», «social norms».

Introduction

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that explores the evolution of human perception and judgment through the lens of social class, personal biases, and self-awareness. The story follows Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, whose initial misunderstandings and prejudices create cognitive barriers that shape their interactions and decisions. Through their character arcs, Austen presents a nuanced study of how individuals construct, modify, and reconcile mental spaces based on new experiences and self-reflection.

This article employs the theoretical framework of Gilles Fauconnier's mental space theory [1], which provides insights into how meaning is dynamically constructed and revised in response to external stimuli. Elizabeth's and Darcy's transformations exemplify cognitive shifts that occur through discourse, reflection, and narrative progression. The study also incorporates Peter Stockwell's contributions to cognitive poetics [3], highlighting the role of language in shaping perception.

By analyzing key moments in the novel—such as Darcy’s first proposal, his letter to Elizabeth, and her visit to Pemberley—this study demonstrates how Austen constructs a psychological landscape where cognitive dissonance and emotional growth drive character development. Through linguistic elements such as space builders, contrastive structures, and hypothetical scenarios, Austen crafts a narrative that reflects the complexity of human thought and the potential for transformation. The study ultimately argues that *Pride and Prejudice* is not just a romantic novel but a profound exploration of cognitive restructuring and moral evolution. The novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen presents a rich narrative that explores cognitive and emotional transformations through the conceptual lens of Gilles Fauconnier's mental space theory [1]. This approach allows us to understand how Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy undergo significant cognitive restructuring by forming, modifying, and merging mental spaces throughout the novel. The application of cognitive linguistics, particularly mental space theory, provides insights into the characters' evolving perceptions and moral development.

Methods:

This study employs a combination of contextual analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and comparison to examine the cognitive and linguistic transformations of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Contextual Analysis explores the novel’s historical and cultural background, focusing on social hierarchies, marriage norms, and gender roles that shape character development and conflicts. Austen’s critique of social mobility and marriage as economic security provides insight into the protagonists’ transformations and the novel’s broader social commentary.

Discourse Analysis examines Austen’s linguistic choices and their role in constructing or dismantling characters’ mental spaces. Key focus areas include space builders—linguistic elements like prepositional phrases, contrastive constructions, and hypothetical scenarios—that highlight shifts in perception and cognitive transformation.

Narrative Analysis investigates the structure of character transformation by analyzing key turning points, such as Darcy’s proposals, his letter, and Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley. The study considers how Austen’s pacing, sequencing of events, and thematic development reflect cognitive processing and self-awareness.

Method of Comparison contrasts the character arcs of Elizabeth and Darcy as embodiments of PRIDE and PREJUDICE. By examining their attitudes, emotional responses, and transformations, this method highlights their distinct yet parallel cognitive reconstructions and personal growth.

By integrating these methodologies, this study offers an interdisciplinary perspective on how cognitive processes, linguistic strategies, and narrative structures contribute to Austen’s portrayal of character transformation and social critique. This study employs a cognitive linguistic framework, drawing on Fauconnier’s theory of

mental spaces [2] and Stockwell's contributions to cognitive poetics [3]. By identifying linguistic markers such as space builders, subject-verb constructions, and hypothetical structures, we analyze how mental spaces shift in response to new information. The methodological approach includes:

1. **Identification of space builders** (e.g., prepositional phrases, adverbs, and conditional clauses) that indicate shifts in perception.
2. **Tracing cognitive transformations** in both Elizabeth and Darcy through pivotal events in the novel.
3. **Applying cognitive modeling** to represent shifts in mental spaces visually.

Elizabeth Bennet's Cognitive Transformation

Elizabeth Bennet's cognitive transformation is one of the most significant narrative arcs in *Pride and Prejudice*, illustrating how mental spaces can be shaped and reshaped through experience, reflection, and emotional growth.

At the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth constructs a mental space in which Darcy embodies arrogance and social elitism. This perception is cemented during the Meryton ball when he refuses to dance with her, stating, **"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."** [4] This remark becomes a powerful space builder that establishes a negative cognitive model of Darcy in Elizabeth's mind, framing him as a man of excessive pride who looks down upon those of lower social standing.

Her prejudice is further reinforced by her interactions with Wickham, whose deceptive narrative solidifies her belief in Darcy's moral shortcomings [5]. Wickham's claim that Darcy denied him his rightful inheritance serves as a cognitive trigger, causing Elizabeth to integrate this new "evidence" into her existing negative mental space. She internalizes Wickham's account without seeking corroboration, which highlights the cognitive tendency to reinforce pre-existing biases rather than challenge them. In doing so, she unknowingly creates a mental space where Darcy is not only proud but also unjust and untrustworthy, making any further interactions with him subject to a confirmation bias.

However, this mental space begins to collapse following Darcy's letter, which refutes Wickham's claims and explains his actions regarding Bingley and Jane [4]. The letter forces Elizabeth into cognitive dissonance, leading her to reevaluate past events. Her realization, **"Till this moment, I never knew myself."** [4] marks the dissolution of her previous mental space and the formation of a more complex understanding of Darcy's character. This moment signifies not only a shift in Elizabeth's perception of Darcy but also an awakening to her own biases and limitations in judgment. She begins to understand that her assessment of character had been influenced by surface-level impressions and emotions rather than careful discernment.

Further cognitive restructuring occurs during Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley. The descriptions provided by Darcy's housekeeper contrast sharply with Elizabeth's prior assumptions. When Mrs. Reynolds praises Darcy's kindness and generosity—**"He**

was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world" [4]—Elizabeth experiences a moment of cognitive conflict. Her rigidly negative perception of Darcy is now challenged by evidence of his genuine kindness. Her encounter with Darcy at Pemberley, where he displays genuine kindness and respect toward her and her relatives, further challenges her previous beliefs. She is struck by how differently he behaves in his own home, free from the social pressures and formalities of public life. When she observes him interacting cordially with her uncle and aunt, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain her earlier belief in his arrogance. This cognitive restructuring culminates when she reflects: **"She was forced to acknowledge his merit."** [4]

One of the most critical turning points in Elizabeth's transformation is her reaction to Darcy's role in resolving Lydia's elopement. His intervention, which he undertakes without seeking recognition or thanks, dismantles her prejudices completely. She realizes that Darcy's actions contradict the image she had constructed of him as a proud, self-serving aristocrat. Rather than acting out of self-interest, he demonstrates humility, responsibility, and a willingness to sacrifice his own social reputation for the well-being of Elizabeth's family. The fact that he does so without expecting anything in return serves as a final confirmation that her previous mental model of him was deeply flawed.

Elizabeth's transformation is complete when she acknowledges: **"Her heart did whisper that he had done it for her."** [4] This moment reveals that her feelings for Darcy have shifted from suspicion and resentment to admiration and gratitude. She recognizes that true nobility is not defined by birth or wealth, but by one's character and actions. By the time Darcy proposes to her a second time, Elizabeth's mental space has undergone a fundamental restructuring. She is no longer bound by her initial prejudices but has instead cultivated a more nuanced, mature perspective on both herself and those around her. This transformation not only shapes her relationship with Darcy but also serves as a broader moral lesson about the dangers of pride and prejudice in forming judgments about others. At the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth constructs a mental space in which Darcy embodies arrogance and social elitism. This perception is cemented during the Meryton ball when he refuses to dance with her, stating, **"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."** [4] This remark becomes a powerful space builder that establishes a negative cognitive model of Darcy in Elizabeth's mind.

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His role in resolving Lydia's elopement ultimately dismantles her prejudices, allowing her to form a revised mental space where Darcy is no longer a proud aristocrat but a man of integrity. The fact that Darcy intervenes in the situation without seeking recognition or personal gain serves as a final confirmation that her previous mental model of him was deeply flawed. Her transformation is complete when she acknowledges: **"Her heart did whisper that he had done it for her."** [4]

Mr. Darcy's Cognitive Transformation

Darcy's initial mental space is shaped by his aristocratic upbringing, where social rank determines personal worth. This framework leads him to dismiss Elizabeth as an unsuitable match due to her family's lower status. His infamous first proposal reflects this mindset, as he states, **"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed."** [4]

Elizabeth's rejection serves as a catalyst for Darcy's cognitive dissonance. Her accusations force him to recognize his flaws: **"You are the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."** [4] This confrontation triggers a transformation in his mental space, leading him to reflect on his behavior and social assumptions. For the first time, he sees himself through Elizabeth's eyes and recognizes that his sense of superiority is not merely an internal belief but an external barrier that prevents genuine human connection.

Darcy's evolution is evident in his changed actions. He no longer perceives social status as the primary determinant of virtue. His treatment of the Gardiners during Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley signals a shift in his perspective. Instead of viewing

them as socially inferior, he treats them with warmth and respect, which Elizabeth herself notes with surprise. His ultimate act of arranging Lydia and Wickham's marriage without seeking recognition signifies the complete restructuring of his mental space. He now values personal integrity over class distinctions.

The culmination of his transformation is reflected in his second proposal, which is markedly different from the first. This time, he does not emphasize his own struggle but instead expresses his feelings with humility: **"You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."** [4] Unlike his first proposal, which was characterized by condescension and self-conflict, this second confession is devoid of arrogance. He no longer sees Elizabeth as a woman beneath him in status but as an equal partner. His words now emphasize sincerity and admiration rather than duty or struggle.

This transformation is further underscored by his willingness to accept Elizabeth's rejection should she still refuse him. He does not pressure her or assert his superiority but instead acknowledges her agency in making the decision. This signals a complete shift in his cognitive framework—from entitlement to emotional maturity. His patience and humility demonstrate that he has truly internalized the values of respect and equality, making his final union with Elizabeth one of mutual understanding rather than obligation. Darcy's initial mental space is shaped by his aristocratic upbringing, where social rank determines personal worth. This framework leads him to dismiss Elizabeth as an unsuitable match due to her family's lower status. His infamous first proposal reflects this mindset, as he states, **"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed."** [4]

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Conclusion. The cognitive transformations of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy illustrate how rigid mental spaces, shaped by social norms, biases, and personal experiences, can evolve through cognitive dissonance, new information, and self-reflection. By applying Fauconnier's mental space theory, we can trace how both characters navigate their internal prejudices, reinterpret past events, and ultimately restructure their worldviews.

Elizabeth's initial perception of Darcy, rooted in pride, wounded self-respect, and social resentment, leads her to misinterpret his actions and character. Similarly, Darcy's aristocratic background fosters an elitist mental space, wherein social rank dictates moral worth and suitability for marriage. However, as the novel progresses, both characters are forced to confront the limitations of their cognitive models—Elizabeth through Darcy's letter and her visit to Pemberley, and Darcy through Elizabeth's rejection and subsequent self-examination.

By deconstructing and reconstructing their mental spaces, both characters experience genuine personal growth. Elizabeth learns to question her initial judgments and acknowledge her own biases, while Darcy realizes that virtue, integrity, and emotional depth transcend class distinctions. Their transformations culminate in a relationship founded on mutual respect, emotional maturity, and an equitable understanding of one another's values—demonstrating that true character is not determined by status, but by one's ability to reflect, change, and grow.

Thus, the mental space model applied to *Pride and Prejudice* highlights how Austen crafts a nuanced and psychologically authentic portrait of human development. Rather than presenting static characters, she depicts individuals whose beliefs, emotions, and perceptions evolve in response to new knowledge and meaningful interactions. This transformation not only resolves the central conflict of the novel but also underscores its philosophical message: only by recognizing and overcoming our prejudices can we attain true understanding, emotional fulfillment, and meaningful connections with others.

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КОГНИТИВНЫЕ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ В РОМАНЕ «ГОРДОСТЬ И ПРЕДУБЕЖДЕНИЕ»: РЕКОНСТРУКЦИЯ МЕНТАЛЬНЫХ ПРОСТРАНСТВ ЭЛИЗАБЕТ БЕННЕТ И МИСТЕРА ДАРСИ

Kadyrbay A.

В данной статье рассматриваются когнитивные трансформации Элизабет Беннет и Фицуильяма Дарси в романе «Гордость и предубеждение» через призму теории ментальных пространств, разработанной Жилем Фоконье. Анализируя эволюцию их ментальных пространств, сформированных под влиянием предубеждений, социальных норм и личного опыта, мы показываем, как когнитивный диссонанс, получение новой информации и самоанализ приводят к преодолению предвзятости и пересмотру их мировоззрений. В исследовании применяются методы когнитивной поэтики и дискурсивного анализа для изучения того, как язык выступает в роли конструктора пространства, влияя на восприятие и понимание повествования. Результаты показывают, что роман Остин представляет собой не только любовный конфликт, но и глубокий психологический процесс самопознания и интеллектуального развития.

Ключевые слова: развитие персонажа, когнитивный диссонанс, конструкторы пространства, социальные нормы.

«ГОРДОСТЬ ЖӘНЕ ПРЕДУБЕЖДЕНИЕ» РОМАНЫНДАҒЫ КОГНИТИВТІК ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯЛАР: ЭЛИЗАБЕТ БЕННЕТ ЖӘНЕ МИСТЕР ДАРСИДІҢ МЕНТАЛЬДЫҚ ПРОСТРАНСТВОЛАРЫН ҚАЙТА ҚҰРУ

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Бұл мақалада «Гордость и предубеждение» романындағы Элизабет Беннет пен Фицуильям Дарсидің когнитивті трансформациялары Жиль Фоконье әзірлеген ментальдық кеңістіктер теориясы арқылы қарастырылады. Әлеуметтік нормалар және жеке тәжірибе арқылы қалыптасқан ментальдық кеңістіктерінің эволюциясы талдай отырып, когнитивті диссонанс, жаңа ақпарат алу және өзіне сын көзбен қарау арқылы оларды қабылдаудың өзгеруіне және дүниетанымдарының қайта құрылуына қалай әкелетінін көрсетеміз. Зерттеу когнитивтік поэтика мен дискурстық талдау әдістерін қолдана отырып, тілдің кеңістік құраушы ретінде рөлін зерттейді, оның қабылдау мен баяндауды түсінуге әсерін айқындайды. Нәтижелер Остиннің романы тек қана романтикалық қақтығыс емес, сонымен қатар өзін-өзі тану және интеллектуалдық өсу үдерісін терең психологиялық тұрғыда көрсететінін дәлелдейді.

Кілт сөздер: кейіпкердің дамуы, когнитивті диссонанс, кеңістік құраушылар, әлеуметтік нормалар.