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# Olfactory metaphor: forming, semantics, functioning

### Ольфакторна метафора: формування, семантика, функціонування

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyze the formation, semantics, and functioning of olfactory metaphors in modern English fiction texts. This article examines olfactory metaphors, a type of synesthetic metaphor, as complex linguocognitive and perceptual phenomena rooted in sensory experience. Methods conceptual, semantic, component and contextual analysis enable to reveal the models of olfactory metaphors used in English-language fiction texts: «SMELL-TASTE», «SMELL-TOUCH», «SMELL-SIGHT» «SMELL-HEARING». Such models actualize polymodal and intermodal images, as well as the perceptual sensations of a person perceiving a smell. The semantic characteristics of olfactory metaphors in Englishlanguage fiction texts are revealed with the help of contextual and semantic analysis.

#### Анотація

Метою статті є аналіз формування, семантики та функціонування ольфакторних метафор у текстах сучасної англійськомовної художньої літератури. Ольфакторна метафора розглядається у статті як вид синестезійної метафори, що є складним лінгвокогнітивним та перцептивним явищем, сформованим на основі людського сенсорного досвіду. Методи концептуального, семантичного, компонентного та контекстуального аналізу дозволяють виявити моделі формування ольфакторних метафор у текстах англомовної художньої літератури: «ЗАПАХ-ДОТИК», «ЗАПАХ-СМАК», «ЗАПАХ-ЗІР», «ЗАПАХ-СЛУХ». Подібні моделі актуалізують полімодальні та інтермодальні образи, а також перцептивні відчуття, які виникають у людини при сприйнятті запаху. Семантичні характеристики ольфакторних метафор

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англомовних художніх текстів виявляються за допомогою методів контекстуального та семантичного аналізу.

**Ключові слова:** лінгвокогнітивне та перцептивне явище, ольфакторна метафора, семантика, текст, англійська мова.

### Introduction

Metaphor plays a significant role in human cognition and understanding of the reality. It is also one of the most productive means of enriching the language, a manifestation of a linguistic economy that uses signs of one conceptual sphere to denote another one similar to it. Philosophers (Avtonomova, 1991; Mattice, 2017; Ortony, 1993), linguists (Ilchenko, et al., 2021; Kravchenko & Zhykharieva, 2023; Kramar & Ilchenko, 2021; Kushch, 2013; Kriukova, 2000; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Ricoeur, 2004; Ricoeur & Czerny, 1981; Zhykharieva & Stavtseva, 2023; Zhykharieva & Stavtseva, 2024), and literary critics (Prokopieva, Dmitrieva & Korkina, 2019; Rindisbacher, 1992; Turanina, et al., 2019; Williams, 1999) have been using the concept of metaphor for centuries. A significant amount of scientific literature devoted to the problem of metaphor indicates a great interest of scholars to it.

An increased interest in synesthetic metaphorical nominations is observed in modern linguistics nowadays (Ivakina, 2001; Fomin, 2018; Gibbs, 1994). Such metaphors are motivated by human bodily sensations and the interaction of human sensory systems. Olfactory metaphors denoting the peculiarities of human perception of different smells are the least studied among other groups of synesthetic metaphors.

The study of English olfactory metaphors – carried out in the article –contributes to the understanding of creating mechanisms of polymodal and intermodal images of smell. Besides, it reveals the models of intersensory transfers based on which such images are formed. Meanings of olfactory metaphors are scrutinized in the article, characteristics of their referents in the English-language fiction texts are also revealed. It provides an opportunity to reveal the subjectivity and individuality of perceiving a particular smell and its varieties by humans as well as to identify the means and ways of linguistic fixation of their olfactory and polysensory impressions, along with sensations of extralinguistic reality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study of smells and the subtleties of their perception goes back to ancient Greece, where sensory and rational cognition were clearly distinguished. Plato (428 BC – 348 BC) attributed smells to the realm of the sensual perception and divided them into two categories: pleasant and unpleasant, due to the feelings they evoked. Smells that gave an esthetic pleasure and did not provoke physiological reactions were considered to be positive. Smells, which were considered as a source of sensual passion, arousing a sense of pleasure, a rampant hunger, leading to the inhibition of human consciousness, were assessed negatively (Alican, 2012; Plato, 1997).

Since Plato, philosophers have paid little or no attention to studying and interpreting smells. Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) turned to this topic only thousands of years later. He considered smells from the point of view of pleasure that positively affect consciousness (Kant, 2005). The lack of scientific interest in the olfactory sphere overall (*from the Latin olfactorius – fragrant, odorous, belongs to the area of smell perception*) is explained by the increased interest in other sensory spheres of human perception, vision and hearing especially. Unlike olfactory, they were considered dominant in comprehending reality (Baltussen, 2014).

Scientists took the plunge into the research of smells only at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was influenced by the development of several human sciences: psychology, medicine, neurophysiology, psychophysiology, and later cognitology and its varieties. Awareness of the olfactory channel's role in human perception of information has led to the pressing need for scrutinizing the biological, psychophysiological, cognitive, and other factors of smell; its socio-cultural value in the life of humanity as well as in life of every individual, and peculiarities of its designation by linguistic means.



Fiction is one of the most striking «treasure troves of smell». Smells and aromas help to create the flavor of a particular era, time, place, or even period of a person's life. The theme of smells in fiction texts became particularly popular in 1985 after the publication of Patrick Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Süskind, 2010). The novel and its subsequent film adaptation by Tom Tykwer in 2006 brought about a real «olfactory revolution». Roles and importance of different kinds of smell in world literature over the past one hundred and fifty years was studied thoroughly in the book *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature* (Rindisbacher, 1992).

Emphasizing that the human sense of smell can distinguish hundreds of thousands of different smells, Dan Sperber pointed out the following: «In none of the world's languages does there seem to be a classification of smells comparable, for example, to colour classification.... There is no semantic field of smells» (Sperber, 1975, p. 115-116). The only exception is Livatsi, the language of hunting people of the West African part of Gabon. It has eleven smell namings used by its representatives during hunting (Kostyaev, 2007, p. 38). Therefore, smells can be defined as cognitively constructed units that are used to reflect their objective reality.

A hypothesis for the lack of variable olfactory vocabulary in different languages may be the fact that over the course of human evolution, the sense of smell gradually lost its importance in favor of sight and hearing, which have been entitled to a more significant role in the perception of the surrounding reality and nature preservation (Velichkovskij et al., 1973, p. 48). Another explanation of such absence is the peculiarities of the brain's neurophysiological structures: processing of the olfactory stimuli is carried out in the right brain hemisphere, which does not perform verbal function (Vecker, 1998, p. 162).

Studying the modeling of the world of smells in P. Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Süskind, 2010), H. J. Rindisbacher emphasized: «In human communication, the world of smells has a bipolar structure and the space between these two poles is almost empty...» (Rindisbacher, 1992, p. 60). The most common solution is to describe a smell through its correlation with an abstract notion: pleasant smells are evaluated positively, unpleasant ones – negatively, and as a result, an explanation of an array of smells is limited in languages to a few designations. Therefore, when describing an odor, a person has to compare it with something «to find an accurate metaphor to indicate the peculiarities of smell perception» (Fomin, 2018, p. 21).

The olfactory metaphor, a metaphorical nomination with the component «smell», based on the phenomenon of synesthesia, is a successful means for overcoming the complex system of natural barriers to the designation of olfactory sensations. Studying the olfactory metaphor becomes possible due to the awareness of its essence as a linguo-cognitive and perceptual phenomenon, the evolution of linguistics, which leads to its interdisciplinary nature, and the emergence of various paradigms for studying language and its units.

### Methodology

Synesthetic and olfactory metaphors are related to perception, cognition, and linguistic actualization, which determines its complex multidimensional nature and necessity of interdisciplinary study involving data from psychology and cognitive linguistics. *The synesthesia and synesthetic metaphor theory* is the methodological basis for studying olfactory metaphors. Synesthesia (*from the Greek syn – together and aisthesis – sensation*) means «a joining of the senses» (Cytowic 1989, p. 1). However, the terms «intersensory connection» (Gazarova, 2002, p. 12), «intersensory sensation» (Velichkovskij, et al., 1973, p. 50), and «intermodal perception» (Howes, 1991, p. 34) are also used to designate the notion of synesthesia.

In psychology synesthesia is viewed as a phenomenon of perception in which, along with sensations specific to one particular organ, sensations of other stimulated organs appear simultaneously (Gazarova, 2002, p. 13). Synesthesia is also considered to be a fusion of qualities of different spheres of sensitivity, in which the qualities of one modality are transferred to another (Cytowic, 2018, p. 36). The synesthesia experience refers to multisensory impressions and sensations that cross the boundaries of one modality and are based on particular mode of perception: SIGHT, HEARING, TASTE, SMELL, TOUCH, TEMPERATURE (Howes, 1991, p. 32). Modality is used as a psychological term meaning «belonging to a certain sensory system» (Rubinstein, 1998, p. 27).



The theory of synesthetic metaphor has been developed also due to the development of the theory of conceptual metaphor. Within conceptual theory – founded by the American researchers J. Lakoff and M. Johnson – metaphor is viewed as a means of the world conceptualizing, complex linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, the basis of human mental operations manifested in linguistic metaphorical expressions available to perception (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). The complex organization of synesthetic metaphors at the conceptual and linguistic levels distinguish them from many other conceptual metaphors.

Olfactory metaphor as a type of a synesthetic metaphor appears as a result of the cognitive-symbolic integration of human sensory experience. It plays a significant role in integrating the human verbal and sensory-imaginative systems. The sensuality is conceptualized not as a separate way of cognition but as something synergistic, holistic, and integrated. This view of metaphor is based on the conceptual statement put forward by cognitive scientists who emphasize the person's vigorous, consciously creative activity (Pankratova, 2009; Zinchenko, 2022; Zubkova, 2010). In this regard, metaphor is seen not only as a trope or figure of speech that reflects a similar experience (Gazarova, 2002, p. 38) but also as a bodily and cognitive construct being a part of the integrative processes of subjective experience with verbal embodiment (Fomin, 2018, p. 22; Grossenbacher & Lovelace, 2001; Seaberg, 2023).

Perceiving a smell, a person has a *polymodal image* of the object or situation of that smell verbalized through metaphorical denotation. The polymodal image is a complex mental formation that reflects the peculiarities of human perception of a particular phenomenon and object in the unity of all sensory impressions (taste, sight, hearing, touch, smell etc.) (Howes, 1991, p. 34). Along with polymodal, scholars also distinguish intermodal transfer based on characterizing an object that does not correspond to real perceptual sensations (Vasiliuk, 1993, p. 7; Gazarova, 2002, p. 71).

The data analyzed in the paper encompass 800 olfactory metaphors selected from 31 modern English-language fiction texts.

The method of integrative analysis of linguistic and psychological data is used to clarify the essence of olfactory metaphors as a type of synesthetic metaphorical nominations. The selection of olfactory metaphors is carried out by analyzing their meaning and component structure. It enables identifying the basic lexical units of the nomination of the olfactory sphere in English and lexemes of other perceptual spheres, which, along with the basic units, are involved in creating olfactory metaphors.

The methods of conceptual, semantic, component, and contextual analysis make it possible to identify the models of intersensory transfers on which the olfactory metaphors of the modern English-language fiction texts are based. Semantic and contextual analysis methods are used to determine the characteristics attached to smells and referents that are denoted by olfactory metaphors in fiction texts.

The study of olfactory metaphors is carried out in stages in the article:

- 1) The evolution of humanity's interest in smell and the problems to study the smells are viewed;
- 2) The specificity of olfactory metaphor as a type of a synesthetic nomination is clarified;
- 3) The models of intersensory transfers serving as the basis for the formation of olfactory metaphors in English, as well as polymodal and intermodal images of smell reflected in them are revealed;
- 4) The formation and functioning peculiarities of olfactory metaphors of different types of modalities in English literary texts are characterized;
- Semantic, emotional, evaluative, and other characteristics of the analyzed olfactory metaphors are researched.

## **Results and Discussion**

The olfactory metaphors used in the English-language fiction texts are formed on the basis of intersensory transfer models «SMELL-TASTE», «SMELL-TOUCH», «SMELL-SIGHT», «SMELL-HEARING». A simultaneous combination of three types of modalities can also be the model for the formation of olfactory metaphorical nominations.

Olfactory metaphors based on the intersensory transfer model «SMELL-TASTE» are widely represented in the texts under analysis. These metaphors are based on the actual connection between the taste and odorative (olfactory) components of perception. Such a connection reveals the role and importance of the



sense of taste in human life. Taste plays a protective role and functions as a controller of the human digestive system (Pocock et al., 2017, p. 67).

The attributive lexeme of the taste modality *peppery* used in the synesthetic metaphors of the «SMELL-TASTE» model affects the connotation of the odorous sensation denoted by the lexemes *odor* and *scent* that become negative: *the peppery odor of his sweat* (Grisham, 2011, p. 402); *the peppery scent of water elder* (Lustbader, 2011, p. 307). The odorous metaphor with the component *smell* used with the adjective *musty* has a negative connotation: *the musty smell of the house* (Clancy, 2002, p. 174). Olfactory metaphors with the component *reek* have negative odorous connotations: *a soured reek* (Brin, 2013, p. 113); *the acrid reek of... disinfectants* (Rhodan, 2012, p. 86). An unpleasant smell creates correspondent atmosphere: *The atmosphere is sodden with the bitter reek of hallway filth* (Rhodan, 2012, p. 172).

There can also be a combination of three modalities («TASTE-SMELL-TOUCH») in English synesthetic metaphor. Odorous and taste metaphors may include nominations of the tactile modality represented by several submodalities, namely kinesthetic, gravitational, vibrational, tactile, temperature, and spatial-volumetric. As a result, the smell is endowed not only with taste but also with motor, gravitational, vibrational, tactile, temperature, and spatial-volumetric characteristics.

The following examples actualize kinesthetic sensations of smell: sweet perfume floats in the air (Gibson, 2003, p. 134); The fruity scent filled the kitchen and spread through the entire house (Eddins, 1986, p. 191). The smell can be localized in space: A bitter stink of burnt feathers hung in the air (Niven, 1985, p. 199); the sour that smell rises from ... was hanging over the alley (Pratchett, 2003, p. 403). The use of prepositions makes it possible to indicate the direction of the smell: Honeyed scent across the spread table (Clancy, 1998, p. 406); The sweet odor floated over to me (Crichton, 2009, p. 95); A sweet, rotten-fruit odor burst forth (Clancy, 1994, p. 606); rancid reek striving against (Mayer, 2012, p. 199).

Kinesthetic *waft* is the most frequent word used in the olfactory metaphors of this model: *a rancid odor wafted to him* (Rhodan, 2012, p. 167); *the sweet perfume of...smoke wafting off...jacket* (Turrow, 1996, p. 14); *The musty scent of newsprint filled her lungs* (Loudlum, 1984, p. 178). The temperature and spatial-volumetric submodalities are not represented in the considered model of odor and taste synesthetic associations.

Two nominations of the taste modality are often used alongside to characterize the perception of a certain smell: *the sweet, acid tang coming from* (Eddins, 1986, p. 195); *a sour-sweet odor pervades* (Clancy, 2010, p. 201). Taste nominations can be combined when used in a compound adjective (salt-and-sour): *The salt-and-sour smell of the rind filled the...room* (Norman, 2014, p. 118).

Taste sensations, in combination with visual ones, can be involved in the description of odorous sensations («TASTE-SMELL-SIGHT»). The perception of the smell can be accompanied by its color designation: *the sweet coppery scent* (Rhodan, 2012, p. 176). Olfactory and taste metaphors indicating subjective perception of a certain object and phenomenon are a separate group of metaphors: *the sour odor of settledness* (Pratchett, 2003. p. 327); *a sour odor lifted from her*, *the odor of dissolution of, impending death* (Rhodan, 2012, p. 198).

Adjectives denoting taste are much more frequently used in metaphorical nominations of smells of abstract concepts. The formation of such nominations reflects the real subjective connection existing between odorous feelings and abstract realities. The concepts of «life» and «death» often become the objects of designation by olfactory and taste synesthetic metaphors: the sweet aroma of life and death (Grisham, 2010, p. 18); the spicy perfume of death (Mayer, 2012, p. 136); a sweet scent of life (Bova, 2009, p. 207).

Olfactory and taste metaphors are used to denote abstract concepts such as «success» and «miracle»: *the sweet smell of success* (Eddins, 1986, p. 199); *the sweet scent of the miracle* (Clancy, 1994, p. 611). The abstract concept of «disease» denoted by the metaphorical nomination of this type receives a negative-evaluative emotional connotation: *sweet smell of disease* (Herbert, 1983, p. 546).

In the following examples, we can see an emotional reaction to the perception of smell: *smell so sweet* <u>it</u> <u>got you drunk</u> (Clancy, 2010, p. 212); *the tangy smell of the ocean, which made him sad* (Rice, 2006, p. 178). The evaluation of aroma and smell is determined by the individual perception of them. Appealing



to the individual sensory experience of the world's cognition by the subject of perception, olfactory and taste metaphorical nominations acquire additional synesthetic characteristics. Thus, for example, aroma affects the emotional state of a person: *the sweet aroma of the flower gardens filled my senses* (Martin, 2010, p. 299).

Olfactory metaphors based on the intersensory transfer model «SMELL-TOUCH» are also widely used in the English literary texts. Their abundance is not accidental, as they are the ones that define the most common intersensory relations that a person has when perceiving a smell. A person attempts to materialize it and endow it with specific qualities.

Spatial and volumetric characteristics of smell (enveloping, wrapped around, to wrap around) actualized in the olfactory metaphor of the «SMELL-TOUCH» model can be combined with its kinesthetic (rose up, enveloping swirled out, wrapped ... around), temperature (warm), tactile (thick) and gravitational (heavy) characteristics: the warm aroma of broccoli rose up, ... enveloping the whole of her (Vapnyar, 2009, p. 12); A thick, heavy smell ... swirled out of the room and wrapped itself around them (Clancy, 1998, p. 339). The combination of odoristic and spatial-volumetric sensations may also be accompanied by emotional comparisons: the reek of booze and barf...surrounded her like a thick cloud (Clancy, 1994, p. 209); Their aroma surrounded me like summer perfume (Adams, 1991, p. 104).

The synesthetic metaphors of the «SMELL-TOUCH» model have a significant impact on people, which is manifested at the physiological level, in particular: *the lingering scent of burned wood, scorched metal, and ash making her grimace* (Brennan, 2008, p. 10).

The olfactory metaphorical nominations of the «SMELL-SIGHT» model indicate visual sensations and visual images manifested when a person perceives smells. Sight provides humans with most of the information about the world around them. Vision impairment reduces the quality of life. Therefore, metaphorical nominations of this model are frequently used in English-language fiction.

The perception of smell can combine tactile (sharp), visual (golden brown), odorous (fragrance), and kinesthetic (hung) sensations: a sharp, golden-brown fragrance hung in the air (Hamilton, 2019, p. 709). Such metaphors define the connection existing between the olfactory and tactile categories (sharp fragrance, fragrance hung), as well as between the olfactory and visual ones (golden-brown fragrance). The following examples of metaphors indicate the double synesthetic transfers «SMELL-SIGHT» (red whiff, dusky perfume), «SMELL-TASTE» (acrid whiff, acrid perfume): the red acrid whiff (Niven, 1985, p. 214); dusky, ...acrid perfume (Clancy, 1994, p. 108).

Visual and olfactory synesthetic metaphors indicating the size of smells (*smallest whiff*, *little whiff*) can incorporate the characteristic of their spreading (*crawling across, comes from, rising*): the *smallest whiff* of decay that comes from (McCaffrey, 1992, p. 209); the little whiff of steam rising from (Clancy, 1987, p. 602). In rare cases, such synesthetic images are accompanied by temperature characteristics: big warm whiff of tender pot roast (Clancy, 2000, p. 217). There is also an individual-authored interpretation of the odorous sensation: *small whiffs possibility of* (Niven, 1985, p. 134).

Synesthetic metaphors of the analyzed model can indicate the detrimental impact of smell on the physiological level: *The clean scent of lemon oil polish irritated his sinuses* (Feist, 2005, p. 332); on the emotional level (*whiff of my scent...to turn him away* (Barker, 2007, p. 209); on the physical level (*drugged with...flow of scent*) (Loudlum, 1984, p. 187).

The analysis of the synesthetic metaphors of the «SMELL-SIGHT» model reveals the multidimensionality and differentiation of the visual modality of smell perception. The substance «SMELL», as a part of olfactory synesthetic nominations, correlates with color, light, spatial and volumetric (size, length) characteristics. Involving components of color and light submodalities of the modality «SIGHT» when describing a smell not only forms a visual image of the concept «SMELL», but also adds certain axiological characteristics to its perception.

The English-language synesthetic metaphors based on the intersensory transfer «SMELL-HEARING» are not ubiquitous. There are just few examples of them: *ratling stink* (Clancy, 2002, p. 78); *His perfume was so noisy* (Adams, 1991, p. 32). Olfactory metaphors of different modality types are often accompanied by evaluative and emotional characteristics of smell perception, units characterizing its intensity.



#### **Conclusions**

Olfactory metaphor is a complex linguo-cognitive and perceptual phenomenon, a type of synesthetic metaphor formed on the basis of the intersensory transfers models «SMELL-TASTE», «SMELL-TOUCH», «SMELL-SIGHT», «SMELL-HEARING». Such models actualize polymodal and intermodal images and perceptual sensations that a person has when perceiving a smell. English-language olfactory metaphors can also arise from models based on perceptual sensations of three types of modality.

Olfactory metaphors are widely used in English-language fiction not only to denote smell and the peculiarities of its perception by humans but also to characterize various phenomena and objects of extralinguistic reality. Olfactory metaphors of the «SMELL-TASTE» model are the most common in the analyzed literary texts. Such units reveal the connection between the olfactory and gustatory spheres of human perception, revealing the taste characteristics attributed to a smell when perceiving it. The olfactory metaphors of this model are used to nominate different abstract and specific notions, human feelings.

Olfactory metaphors of the model «SMELL-TOUCH» are also common in the English-language fiction texts. They actualize various person's tactile sensations of a person perceiving a smell: temperature, gravitational, motor, and spatial-volumetric. Metaphorical nominations of this model are also used to characterize the physiological states of a human perceiving various objects and phenomena of extralinguistic reality.

The substance «SMELL», as a part of olfactory synesthetic nominations used in English fiction texts, correlates with color, light, spatial-volumetric (size, length) characteristics. Such metaphors are formed on the basis of the model «SMELL-SIGHT». Involving components of color and light submodalities when describing a smell forms a visual image of the concept «SMELL» and adds certain axiological characteristics to its perception.

English-language synesthetic metaphors based on the intersensory transfer «SMELL-HEARING» are scarce in English fiction since the sense of hearing is rarely involved in the formation of synesthetic images of smell. Prospects for further research are seen in a comparative analysis of different groups of olfactory metaphors in various types of English fiction and non-fiction texts.

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