



**Sensory Metaphor in V.V. Nabokov's "Ada, or Ardor"**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the present article is to explore V. Nabokov's "Ada" through the lens of sensory metaphor. Sensory metaphor is one of the metaphor subtypes linked to such areas of perception as visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile in temperature, tactile in texture. Through sensory metaphors one can better understand the notion of embodied cognition, as they are rooted in our day-to-day reasoning. V. Nabokov makes abundant use of sensory metaphors in his "Ada" to trigger the most original associations and give rise to the most vivid images in the minds of the reader. For instance, aroma is interpreted through the category of light; terror – through the category of food; message, time, desire, etc. – through the category of texture, etc. In terms of sensority, tactile in texture metaphors constitute an overwhelming majority.

**Key words:** linguistic metaphor, cognitive metaphor, sensory metaphor.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the present article is to have a closer look at V. Nabokov's "Ada" through the lens of sensory metaphor. The abundance of sensory metaphors in the book under consideration can be accounted for by the fact that in order to provide the reader with proper images guiding him towards adequate comprehension, the author has to resort to tropes based on hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch.

Psychologists mention that a great number of metaphors we employ every day have strong sensory links. In English, we "move forward" with our lives and don't "retreat into" the past. We speak about people who are "cold as ice" and "heavy" matters we need to resolve... The lists could go on and on - only a "black hearted" writer whose readers need to be rescued by a "white knight" would deny that. Psychologists, using sophisticated research tools, find out that some of these metaphorical expressions are more than just, well, expressions - they are actually rooted in our sensory experiences. This mind-body link is called "embodied cognition."

Metaphor is looked upon as not only a linguistic entity, but also the one embracing our thoughts and senses. Thus, the so-called linguistic metaphor leads us to more complex cognitive structures "we live by" (Foroughi and Esfahani, 2012). It is also noteworthy that metaphorical signs tend to augment their contentive potential through the right medium created by discourse. Thus, discourse is rightfully treated as a cognitive basis for secondary semiosis implementation, whereas metaphor is construed as a product 'manufactured' in the course of cognitive-discursive activity of an individual.

Through any metaphor the vision-oriented principle in language is realized. The given principle gives a touch of subjectivity to any literary text and explains the existence of a plethora of interpretations of imaginary literature works on the part of the recipient.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH**

There is a vast literature on metaphor, but it is not safe to assume that there exists a clear-cut definition of metaphor. A standard view, following G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980), is that metaphor is looked upon as an interaction between two concepts. The interaction in question enables us to interpret one concept in terms of the other.

The authors of the present article are also of the opinion that metaphor resembles the relations typical of a dialogue. Combining direct and indirect senses, metaphor makes



for their interaction through a specific system of associative complexes, emerging at the junction of the so-called conceptual zones or domains. Later these associative complexes set out to come together and they finally start to imitate the qualities of one another. Thus, metaphor, being a volumetric sense model, reveals the tendency towards hierarchical distribution of its numerous senses (Pacheco et al., 2017). There are a number of metaphor theories in present-day linguistics, i.e. 1) cognitive metaphor theory by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson together with its methodological variations known as structure-mapping theory, class-inclusion theory, similarity-creating theory; 2) salience-related theory of metaphor, salience-imbalance theory, 'graded salience' hypothesis theory; 3) domains-interaction theory; 4) metaphor-in-use theory; 5) corpus-based theory of metaphor, etc. Nevertheless, there is a marked similarity between the above theories. They all circle around conceptual domains whose interaction contributes to a new sense formation.

Sensory metaphor is one of the metaphor subtypes linked to such areas of perception as *visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile in temperature, tactile in texture*. Hence, one can make the assumption that there is an obvious interrelation between sensory and physical metaphors. Sensory metaphors are the counterpoint of physical metaphors: when you create something physical, it addresses the senses. **Emotions/ feelings** we experience bear directly on our sense of touch: *That feels like a good idea*. **Grasping** and our sense of touch can be associated with not only holding physical entities, but also with holding ideas and concepts: *She held the idea in the palm of her hand. Hold onto that thought for a minute!* **Connection**, being a form of touch, though lighter, bears a certain similarity with our senses: *He has a very hands-on approach.; She touched many of the people with her moving speech*. **Form** – in metaphors of form one utilizes shape, weight, texture, malleability, hardness and other attributes of physical items to describe other experiences: *He is light on his feet. I am prepared to flex my offer*. **Pressure** – when one touches something, he inevitably experiences pressure. *I am going to put a squeeze on him*. **Temperature** is both an indicator of energy and such intense feelings as love and hatred: *It is a boiling new idea. She gave him an icy stare which inflamed him*. **Visibility** – when something becomes visible, it becomes real: *I see what you mean*. **Taste** – eating is not just an activity to fuel up the body, but also an activity which brings satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Those things



which taste good normally make us feel good and just the other way round: *That is really sweet of you. He is a rotten egg.* **Smell** is one of the most evocative emotions, as it triggers the deepest emotions ever: *She had a fragrant personality. This idea stinks.* Nabokov's sensory metaphor is far from being trite, it is highly original partly due to the fact that Nabokov's works are exceptionally full of vigour and energy, associations and allusions.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### An Empirical Account of Nabokov's Sensory Metaphor in "Ada, or Ardor"

The sensory metaphors extracted from the Nabokov "Ada" fall under the following categories.

**Visual:** *A glossy wasteland (p. 43); A glowing account of you (p. 163); In a dark mood (p. 167); Radiant beauty (p. 203); Van's mind flashed (p. 232); Gray years, black decades (p. 234); The dark aroma (p. 287); He did not shine in the discussion (p. 389); With only a breathing blackness before me (p. 420), etc.*

**Auditory:** *Whoosh down (p. 252); A pine forest fizzled out (p. 304); The journey roared into Uruguay (p. 345); The first trumpet blast of destiny (p. 471); The silent thunder of the infinite unconsciousness (p. 535), etc.*

**Gustatory:** *Van has not tasted the Terror of Terra (p. 73); Van's lifestream was too bitter (p. 108); A bitter lie (p. 190); The sweetness of her smile (p. 286), etc.*

**Olfactory:** *Fuming appeal (p. 206)*

**Tactile in temperature:** *When cool life kissed him with pouting lips (p. 32); The texture of those brown silks had once inflamed his senses (p. 140); The warm breath of fulfilled ambition (p. 184); In icy fury (p. 189); The fire of evil temptation (p. 482), etc.*

**Tactile in texture:** *The silks of her girlhood (hair) (p. 58); His swollen senses (p. 59); Sticky desire (p. 113); The velvet pit of the garden (p. 250); Ada's letters breathed, writhed, lived (p. 338); The touch of time's texture (p. 388); The sum of money which had been swelling with each pregnancy (p. 411); The surface of logic began to be affected by a ripple of sleep (p. 491), etc.*

It is noteworthy that out of 136 examples, visual metaphors amount to 32 items (23%), auditory - 9 items (7%), gustatory - 10 items (7%), olfactory - 1 item (1%), tactile in temperature - 19 items (14%), tactile in texture - 65 items (48%). It is obvious that metaphors belonging to the tactile in texture type prevail over the other types.



The fact that tactile in texture metaphors prevail in the Nabokov literary work under consideration can be explained in the following way. The author invites the reader to actively participate in the process of evaluation of the phenomena surrounding him. For the majority of people this kind of evaluation could be performed more easily through touch. Thus, V. Nabokov urges his reader to experience *her raven silks* referring to such features of the girl's hair as smoothness, glossiness and glitter; to feel *the smoothness of speed* or to get an idea of *the texture of time*, etc.

Visual metaphors take second place as far as their frequency of occurrence is concerned. Vision is the main guiding line for an individual in the world due to the fact that among all the types of information, information obtained through vision is central, cf. *Seeing is believing*. Visual information is processed by the brain rather quickly (i.e. instantly, immediately). It should also be mentioned that the situation of visual perception cannot be boiled down exceptionally to the notion "to see" and its derivatives; it covers a large sphere of various physical phenomena: light, color, size, shape, quantity, space, distance, perspective, the observer's location (cf. before, after, ahead, behind, above, beneath), the state of the environment with the help of which an object is perceived (cf. fog, cloudiness, shroud, veil – clear, distinct, bright), presence of obstacles (to block, to hide, to conceal), force and condition of visual ability (short-sighted, far-sighted, wall-eyed, etc.) as well as a particular identification, comparison and distinguishing of physical objects, actions, and phenomena.

The next step of analysis presupposes the procedure of singling out cognitive metaphors based on the linguistic metaphors extracted. According to the linguists working within the framework of cognitive metaphor theory, metaphor is treated as a cognitive entity with at least two important domains. The so-called source domain deals with the elements underlying the foundations for sense-related transfer conduction; i.e. source domain of conceptualization, which is instinctively clearer, more concrete, and connected with the immediate physical or spatial human experience. The latter sphere is the recipient one, i.e. the so-called target domain of the cognitive metaphor. Hence, metaphor is associated with the ability of a person to perceive and create similarity between heterogeneous classes of objects and individuals (see **Tables 1-6**).



Table 1: Visual

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
<i>A glossy wasteland</i>	Brilliance	Expanse	Expanse is brilliance
<i>A glowing account of you</i>	Glow	Praise	Praise is glow
<i>In a dark mood</i>	Dark color	Sadness	Sadness is darkness
<i>Radiant beauty</i>	Radiance	Beauty	Beauty is radiance
<i>Van's mind flashed</i>	Flash	Thought	Thought is flash
<i>Gray years, black decades</i>	Black	Ageing	Ageing is black
<i>The dark aroma</i>	Light	Aroma	Aroma is light
<i>He did not shine in the discussion</i>	Shine	Wit	Wit is shine
<i>With only a breathing blackness before me</i>	Blackness	The unknown	The unknown is blackness

Table 2: Auditory

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
Whoosh down	Whoosh	Speed	Speed is whoosh
A pine forest fizzled out	Fizzle	Speed	Speed is fizzle



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The journey roared into Uruguay	Roaring	Speed	Speed is roaring
The first trumpet blast of destiny	Blast	Tragedy	Tragedy is blast
The silent thunder of the infinite unconsciousness	Thunder	Death	Death is silent thunder



**Table 3: Gustatory**

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
Van has not tasted the Terror of Terra	Food	Terror	Terror is food
Van's lifestream was too bitter	Consumption	Existence	Existence is consumption
A bitter lie	Wormwood	Lie	Lie is wormwood
The sweetness of her smile	Sweetness	Smile	Smile is sweetness

**Table 4: Olfactory**

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
Fuming appeal	Fume	Appeal	Appeal is fume

**Table 5: Tactile in temperature**

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
When cool life kissed him with pouting lips	Coolness	Liveliness	Liveliness is coolness
The texture of those brown silks had once inflamed his senses	Flame	Senses	Senses are fire
The warm breath of	Warmth	Success	Success is warmth





fulfilled ambition			
In icy fury	Ice	Fury	Fury is ice
The fire of evil temptation	Fire	Temptation	Temptation is fire

**Table 6: Tactile in texture**

<b>Linguistic metaphor</b>	<b>Source domain</b>	<b>Target domain</b>	<b>Metaphorical mapping</b>
The silks of her girlhood (hair)	Silk	Hair	Hair is silky fabric
His swollen senses	Texture	Senses	Senses are texture
Sticky desire	Texture	Desire	Desire is texture
The velvet pit of the garden	Texture	Foliage	Foliage is texture
Ada's letters breathed, writhed, lived	Texture	Message	Message is texture
The touch of time's texture	Message is texture	Time	Time is texture
The sum of money which had been swelling with each pregnancy	Substance	Money	Money is substance
The surface of logic began to be affected by a ripple of sleep	Wave	Sleep	Sleep is a wave

There is, besides, a group of metaphors that may be called (following A. Bely, who, in fact, addressed epithets) euphonic. They not only characterize the determinant, but



also imitate a certain sounding or simply correlate with it by way of forming a peculiar "rhyming": *A glossy wasteland* (p. 43), *A radiant Dick* (p. 176), *The blindness of ascending bliss* (p. 213), *With only a breathing blackness before me* (p. 429), *A talking palette* (p. 437), *Gurgling blurbs* (p. 198), *Whoosh down* (p. 252), *A pine forest fizzled out* (p. 304), *Van has not tasted the Terror of Terra* (p. 72), *The sweetness of her smile* (p. 286), *While the flame still flickered* (p. 456), *His swollen senses* (p. 59), *The black bronze stream* (p. 104), *Soft squeals* (p. 205), *I'll slide into my own little millions* (p. 330). But on the whole, V. Nabokov does not take too great an interest in sound script theme. Moreover, metaphors in V. Nabokov's novel are represented by morphologically various items with nouns prevailing. In terms of sensority, tactile in texture metaphors constitute an overwhelming majority.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The analysis conducted enables us to arrive at the following conclusions.

1. V. Nabokov's metaphor is innovative or original in the majority of cases. The author exploits the potential of metaphor in order to realize the so-called 'principle of visuality' making for better understanding of the literary text on the part of the recipient.
2. V. Nabokov's "Ada" contains a plethora of sensory metaphors to encourage the reader to take an active part in the process of a new imaginary world creation. His sensory metaphor is represented by such subtypes as *visual*, *auditory*, *gustatory*, *olfactory*, *tactile in temperature*, *tactile in texture*. The last type outnumbers the other ones.
3. As metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also an entity typical of cognition, we considered it of importance to trace those cognitive connections which were established in V. Nabokov's "Ada" between certain unrelated phenomena. The connections we were especially interested in circle around sensority. Thus, through the category of visual perception the writer of the book introduces such conceptual mappings as WIT IS SHINE, THOUGHT IS A FLASH, etc.; through the category of auditory perception he resorts to such mappings as TRAGEDY IS A BLAST, DEATH IS A SILENT THUNDER, etc.; the category of gustatory perception allows V. Nabokov to create such associations as TERROR IS FOOD, LIE IS SWEETNESS, etc.; with the aid of the category of olfactory perception the author activates such a



conceptual mapping in the reader's mind as APPEAL IS FUME; tactile in temperature perceptions are detected in the mappings of SENSES ARE FIRE, FURY IS ICE, etc.; through the category of tactile in texture perceptions the mappings like TIME IS TEXTURE, DESIRE IS TEXTURE, etc. are created.

4. There is one more group of metaphors related to sensority in the Nabokov "Ada" known as euphonic metaphors. Their purpose is not only to bring to light certain characteristics of the determinant, but also to emulate a certain sound. This effect is mainly attained through rhyme.

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