The Garden and Gaol in I Tender My Flowers for Thee

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Abstract. Emily Dickinson, one of the American literature pioneers in the 1830s, produced over 1700 poems featuring natural images throughout her entire life. Her thought-provoking poem I Tender My Flowers for Thee reflects a sharp contrast between ideal and reality, which has caught scholars' attention and inspired in-depth interpretation of her works. Therefore, under the guidance of Embodied-cognitive linguistics, the paper studies the botany-related terms in I Tender My Flowers for Thee, explores deep connotation beneath simple images and dives in Emily's garden as well as her gaol. It is found that the images exert a pivotal role in expressing her complicated feelings and values, rendering a distinctive perspective in the comprehension of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

Keywords: Emily Dickinson; Embodied-cognitive linguistics; I Tender My Flowers for Thee; Image interpreting.

1. Input and Blend

Embodied-cognitive linguistics (ECL), also known as Chinese localization and extension of cognitive linguistics, features the analysis of language origin and usage, from the perspectives of both materialism and humanism. It is believed that language is formed on the basis of "embodied experience" and "cognitive processing", which elucidates once obscure language mysteries.

The core principle of this linguistics, namely "Reality-Cognition-Language", contains two phases: "input" and "blend". In the input phase, the readers' target is to understand the ideas and contents; while the process of blend renders readers in-depth comprehension of the social circumstances based on personal experience and emotional resonance. This two-phase principle then affords literature analysis enlightenment on the images of words or phrases, rhetoric devices of sentences and paragraphs and overall atmosphere and writing styles of the entire piece of work. In recent years, many scholars have applied the concepts of "input" and "blend" of embodied-cognitive linguistics into various fields, such as philosophical history, translatology, etc. For example, Xie Shijian and Yuan Yongdan (2022) applied ECL to literature comparison and detailed implementation of a study on the botany-related metaphor and non-metaphor in two masterpieces from home and abroad.

In accordance with the major implications of ECL, this research is conducted on the view that botany-related image is a carrier of human emotion and the materialized expression of aesthetic psychology. Different cognitive responses in reality like mental status, time and space are derived from a single image of botany in the literature work and therefore exert corresponding influences on the picked vocabulary. The same philosophy can be appropriate for more discussions on literary texts.

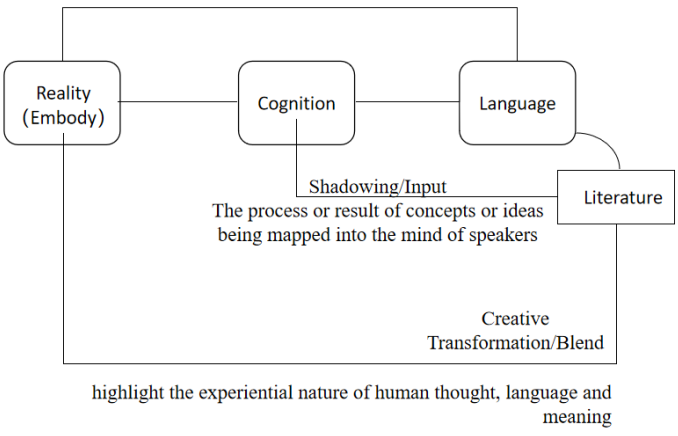


Fig.1 Literature analysis under the guidance of ECL core principle

2. Interpretation of Emily Dickinson from I Tender My Flowers for Thee

Born in the 1830s, Emily Dickinson had devoted her 30 years of youth and ardour to literary creation and she produced over 1700 universally acknowledged poems. Her poems center on life, nature, friendship, freedom, beliefs and love. In view of her secluded lifestyle and penchant for horticultural chores, relevant images remain frequent in her works, including I Tender My Flowers for Thee (Full text excerpt listed as below).

I tend my flowers for thee -
Bright Absentee!
My Fuchsia's Coral Seams
Rip-while the Sower-dreams-

Geraniums-tint-and spot-
Low Daisies-dot-
My Cactus-splits her Beard
To show her throat-

Carnations-tip their spice-
And Bees-pick up-

A Hyacinth- I hid-
Puts out a Ruffled Head-
And odors fall
From flasks-so small-
You marvel how they held-

Globe Roses - break their satin flake-
Upon my Garden floor-
Yet-thou-not there-
I had as lief they bore
No Crimson-more-

Thy fower-be gay-
Her Lord-away!
It ill becometh me-
I'll dwell in Calyx-Gray-
How modestly-alway-
Thy Daisy- Draped for thee!

The full text excerpt has been included in the The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson (1976). Same as the majority of her poems, this piece reveals her flexibility in the use of short sentences or verses (normally at most 6 sections), featuring inversion and the omitting of certain sentence elements, mostly verbs. The theme of the poem is Emily's flowers, which well assorts with her characters and experience. Therefore, the exquisite expressions have two implications: on the one hand, it displays Emily Dickinson's proficiency in gardening and zeal for nature; on the other hand, it suggests different personalities of Emily are materialized into different species of flowers, neither creepers nor branches, but telling its distinctive tales.

3. Discussion of the garden and gaol

Emily Dickinson's garden is considered as her isolated paradise, where she could have a moment to look upon the starry night and release her boundless creativity. There are 7 kinds of flowers or plants mentioned in the sufficient poem, some even referred twice (listed as below).

Table 1. Botanical names and floral languages in I Tender My Flowers for Thee

Sequence number	Botanical name	Floral language
1	Fuchsia	Hidden beauty
2	Geraniums	Happiness and memory
3	Daisies (2)	Innocence, happiness and peace
4	Cactus	Adamancy, loneliness and pursuit of love
5	Carnations	Glamour and true love
6	Hyacinth	Freedom and depression
7	Roses	Passion and love

Love, happiness and a certain degree of inner grief, which are the typical themes of Emily Dickinson's work, have been implied within the portrait of the flowers. Ostensibly, the writer was appreciating her garden blazing with colors. She borrowed those plants to describe her own fantasy and tragedy.

In addition to the named plants, more botany-related terms appear in the poem, conveying a certain sense and sensibility (listed as follows).

Table 2. botany-related terms in I Tender My Flowers for Thee

Sequence number	botany-related term
1	Beard (a tuft of hairs or bristles on certain plants, especially the awn of a grass)
2	Bee and spice
3	Calyx (the ring of small green leaves that protect a flower before it opens)

For one thing, the writer apparently is well aware of flower conservation and the circle of nature; for another, the subtle dynamic description of these botany-related terms contrasts with the static flower images, adding spice to the simple verses.

From both the static portraits and the dynamic descriptions, readers can dive in and figure out the pursuits and captivity beyond the poem and existing in reality.

3.1 Garden and pursuits

Beautiful flowers and vivid images comprise the pure pursuit of Emily Dickinson, namely love, independence and freedom. She isolated herself from the hustle and bustle of human society, ditched the flourishing industry and economy, but ran towards the nature. Therefore, in this poem, she chose petite, even inconspicuous images, with concise diction.

Love has long been her dream. At the beginning of the poem, she introduced the "Absentee", indicating the emotion hidden deep down her heart. The interaction between bee and carnations forebode great intimacy, as if codependent lovers. Roses have been eternally a subject of ardent love, suggesting the preservation of her yearning for love. The debut of daisy was low-profile, moderately standing aloof from worldly success, which conforms to Emily's strong mind. However, even this innocent tiny flower could not resist the love enchantment, just as the word "draped" conveys a sense of inexperienced flurry and insuppressible affection. Likewise, in Emily's A Bee his burnished Carriage and Come Slowly—Eden, she explicitly compared male to the bee, while female the flowers, implying her longing for carnal desire and imaginary Garden of Eden. Noticeably, the male character represented by bee has been dominant in the sexual love, taking the initiative and enlivening the atmosphere, while the flowers silently accept, which indicates Emily started her vision for lust and passion. These images work their dim way through Emily's love value in two dimensions: both the

pleasure of flash (seen from the collocation of bee and flowers) and spiritual resonance (seen from rose and daisy). The bachelorette, undoubtedly kept a special place in her heart for ideal relationship. As for her, love became an instinct.

Meanwhile, Emily's life burst its bond in exceeding resolve at the stage where American women were under oppression for years. Hyacinth epitomizes Emily's independence and intelligence. Even it was hidden by her, hyacinth kept its curiosity and brought its fragrance, which can be regarded as a rebellion to the outside world, where Emily's fragrance is her literary talents and unfettered imagination. She proclaimed to the world, in other poems, that "…I'm a rose!", detached from the world and engrossed in the nature. Besides, her boundless mind has never been confined in the limited space in the garden, instead, she squeezed, blasted and suddenly the world became her oyster.

3.2 Gaol and captivity

Her pursuit of love, independence and freedom collapsed with the slap from reality hit in her face. Controversy and contradictions intertwined with her life. Cruel surroundings and miserable experiences have exerted a far-reaching but implicit influence on her writing styles, trapping conversely her in the gaol.

One is fruitless love. Her audacious spirits were confined to fear in behaviour. Verbs in the poem, such as "rip" and "break", are emblematic of separation and bitterness, coherent to the "Absentee" at beginning. She had never stepped into marriage, but she did fall in love several times. According to her mails, her lovers shared certain same features: married, similar age to her father and successful in business. However, her blunt, innocent and pure love had not received proper response. In addition, a taste of being crossed in love often conceals within lines of her major works. By writing

"TO make a prairie it takes a clover and one
bee,—
One clover,and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.",

she was sulky with her own love affairs beyond self mockery. Revery suggests daydream, forming a stark contrast to the reality: her relationships fizzled into nothing.

Furthermore, she was too weak to fight against the universal prejudice in gender, sometimes she even surrendered to male-dominated society. In spite of her thirst for intimacy, she recognized men had created a social and economic advantageous position for themselves over women. "Calyx" wrapped inherent weakness in Emily's character: shackles buckled by the external circumstances. The garden, the blossom and crimson were all built on a pathetic attachment to male supremacy. Expect that, Emily's sense of insecurity and passiveness are seen from "Sun" in her other works. For example, in I'll tell you how the Sun rose and How happy is the little stone, she compared man to the sun, laying bare her worship to man.

3.3 Input and blend of the images

Images in Emily's works reflect inherent implications in terms of aesthetics and philosophy. Embodied-cognitive linguistics suggests that images combine the objectivity, shadowing the concise visual pictures, and subjectivity, blending with readers' experience and writers' rational, artistic and social expressions. Literature, in particular, is marked by subjectivity. Based on the above, Figure 2 is the mechanism of input and blend.

In accordance with "Reality-Cognition-Language" principle, Emily Dickinson's poem relates the botany-related terms to the cognition and turned them into subtle and detailed vocabulary. To thoroughly understand the original meaning in both the real world and the cognitive world, readers should not only learn about common sense, but look deep into what the writer went through.

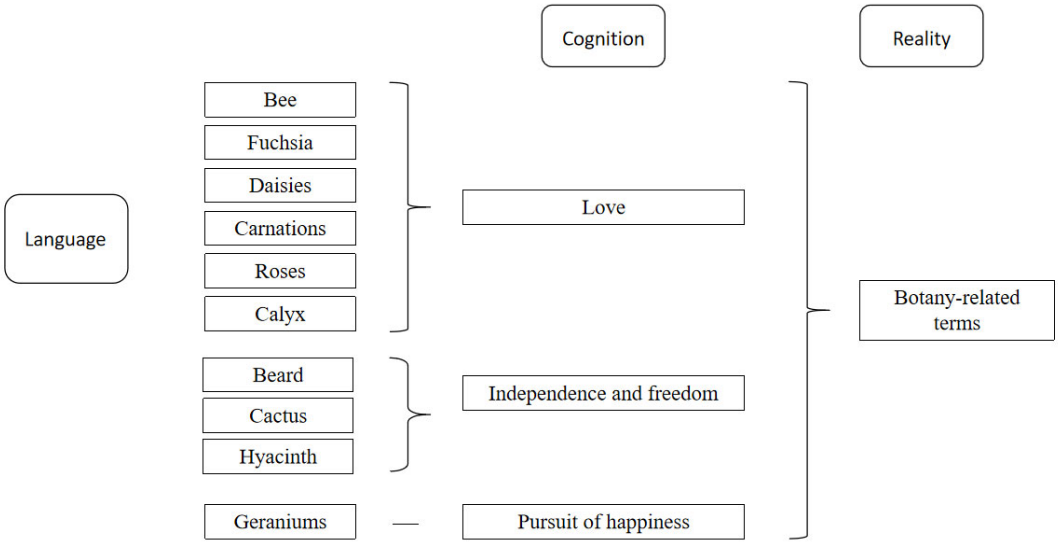


Fig.2 Mechanism of input and blend of the botany-related terms in the poem

4. Conclusion

This paper studies I Tender My Flowers for Thee by Emily Dickinson and discovers her secret garden as well as concealed gaol respectively from the "Reality-Cognition-Language" analysis of botany-related terms in the poem. Themes such as life, death, love and freedom accompanies Emily Dickinson and transformed into images in her works. Based on the Reality-Cognition-Language principle, readers can capture subtle thought-provoking contrast between ideal and reality. Hence, as a combination of embodied philosophy and cognitive linguistics, embodied-cognitive linguistics renders people a brand-new perspective on literature analysis.

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