

## PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC FIELDS AND ASSOCIATIVE NETWORKS IN THE WORKS OF EDWARD YOUNG

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**Abstract.** In the article semantic fields and associative networks in the works of Edward Young from a psycholinguistic perspective are aimed to analyse. Focusing primarily on *Night Thoughts*, the study analyzes how emotionally marked lexical units, metaphorical oppositions, and existential concepts form interconnected semantic structures that activate readers' cognitive and emotional processes. The findings demonstrate that Young's poetic language functions as a psychological mechanism shaping inner speech, existential reflection, and affective responses, thereby confirming the relevance of his work for contemporary psycholinguistic research.

**Keywords:** psycholinguistics, semantic field, associative network, inner speech, metaphor, graveyard poetry, proto-Romanticism, Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются семантические поля и ассоциативные сети в произведениях Эдварда Янга с психолингвистической точки зрения. Основное внимание уделяется «Ночным размышлениям», анализируется, как эмоционально маркированные лексические единицы, метафорические оппозиции и экзистенциальные понятия формируют взаимосвязанные семантические структуры, активизирующие когнитивные и эмоциональные процессы читателей. Результаты показывают, что поэтический язык Янга функционирует как психологический механизм, формирующий внутреннюю речь, экзистенциальную рефлексия и аффективные реакции, тем самым подтверждая актуальность его творчества для современных психолингвистических исследований.

**Ключевые слова:** психолингвистика, семантическое поле, ассоциативная сеть, внутренняя речь, метафора, кладбищенская поэзия, проторомантизм, Эдвард Янг, «Ночные размышления».

**Annotatsiya.** Maqolada Edvard Yang asarlaridagi psixolingvistik nuqtai nazardan semantik maydonlar va assotsiativ tarmoqlar tahlil qilishga qaratilgan. Asosan "Tungi fikrlar"ga e'tibor qaratgan holda, tadqiqot hissiy jihatdan belgilangan leksik birliklar, metaforik qarama-qarshiliklar va ekzistensial tushunchalar o'quvchilarning kognitiv va hissiy jarayonlarini faollashtiradigan o'zaro bog'liq semantik tuzilmalarni qanday shakllantirishini tahlil qiladi. Topilmalar Yangning she'riy tili ichki nutqni, ekzistensial aks ettirishni va affektiv javoblarni shakllantiruvchi psixologik mexanizm sifatida ishlashini ko'rsatadi va shu bilan uning asarining zamonaviy psixolingvistik tadqiqotlar uchun dolzarbligini tasdiqlaydi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** psixolingvistik, semantik maydon, assotsiativ tarmoq, ichki nutq, metafora, qabriston she'riyati, proto-romantizm, Edvard Yang, Tungi fikrlar.

**Introduction.** In modern psycholinguistics, literary texts are regarded not merely as aesthetic constructs but as complex systems that model human cognition and emotional experience through language. Particularly in philosophical and existential literature, linguistic units operate as mechanisms that activate inner speech, reflection, and affective response. The poetry of **Edvard Yung**, a prominent representative of eighteenth-century English literature, occupies a significant place in this context. His work *Night Thoughts* is characterized by a dense network of existential concepts—death, time, eternity, and

spiritual anxiety—organized into stable semantic fields. This article aims to analyze how these semantic fields generate associative networks in the reader's consciousness and how they contribute to the psycholinguistic impact of Young's poetry.

**Methods.** The study employs a complex methodological approach combining qualitative linguistic and psycholinguistic analysis.

First, *close reading* was applied to identify key lexical units, metaphorical patterns, and semantic oppositions forming the core semantic fields of the text.

Second, *psycholinguistic analysis* focused on the interaction between emotionally evaluative vocabulary and inner speech activation, examining how affective states are verbalized.

Third, *cognitive and discourse analysis* was used to explore conceptual oppositions such as life–death, time–eternity, and darkness–light as cognitive models.

Finally, a *historical-contextual method* allowed the interpretation of semantic fields within the framework of eighteenth-century religious and philosophical thought.

**Results.** Psycholinguistics investigates how language is processed, represented, and organized in the mind. According to associative network models, items are stored as nodes connected through semantic relationships. Activation of one concept spreads to related nodes, influencing comprehension and affect. [1; 411]

In literary discourse, repeated lexical clusters strengthen associative links, producing cognitive salience and emotional intensification. Originating in structural linguistics, semantic field theory posits that words derive meaning from their position within conceptual systems. In poetic texts, semantic fields create thematic coherence and symbolic density.[6]

Young's poetry demonstrates highly concentrated semantic clustering, particularly around existential themes. Cognitive poetics integrates linguistics and literary studies, examining how textual patterns shape mental simulation. Repetition, metaphor, and symbolic mapping trigger embodied responses in readers. Young's work offers an exemplary case of emotionally driven cognitive design. The analysis reveals that Night Thoughts is structured around several dominant semantic fields, each generating stable associative networks that activate readers' emotional and cognitive processing.

Following Collins and Loftus activation spreads automatically between semantically linked nodes. [1; 420]. In Young's poetry "Night" activates "darkness", "Darkness" activates "death", "Death" activates "soul" and "Soul" activates "immortality". This progression mirrors the poem's thematic movement.

Conceptual metaphors identified include life is a journey, time is a thief, death is sleep and night is spiritual revelation. Later Romantic poets expand these networks toward nature mysticism and personal transcendence. The semantic field of **death and loss** is realized through recurrent lexical units such as *death, grave, dust, and tomb*. These units

consistently co-occur with evaluative and metaphorical language, producing associations of transience, grief, and existential anxiety.

For example, Young explicitly links human knowledge to sorrow in Night III:

*“Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
Must mourn the deepest o’er the fatal truth.”* [11; 67]

This passage demonstrates a **cognitive–emotional linkage**, whereby increased awareness leads to intensified psychological suffering. From a psycholinguistic perspective, such constructions stimulate reflective inner speech and deepen affective engagement.

The semantic field of **time** (*time, moment, hour, fleeting*) functions as a psychological rather than purely chronological category. Time is repeatedly conceptualized as something perceived only through its loss, reinforcing feelings of regret and retrospective awareness. Lexemes: *time, hour, fleeting, moment, eternity, ages, transient*. Time is personified and often depicted as destructive. Metaphorical constructions like “Time the devourer” map temporal experience onto predatory imagery. Associative chain: Time → Transience → Mortality → Eternity. This progression cognitively bridges finite human existence and infinite metaphysical speculation. In Night VII:

*“The bell strikes one. We take no note of time,  
But from its loss.”* [11; 214]

These lines activate a **retrospective cognitive frame**, compelling the reader to reassess personal temporal experience and missed opportunities. The associative network formed here links time → loss → regret → self-reflection.

Another dominant semantic field centers on **soul and spirituality**, expressed through *soul, eternity, heaven, and immortality*. These lexical items generate associations of inner search, faith, and hope, counterbalancing the despair produced by death-related imagery. The semantic field of faith and immortality lexemes are *soul, heaven, God, salvation, immortality, divine, eternity*:

*“The soul, uneasy and confined at home,  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.”* [11; 176]

In a psycholinguistic way, such example in Night VI provide a **compensatory emotional mechanism**, offering cognitive relief and restoring existential balance by redirecting attention from mortality to transcendence.

Core lexemes include *death, grave, tomb, dust, mortality, coffin, corruption, perish*. This field dominates the poem’s lexical landscape. Repetition creates what psycholinguists describe as **frequency-based activation**, increasing emotional intensity. Death-related words cluster syntactically and semantically, forming chains such as: Grave → Dust → Corruption → Human Frailty. This network reinforces existential awareness and prompts reflective cognition.

The opposition *darkness and light* (*night, darkness* versus *light, dawn*) functions as a large-scale **cognitive metaphor**. Darkness symbolizes ignorance, inner turmoil, and unconscious thought, while light represents awareness, insight, and spiritual awakening. The semantic field of night and darkness lexemes include *night, shadow, gloom, darkness, silence*.

*“Night is the time for thought.”* [11; 9]

In Night I this concise statement expresses Young’s psycholinguistic strategy: night suppresses external stimuli, thereby intensifying inner speech and reflective cognition.

These semantic fields do not operate independently. Instead, they intersect to form **complex associative networks** in which death intensifies time awareness, time deepens spiritual questioning, and darkness enables inner reflection. As a result, readers experience heightened emotional resonance, sustained inner dialogue, and active meaning construction.

**Semantic Fields and Associative Networks in the Works of Edward Young**  
(Table)

Semantic Field	Key Lexical Units	Associative Networks (Cognitive Links)	Psychological / Psycholinguistic Effect
<b>Death and Loss</b>	death, grave, tomb, dust	transience → loss → grief → suffering	Intensifies existential anxiety and activates affective states
<b>Time and Transience</b>	time, moment, hour, fleeting	time → delay → loss → regret	Produces retrospective awareness and inner self-evaluation
<b>Soul and Spiritual Quest</b>	soul, eternity, heaven, immortality	search → faith → eternity → hope	Deepens inner speech and activates spiritual awakening
<b>Night and Darkness</b>	night, darkness, shadow	silence → solitude → inner voice → distress	Activates subconscious processes and strengthens introspection
<b>Light and Awareness</b>	light, dawn, flame	light → awareness → spiritual relief	Represents cognitive transformation and psychological release
<b>Suffering and Inner Crisis</b>	sorrow, distress, misery	pain → denial → inner conflict	Models psychological crisis through affective language and dramatic syntax
<b>Silence and Reflection</b>	silence, stillness, pause	quietness → inner speech → reflection	Enhances reflective thinking and self-directed cognition

**Discussion.** The findings confirm that semantic fields in Young’s poetry perform not only a stylistic function but also a distinctly **psycholinguistic one**. Through interconnected associative networks, abstract existential concepts are transformed into emotionally and cognitively accessible experiences.

The dominance of **inner monologue** and **metaphorical structuring** aligns closely with psycholinguistic theories of inner speech by Vygotsky and conceptual metaphor.[5] Young's repeated activation of the same semantic fields ensures emotional continuity across the poem, maintaining a high level of reader involvement.

Importantly, the reader is positioned not as a passive recipient but as an **active cognitive participant**, compelled to complete meaning through personal reflection. This explains the poem's enduring relevance in modern contexts such as **existential psychology**, **bibliotherapy**, and reflective reading practices. From a contemporary standpoint, *Night Thoughts* is expected to be modern understandings of psychological introspection by modeling how language can guide inner speech, regulate emotional states, and structure existential awareness.

**Conclusion.** "*Night Thoughts*" functions as a psycholinguistic system in which semantic fields and associative networks activate inner speech, emotional resonance, and existential reflection. Edward Young's systematic use of lexical clustering and metaphor transforms abstract concepts such as death and time into cognitively and emotionally accessible experiences. The interaction of these semantic fields positions the reader as an active participant in meaning construction. Consequently, *the poem* remains relevant not only as a literary work but also as a valuable resource for contemporary psycholinguistic research.

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