COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO "INDIAN KILLER" BY SHERMAN ALEXIE

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Abstract. *This article analyzes Sherman Alexie's* Indian Killer *from the perspective of cognitive poetics. The relevance of the study lies in the continuing importance of racial identity, cultural trauma, and stereotype formation in contemporary literary discourse. The research addresses the problem of how meaning is constructed in the novel and how identity crisis is cognitively framed in readers' perception. To solve this problem, the study applies key cognitive theories, including figure–ground organization, prototype theory, cognitive deixis, scripts and schemas, and conceptual metaphor. The methodological approach focuses on identifying linguistic and narrative patterns that guide readers' mental processing and emotional engagement in the fiction. The findings demonstrate that the novel functions not only as a crime narrative but as a complex cognitive and discursive structure shaping readers' understanding of cultural conflict and social tension. The study concludes that cognitive poetics provides an effective analytical base for interpreting identity formation and racial discourse in modern literature, contributing to both literary theory and interdisciplinary cognitive research.*

Keywords: *cognitive poetics, figure–ground organization, prototype theory, cognitive deixis, scripts and schemas, conceptual metaphor, racial identity.*

Annotatsiya. *Ushbu maqolada Sherman Alexiening Indian Killer romani kognitiv poetika yondashuvi asosida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning dolzarbligi shundaki, zamonaviy adabiyotda irqiy identitet, madaniy travma va stereotiplar masalasi hali ham dolzarb bo'lib, ularni lingvokognitiv yondashuv orqali o'rganish ilmiy yangilik kasb etadi. Maqolada muammo sifatida romandagi ma'no qanday shakllanishi va o'quvchi ongida identitet inqirozi qanday konstruksiya qilinishi masalasi qo'yiladi. Ushbu muammoni hal qilish uchun figura–fon munosabati, prototip nazariyasi, kognitiv deixis, skript va sxemalar hamda konseptual metafora nazariyalaridan foydalanildi. Tahlil jarayonida asardagi til vositalari o'quvchi idrokini boshqaruvchi kognitiv mexanizm sifatida talqin qilindi. Tadqiqot natijasida roman nafaqat kriminal syujetli badiiy matn, balki murakkab diskursiv va kognitiv struktura ekani asoslandi. Xulosa sifatida aytish mumkinki, kognitiv poetika usuli romandagi madaniy ziddiyat va identitet muammosini chuqurroq anglash imkonini beradi hamda zamonaviy adabiy tahlil metodologiyasini boyitadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *kognitiv poetika, figura–fon munosabati, prototip nazariyasi, kognitiv deixis, skript va sxemalar, konseptual metafora, irqiy identitet.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье роман Шермана Алекси* Indian Killer *анализируется с позиции когнитивной поэтики. Актуальность исследования обусловлена сохраняющейся значимостью проблем расовой идентичности, культурной травмы и формирования стереотипов в современной литературе. В качестве основной научной проблемы рассматривается механизм конструирования смысла в романе и когнитивное моделирование кризиса идентичности в восприятии читателя. Для решения поставленной задачи используются такие теоретические инструменты, как соотношение фигуры и фона, теория прототипов, когнитивная дейксис, скрипты и схемы, а также теория концептуальной метафоры. В ходе анализа выявлены языковые и нарративные средства, направляющие когнитивную и эмоциональную реакцию читателя. Результаты исследования показывают, что роман представляет собой не только детективное повествование, но и сложную когнитивно-дискурсивную структуру. Делается вывод о том, что когнитивная поэтика является продуктивным методом интерпретации проблем идентичности и культурного конфликта в современной литературе.*

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Ключевые слова: *когнитивная поэтика, соотношение фигуры и фона, теория прототипов, когнитивная дейксис, скрипты и схемы, концептуальная метафора, расовая идентичность.*

Introduction. Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* is a complex, modern society depicting novel that examines race, violence, urban loneliness and cultural identity in modern America. The book was first published in 1966 and follows multiple characters in Seattle whose lives intersect around a mysterious serial killer who is supposedly targeting white men. But the real strength of the novel does not come from the murder mystery, but from the psychological, emotional and cultural tensions each character experiences in a "colored men hated" society. Alexie, a Spokane-Coeur d'Alene writer, is best known for portraying Native American life with bitter humor, raw honesty and emotional depth. In Indian Killer, he explores the legacy of colonization, the trauma of displacement and the confusion of mixed identity.

The central figure of the novel, John Smith, is an adopted Native man who grows up in a loving white family but remains emotionally disconnected from both worlds. His story is combined with Marie Polatkin's activism, Jack Wilson's "wannabe Indian" identity, and Truck Schultz's racist radio propaganda. The writer`s writing style creates a narrative made of multiple overlapping perspectives and ideological clashes. Cognitive Poetics provides a helpful way to examine how readers process these shifting perspectives and emotional worlds. The novel's use of metaphor, schema, figure–ground contrast, deixis, and narrative worlds creates a reading experience that mirrors the confusion, fear, and cultural dislocation felt by the characters themselves. Cognitive stylistics examines how linguistic structures influence readers' mental representation of fictional worlds.

Cognitive poetics provides a helpful framework for analyzing how readers construct meaning through narrative structures and linguistic patterns. The symbolic image of "white flames" surrounding John, the classroom debates Marie has about Indian identity, and the violent radio monologues of Truck Schultz work not only as narrative details but also as cognitive guidelines that guide readers' reading experiences. Through cognitive poetics, the novel becomes a study of how minds create and navigate cultural meaning in a divided society.

Literature analysis. One of the biggest findings from this paper is that Alexie constantly shapes the reader's attention. Through figure and ground, he decides which parts of a scene stand out and which parts fade into the background. Some characters and their actions and sometimes rain, fog or fear become the "figures" that catch our eye, while the rest of the setting becomes "ground." Because of artistic talent of Sherman Alexie, the reader experiences the same confusion and tension that the characters feel.

The novel also treats identity through prototypes. Society has "prototypical" ideas of what an Indian is supposed to look like, how a Native person should act or about super heroes and their capabilities. But Alexie breaks all these simple categories. We can see

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that John does not fit the classic image of a Native man, Marie constantly push against or reveal false prototypes and Jack Wilson is not the "expert" or "Shilshiomish" as he pretends to be while Truck Schultz challenges destructive stereotypes through his exaggerated portrayal of "Indian violence". By showing characters who do not match the prototypes, I think, Alexie wants to reveals that these categories are unfair and unrealistic. This helps readers understand how stereotypes shape people's lives and how dangerous they can be especially when you really look forward them to match your expectations.

Research methodology. This study employs a qualitative cognitive-poetic approach, focusing on the analysis of linguistic and narrative features in *Indian Killer* to examine how meaning and identity are constructed. The methodology integrates key concepts such as figure–ground organization, prototype theory, cognitive deixis, scripts and schemas, and conceptual metaphor to interpret readers' cognitive and emotional engagement with the text.

Results and discussion. In cognitive poetics, the concept of figure and ground helps us understand how narratives take the reader`s focus on certain elements while pushing others into the background. According to Stockwell, figure–ground organization determines which elements are foregrounded and which remain backgrounded in the reader's perception.

In Indian Killer, Alexie constantly shifts what the reader perceives as the "figure" by contrasting individuals with their hostile environments.

A good example can be seen in the scenes around Pioneer Square. The city park, filled with homeless people and tourists, creates a shifting cognitive background. When one of the characters, Wilson, watches the homeless Indians and the telephone booth display, the ground is the noisy and chaotic park. The figure becomes a single Indian man moving toward the phone. The reader is guided to focus on that man's actions through Wilson's observing consciousness:

"Wilson walked into the park just as the street people were starting to return. Due to the Indian Killer threat, police patrols had been increased, and five cops walked through the park. Some band played an unidentifiable mix of trumpets, piano, strange-looking guitars, and voices. Everybody in the band was white. One homeless white guy in a wheelchair had rolled himself right next to the stage. He was loudly singing along with the band. The musicians gave him angry looks, but the homeless guy was probably a better singer than any of them……

Wilson was about to leave when he noticed an Indian man leaning against a tree about twenty feet from the phones. He was obviously homeless. Dressed in dirty clothes, shoes taped together, broken veins and deep creases crossing his face. Slowly, the Indian man made his way closer to the phones. Wilson watched him…."

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Another example can be observed in chapter 7. Marie Polatkin experiences a different figure–ground dynamic. In the classroom scene, the ground is the university classroom-desks, students chatting and a professor. The figure is Marie's voice when she interrupts the white students' stereotypes about scalping. Her presence disrupts the background assumptions, immediately making her identity the focal point:

"… The students were gossiping about the dead body that had been discovered in an empty house in Fremont. The white students all stared at Marie, saw that she was Indian, and then turned back to their conversation. Still, in spite of and because of Dr. Mather, Marie assumed she'd be one of many Indians in the class, all looking for an easy grade. But she'd been wrong in her assumptions. She was the only Indian in the class…. Dr. Mather tried to ignore Marie, but she felt compelled to challenge him and constantly interrupted his first lecture. She was enjoying herself. She'd found an emotional outlet in the opportunity to harass a white professor who thought he knew what it meant to be Indian.

Alexie repeatedly uses figure–ground shifts to reveal tension. In the novel, Indians appear as sole figures against a white urban background or White society appears as intrusive figures against Native memories or spaces. These changes vividly depict the characters' fractured lives. John often experiences himself as blurred and emotionally isolated both invisibly and visibly in the novel. Wilson tries to make himself a "figure" by pretending to be Indian, while Marie tries to push Native truth into the academic world's background.

Prototype theory explains how readers rely on familiar mental models when encountering characters. And in my novel, Alexie deliberately challenges these prototypes in order to openly show stereotypes about Native identity.

One of the clearest examples is the character Jack Wilson, who claims to be "Shilshomish" but looks entirely white. His identity does not match the prototype that other characters (and readers) expect of an "Indian." On page 141, a detective literally laughs at Wilson's claim of Indianness, noting his blond hair and blue eyes. This mismatch forces readers to question prototypes about ethnicity and authenticity:

"-I'm Indian, sir."

The detective looked at Wilson's blue eyes and blond hair. Wilson was tall, six foot, but slight of build. The detective laughed. Indian, my ass, he thought. The detective patted Wilson on the head, as if he were a dog, and walked away, laughing to himself. "Indian," he said and laughed some more…"

Likewise, Marie fights against the classroom's stereotypical prototypes. She is, in the novel, the most patriotic and sharp-minded character who never feels hesitated to rebel against white society and that is why she can also resemble the "black people`s rights fighter" prototype, I think. When white students insist that "Indians invented scalping",

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Marie disrupts their prototype of Native savagery, correcting them by saying the French were the first to scalp. The prototype of "the violent Indian started scalping" is shown as an ignorant construct created by colonial histories:

"The students were gossiping about the dead body that had been discovered in an empty house in Fremont.

-Yeah, Indians started that whole scalping business.

-You've got it all wrong," Marie said as she sat at a desk near the front. "The French were the first to scalp people in this country. Indians just copied them."

Furthermore , the wheelchair Indian who jokingly claims "Crazy Horse killed them" also pushes prototypes forward by mixing humor with tragic history. He creates an ironic combination of prototypes by combining Crazy Horse, Chief Joseph and Wovoka in order to mock white expectations of legendary Native warriors. He uses these legendary prototype heroes to show how that anonymous Indian Killer is skillful and dangerous:

"Oh, yeah, he's Oglala." The Indian, slowly wheeling back, closer and closer to Daniel, kept speaking. "And he's more. This Indian Killer, you see, he's got Crazy Horse's magic. He's got Chief Joseph's brains. He's got Geronimo's heart. He's got Wovoka's vision. He's all those badass Indians rolled up into one."

Lakoff argues that categories are structured around best examples rather than fixed boundaries. In cognitive linguistics, a prototype is the "best example" or the most typical model of a category in our mind. So in cognitive terms, historical Indigenous figures such as Crazy Horse, Geronimo, Chief Joseph, and Wovoka function as cultural prototypes in American memory. Crazy Horse represents the prototypical "Native warrior," Chief Joseph the "peaceful and wise chief," Geronimo the "defiant resistance fighter," and Wovoka the "spiritual prophet." The Oglala Lakota themselves function as a prototypical Plains Indian group. These prototypes shape how readers and characters in Indian Killer imagine Native identity. However, Alexie deliberately creates characters who fall outside these familiar prototypes, challenging and destabilizing the stereotypical categories imposed on Indigenous people. By constantly applying prototypes to readers, Alexie forces us to see characters more individually and have a better picture of them in our mind.

Cognitive deixis concerns how texts position readers in relation to characters, spaces, and viewpoints. Alexie frequently shifts deixis to create emotional disorientation.

One major deictic tool is in Marie's scenes, where social and ideological deixis is used. In her classroom confrontation with Dr. Mather (pp. 208–210), pronouns like "you" and "we" shift constantly:

"-You think you know more about being Indian than Indians do?"

"-We're not like that."

Marie's "we" creates an in-group deixis around real Native identity, excluding Mather. Readers recognize how identity boundaries are linguistically drawn.

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Or in thirteenth chapter "Anger", Truck Schultz uses deictic "they" to construct Indians as a threatening out-group:

"-They have responded with violence."

"-They want to violate our women."

This creates a deictic wall between whites ("we, citizens") and Natives ("they") guiding the reader's cognitive-emotional alignment.

Moreover, spatial deixis is used in the fourteenth chapter "Blank pages", when Wilson thinks about belonging "here"

"Occidental Park was a gathering place for dozens of homeless people. He watched the Indians gather in the park… Wilson felt he belonged here… Down in Pioneer Square… here they slept, here they talked."

Through these deictic shifts, *Indian Killer* forces readers to experience characters` feelings and expose racial boundaries through pronouns like "they", "our" or "you".

Cognitive grammar explores how patterns of language in a text reveal the way characters conceptualize the world. Cognitive grammar views grammatical structures as reflections of conceptualization processes and grammar encodes viewpoint and construal. In *Indian Killer*, Sherman Alexie uses different grammar patterns to guide the reader`s attention, viewpoint and understand characters` minds.

A consistent grammatical feature in the novel is Alexie's use of **short, clipped sentences** and repetition during moments of fear or racial tension. For instance, when John has to protect the old blind Indian woman from the "white flames".

"A family of white flames, mother, father, daughter, son. A flame riding a bicycle. Flames crowding onto the Bainbridge Island ferry. A flame playing a battered guitar. Flames sitting in the cars passing by. One flame leaning out a pickup window, shouting obscenities at John."

The short clauses and constant repetition of the word "flames", convey John's mental instability and heightened alertness. The grammar mirrors his internal state.

Next, Marie's scenes often use **longer, argumentative sentences** that show her intellectual clarity and resistance. During her confrontation with professor Dr. Mather, her speech is full of rhetorical questions and repeated challenges:

"You think you know more about being Indian than Indians do?"

Grammatically, Marie's speech is assertive and confident, showing how her linguistic choices construct a strong impression in the minds of readers.

Moreover, Truck Schultz's radio rants rely heavily on **parallel structures and repeated phrases** to create emotional impact. In the twelfth chapter "Truck", he repeats adjectives:

"He is pure evil, pure violence, pure rage".

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The repetition persuades his listeners by creating a rhythm of fear. His grammar is intentionally manipulative, using rhetorical structures to shape how the public conceptualizes Native people.

According to construal concept (Stockwell), another feature is grammatical variation in the text leads to conceptual variation. Another character, King`s identity insecurity is described through the use of grammatical variations like ellipsis, repetitive gerunds in not full sentences which helps the reader feel how desperate he is in his desire. For example, in chapter fourteenth "Blank pages".

"Been thinking about coming back home, you know?
Been saving up some coins.
Thinking about coming back."

As for the next feature Profiling, it works in order to direct the reader`s attention to one element of a scene, from a viewpoint within a text world, according to Stockwell. So, Alexie also masterfully uses this grammatical concept in his novel. For example, in the chapter " The learning curve" (pp.150) :

"JOHN SMITH STOOD IN the darkness outside the UW Anthropology Building and stared at Marie Polatkin through the classroom windows. She was arguing with the professor, a white man wearing a grey ponytail and turquoise bolo tie… Of course, John couldn't hear anything Marie was saying, but he could tell she was angry. She sat up straight in her seat, her finger jabbing the air as she made some point, one hand running nervously through her long, black hair. John thought she was beautiful."

Here, grammar structure creates cognitive profile, showing Marie as "figure". Even though John is the grammatical subject of the excerpt, the narrative attention of the reader shift to Marie and John falls into "ground" as he is only the viewer. Alexie highlights one character while backgrounds others.

Scripts and schema refer to the mental frameworks readers bring to narrative situations. Scripts and schemas represent stored cognitive frameworks guiding interpretation of familiar situations and These mental structures influence how readers anticipate narrative development. Alexie frequently activates, disrupts, or overturns common schemas in order to expose racial prejudice and cultural misunderstanding.

For example, in the chapter "Testimony", we can see vivid example of Police questioning script, while the police is interviewing Mrs. Jones, they use classic police interrogation script: asking the mother where the child was, discipline records, possible suspects, asking to repeat the story and so on:

"*MRS. JONES, I KNOW this is a painful experience for you, but we need to go over it again."*

"I've told you everything I can remember."

"Can we please reconstruct the events one more time?"

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"I've told you. I came home from work."

"At what time?"

"A little after six. I usually get home a little after six. Then I walked into the house, and Mark and Sarah, the nanny, were watching television."

"What were they watching….?"

A good example of schema in Indian Killer occurs when the white students discuss the murder victim being "scalped" in the chapter "Introduction to Native American Literature". Their immediate assumption that the killer must be Indian shows how racial and colonial schemas shape interpretation before any evidence is considered.

"The professor had not yet arrived. The students were gossiping about the dead body that had been discovered in an empty house in Fremont. "Yeah," said one older white woman.

"I read he was scalped."

"Yeah," said a white man.

"Like an Indian would do it."

"An Indian?"

"Yeah, Indians started that whole scalping business."

They draw on cultural myths of Native savagery, fear and violence, revealing how deeply learned stereotypes guide cognition every time a racist schema appears.

Discourse-world theory examines the "world" created each time characters speak, argue, or perform identity. In *Indian Killer*, different characters live in incompatible discourse worlds, each shaped by culture, fear, or ideological bias.

Marie's discourse world is grounded in Native activism and lived experience. Her harsh classroom arguments with the professor in the chapter "Deconstruction":

"… Marie raised her hand. She had been tolerating Dr. Clarence Mather's babble for far too long.

"That's bull!" shouted Marie- Well, I'm just sick and tired of people like you. You think you know more about being Indian than Indians do, don't you? Just because you read all those books about Indians, most of them written by white people. By guys like Jack Wilson… You think Indians are the only ones who know how to use a knife? And do you think Indian men are the only ones who know how to use a knife? I'm pretty good with a knife."

Her this assertive speech towards the professor creates a discourse world of Indigenous truth, where her voice challenges the "official" academic discourse represented by Dr. Mather. Her discourse world helps the readers to see and assess the situation through the eyes of Marie.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mather's discourse world is academic and theoretical. He tries to fit Native experiences into metaphors like "revolutionary construct", showing how academic

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discourse often strips away lived reality. Marie rejects this discourse because it does not reflect Indigenous experience:

"If we compare the construct of the Indian Killer with Jack Wilson's fictional alter ego, Aristotle Little Hawk, we can begin to more fully understand the revolutionary nature of Mr. Wilson's mystery novels. The Indian Killer and Little Hawk are twentieth-century manifestations of the classic Indian warrior. One, the Indian Killer, is wild and untamed, à la Geronimo, while the other, Little Hawk, is apparently tamed and civilized, a hangs-around-the-fort Indian, if you will, but is, in fact, actually working within the system in his efforts to disrupt it."

Truck Schultz creates an entirely different discourse world for the reader, a world fueled by fear, nationalism, and white grievance. His listeners enter this world every time he speaks on the radio and chapter twelfth "Truck" greatly shows how discriminating person he is:

".... I know you want to know, and you know that I have the answers. You see, those Indians refused to be helped, even when evidence of their children's progress was placed in front of them. Those Indians responded in the only way they knew how to respond: with violence. And now it's happening again. Despite all that we have done to help the Indians, they have refused to recognize it. They have refused to recognize how well we have educated them, how well have we fed them, how well we have treated them. To this day, they have responded to our positive efforts in the only way they know: violence…"

The reader can easily notice through the novel that in his world, Indians are threats, criminals or burdens who do only harm and violence. This discourse world is emotionally "infectious" in my own words and influential to the reader as this chapter is full of aggressive words towards Native Americans, especially Indians.

Conceptual metaphor is central to *Indian Killer*. Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that metaphor structures human cognition, not only language and Alexie also uses metaphor not just as stylistic decoration but as a way of expressing historical trauma and cultural perception.

The most powerful recurring metaphor is **"white flames."** When John walks through Seattle and sees people as flames, the metaphor transforms ordinary white bodies into threatening fire. John thinks about the history of white conquest (p. 211):

"Those white flames tore everything down… Their jealousy grew into hatred."

This metaphor represents colonization itself and comparing while people to white flames shows skillful mastery of the author.

Truck Schultz uses conceptual metaphor in a racist way. He describes Indians as "pure evil", "a distillation of rage," and compares the killer to a "heathen kept on ice for centuries" (pp. 292–293).

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"This Indian Killer is merely the distillation of their rage. He is pure evil, pure violence, pure rage. He is "heathen kept on ice for centuries"

Moreover, Alexie creates the metaphor "Colonial violence is animal predation" in his novel to show the harshness and inhumanness of this activity. Here, source domain is animal predation and target domain is colonial violence. He says *"Indians had been prey… terrible animals waged war… carried off one of the weakest members of the tribe."* And we can see another conceptual metaphor here which is "Indians had been prey-Indians are prey". The conceptual metaphor INDIANS ARE PREY frames Indigenous people as hunted, vulnerable, and continually pursued, just like prey animals targeted by predators. Source domain: prey animals and target domain: Indigenous peoples under colonial and contemporary racist violence. Alexie through his personage`s words wants to say that colonizers were predators and their prey were Indians.

Finally, conceptual metaphors appear in descriptions of darkness and safety. On page 209, John thinks that "darkness provided safety for Indians now," in other words darkness is safety, showing how the metaphor of darkness shifts from "fear" to "protection." This metaphor describes darkness not as danger but as protective concealment, expressing how marginalized characters in Indian Killer survive by escaping visibility in a world where being seen means being targeted. Thus, darkness feels safe, while light feels exposing.

Conclusion. In conclusion, Indian Killer is a novel that becomes much clearer and more meaningful when we read it through the tools of cognitive poetics. Sherman Alexie does not just tell a story about murder or racism. Instead, he builds a very complex mental and emotional world that the reader enters step by step. By using ideas from cognitive linguistics such as figure and ground, prototypes, deixis, scripts and schemas, cognitive grammar, and conceptual metaphors, we can understand more deeply how the novel makes us think, feel, and respond while we read. Figurative language plays an important role in shaping readers' cognitive interpretation of literary texts.

Cognitive deixis also plays a huge role. The story constantly shifts between different places, times, and mental states. Sometimes the reader is in the present-day Seattle streets; sometimes we move into John's memories or his dreams; sometimes we are inside another character's mind. These shifts make the reader feel the same instability that the characters experience. The movement between different deictic centers different "here," "now," and "I" create a feeling of disorientation. This is exactly the emotional effect the novel wants to make readers understand the confusion of identity and belonging.

Scripts and schemas show how social expectations influence the way characters behave. Many scenes follow familiar cultural scripts: police encounters, hospital routines, adoption procedures, university classrooms, or street violence. But Alexie constantly breaks or twists these scripts. When a script works differently than we expect, the reader

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feels surprise, fear, or uncertainty. This is how the novel shows the everyday stress that Native people face in a racist society.

Cognitive grammar reveals how the style of language use encode emotional intensity. John's clipped, disjointed grammar during distress contrasts sharply with Marie's confident argumentative style with professor in auditorium. Truck Schultz's rhythmic repetitions show how language can be used as propaganda, shaping the public's emotional reactions.

Conceptual metaphors help us understand the emotional power of the text. Metaphors like "Indians are prey" or "darkness is safety" allow the novel to express very complicated feelings in simple and physical ways. These metaphors make emotional pain feel real and understandable to the reader because they connect abstract feelings to everyday experiences.

Overall, cognitive poetics helps us see that Indian Killer is not simply a mystery or a social novel. It is a complex mental experience that uses language, imagery, and narrative structure to make readers feel the confusion, pain, and hope of its characters. By using cognitive poetics, we can see that Indian Killer is not simply a crime novel but an exploration of racial identity and cultural trauma, through cognitive analysis, we see more clearly how Alexie builds an emotional and ethical message about identity, trauma and the need for understanding.

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