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**PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CULTURE**

Natalya F. German (a)\*  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Associate Professor, Chelyabinsk State University, Chelyabinsk, Russia, NatalyaGerman28@yandex.ru,  
+7(951) 800 70 79

*Abstract*

The concept of "beauty" exists in any culture, being one of the cultural universals, but understanding of beauty, criteria of beauty, attitude to it is specific in different linguocultural communities due to perception varieties. The paper is devoted to peculiarities of the concept “beauty” in the English-speaking culture.

Perception refers to the internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize the stimuli of the outside world. Taking into account the fact that perception of beauty is both subjective and culturally determined, we have selected aphorisms, containing the concept of “beauty” and on the basis of their complex interpretative linguistic analysis, have organized them into several groups with the purpose of defining linguocultural peculiarities of the concept “beauty” among British and American famous people. The analysis of 131 aphorisms about beauty, has allowed to identify 7 main images of the concept “beauty” and to make a conclusion about metaphorical and axiological components of the concept.

The main images of the concept are: happiness, woman, time, ideal, something useless, test, truth. Most aphorisms (93%) position beauty as a positive value and only 7% of aphorisms note the worthlessness, uselessness and futility of beauty. The study allows us to state that the concept of “beauty” is characterized by a high degree of abstraction, and rich semantic content. The study of the concept helps to understand the peculiarities of the perception of beauty by representatives of English-speaking culture.

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## 1. Introduction

Beauty is differently perceived across cultures. Various communities highlight definite aspects of beauty. The valence of beauty as a value also differs among people. We can state that culture opens the window through which the members of this or that community feel, see, value and interpret the beauty.

The concept of "beauty" exists in any culture, being one of the cultural universals, but understanding of beauty, criteria of beauty, attitude to it – is specific in different linguocultural communities. In this paper, we present the results of the study of the peculiarities of the concept of "beauty" on the basis of aphorisms about the beauty of famous British and American writers, poets, thinkers, politicians, actors and other public figures. The study of the implementation of this concept allows to establish the peculiarities of the linguistic worldview of the studied linguoculture, expands the possibilities of understanding the system of national and cultural values, and, consequently, the mentality of representatives of the English-speaking communities.

Culture influences one's subjective reality and explains the reason that there are direct links among culture, perception, and behaviour. Each person is taught to perceive the world in accordance with his or her cultural beliefs, values, norms and social practices, personal prior experiences, and all these elements are accepted as status quo, are mostly taken for granted.

Perception is the internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize the stimuli of the outside world (Novinger, 2001, p. 26). Perception refers to the process of acquiring, organizing and interpreting any sensory information. It is shaped by our prior experiences, cultural values, beliefs and socialization, and can influence our reception of knowledge, the way we think and behave, and the impression we form of others (German, 2014).

People are presented with hundreds of different perceptual stimuli. Therefore, it becomes necessary to simplify the information by selecting, organizing, and reducing it to less complex forms. That is, to comprehend stimuli, people organize them into categories, groupings and patterns. Most people tend to think that other people perceive, evaluate, and reason about the world in the same way that they do. In other words, humans assume that other people with whom they interact are like themselves. Indeed, it is quite common for people to draw on their personal experiences to understand and evaluate the motivations of others. How people from different cultures perceive beauty is a simple illustration of culture's influence on the perception.

## 2. Problem Statement

As personal perception is shaped not only by one's prior experience, but also by cultural beliefs, norms and values, it is quite obvious that perception of beauty differs across cultures.

Several characteristics of perception offered by different scholars, for example by N. Alder and A. Gunderson (Alder & Gunderson, 2008, p. 730), give us a better understanding of personal and cultural differences in perception of beauty. Scholars argue that:

1. perception is selective, as there are too many stimuli competing for the attention of our senses, we focus on selected information and filter out the rest;
2. perception is learned, our personal experiences teach us to see the world in definite ways;
3. perception is culturally determined, culture teaches us the meaning of our experiences;
4. perception is consistent, once we perceive something or someone in a particular manner the interpretation does not usually change;
5. perception is inaccurate, we view the world through a subjective lens influenced by culture, values, and personal experiences, which tends to make us see what we want to see.

The concept of "beauty" is one of the most valuable guidelines and has an impact on human activity, determines the attitude of a person to other people and the world around him or her. Throughout the history of mankind, thinkers of different scientific schools and directions write about beauty. We want to see how prominent British and American people perceive and estimate the beauty.

### 3. Research Questions

Taking into account the fact that perception of beauty is both subjective and culturally determined, we have selected aphorisms, containing the concept of "beauty" and on the basis of their interpretative linguistic analysis, have organized them into several groups with the purpose of defining linguocultural peculiarities of the concept "beauty" among British and American famous people.

In linguistics, the term of "concept" is defined mainly from two perspectives: a) as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon to describe which scholars refer to various terms of a cognitive science (ex. "conceptual sphere", "information processing", "general fund of knowledge", "schema", "frame", "script", "Gestalt"); b) linguistic and cultural phenomenon, when the terminology of cultural linguistics is basically used (ex. "constants of culture", "the cultural connotation", "linguocultural element") (Kayumov, 2013; Maslova & Pimenova, 2016; Pimenova & Kondrat'eva, 2016; Language picture of the world, 2014).

a. According to the cognitive approach, the concept is considered in the framework of the concepts of knowledge and consciousness and is understood as a mental formation, a kind of focus of knowledge about the world, cognitive structures, including different units of operational consciousness. In such interpretations, the problem of correlation between language and consciousness comes to the fore. This view of the concept can be found in the works of such Russian scholars as A. P. Babushkin, N. N. Boldyrev, E. S. Kubryakova, Z. D. Popova, I. A. Sternin.

b. Linguocultural approach presupposes that concept is described as "a clot of culture in human consciousness" (Stepanov, 2004, p. 40), "verbalized cultural meaning", "semantic unit "language," culture", "a unit of collective knowledge or consciousness, marked by ethnic and cultural specificity". Culture is seen as a "symbolic Universe", and its manifestations are ethno-specific in comparison with a foreign culture. In this aspect, the concept is interpreted in the works of A. Vezhbtska, N. D. Arutunova, S. G. Vorkachev, V. I. Karasik, S. E. Nikitina, M. V. Pimenova, G. G. Slyshkin, Yu. S. Stepanov and many others. It is believed that the main function of the linguocultural concept is to structure and preserve the cultural values of the nation.

- c. Existing approaches do not contradict to each other, but expand the research methodology.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The hypothesis of this work is that beauty is a complex phenomenon that is differently valued among individuals and cultures; the perception of beauty finds different ways of expression in the language, and has a certain system of metaphorical images peculiar to this or that language community. Being a universal concept, beauty has some common and specific metaphorical images across cultures.

The purpose of this study is the search of aphorisms about beauty (given by prominent American and British people), with the following linguistic interpretation and distribution into certain images with the aim to explore the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the implementation of the concept “beauty” in the English-speaking culture.

#### **5. Research Methods**

- a. The research is based on general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, analogy and comparison. The following methods are also used: the method of conceptual analysis (in the study and description of the concept), the component analysis (in the detection of conceptual features), the method of semantic definition (in the interpretation of the values of figurative means), the method of correlation of linguistic and social phenomena, descriptive method (in the description of the results obtained in the study). The interpretation of the material and the results of the study also required the use of elements of distributive and quantitative methods of analysis.
- b. To study the peculiarities of perception of beauty among famous American and British people we selected aphorisms about beauty. 131 aphorisms, which verbalize the concept of "beauty", give valuable information about the content of the interpretative field of the concept under study. All aphorisms are analyzed in order to highlight the certain metaphoric image of the concept of “beauty”. Each group of aphorisms is further divided (if possible) into subgroups, specifying the image and valuable component of the concept. At the last stage of research, stylistic features of the concept verbalization are analyzed.

#### **6. Findings**

The complex study of 131 aphorisms (100%) allowed us to distinguish 7 basic images of the concept "beauty" and define their frequency.

**Table 01.** Frequency of components of the concept " beauty"

The main metaphorical image	Subgroups of the main image	The number of aphorisms in the group	The general number of aphorisms	A percentage of the total number
1.Beauty as time	1.1.Beauty as a moment	12	14	10%
	1.2.Beauty as an eternity	2		
2.Beauty as something ideal	-	9	9	7%
3.Beauty as unvarnished truth	-	4	4	3%
4.Beauty as test	4.1.Beauty as challenge	5	7	5%
	4.2.Beauty as a temptation	2		
5.Beauty as something useless	-	9	9	7%
6.1.*Beauty as happiness to be beautiful	6.1.1.Beauty as power	11	18	40 %
	6.1.2.Beauty as a gift	7		
6.2.* Beauty as joy to be a beholder of beauty	6.2.1. Beauty as simplicity	4	19	
	6.2.2. Beauty as versatility and immensity	10		
	6.2.3.Beauty as nature	5		
6.3.*Beauty as happiness to be the creator of beauty	6.3.1. Beauty is the result of good deeds	3	15	
	6.3.2.Beauty as an art	12		
7.Beauty as a woman	7.1. Beauty as an inner world	18	37	28%
	7.2.Beauty as a female appearance	16		
	7.3. Beauty as the object of hunting	3		

\* The sixth image in the first column is divided into three subgroups for convenience of presentation

In this paper we present the results of a complex interpretative analysis of the most frequent image "beauty as happiness" (40%). We managed to divide this image into three large subgroups:

1. beauty as happiness to be beautiful (35%);
2. beauty as the happiness of being a beholder of beauty (36%);
3. beauty as happiness to be a creator of beauty (29%).

## **6.1. Beauty as happiness to be beautiful**

### **6.1.1. Beauty as power**

For many authors of aphorisms, beauty is the power that opens amazing opportunities in this world: *"Beauty is power; a smile is its sword."* (Charles Reade). *"Beauty is the index of a larger fact than wisdom."* (Oliver Wendell Holmes). *"I'm sure you agree that beauty is the only thing worth living for."* (Agatha Christie). *"Caught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter."* (Mary Wollstonecraft). These statements emphasize the power of beauty that transcends wisdom and is the true meaning of life. The power of beauty is in a smile, which helps to disarm any opponent. Beauty is compared to the scepter of a woman, and scepter, as it is known, is an attribute of strength and power. The power of beauty lies in its ability to pave the way to the human soul. Beauty is also a force because there will always be someone who will love and appreciate it.

### **6.1.2. Beauty as a gift**

The gift of beauty is not conditioned by anything. *"Beauty is not caused. It is."* (Emily Dickinson). Beauty is sent to a man as a generous gift of heaven. Those who possess this gift are happy people, those who don't remain jealous and talk about the injustice of this gift. *"Beauty is an outward gift which is seldom despised, except by those to whom it has been revised."* (Edward Gibbon).

The following author argues that the gift of beauty is distributed as undemocratically and as unfairly as the power of hereditary peers in the UK, a similar gift is called an amazing reward: *"Beauty is handed out as undemocratically as inherited peerages, and beautiful people have done nothing to desert their astonishing reward."* (John Mortimer).

Beauty can cause envy, contempt, rejection of those who are denied it: *"Beauty is an enormous, unmerited gift given randomly, stupidly."* (Khaled Hosseini). In one of the aphorisms beauty is called the handwriting of God, which means it is a gift given from heavens: *"Beauty is God's handwriting."* (Charles Kingsley). And the gifts of God are not always clear to the human mind.

## **6.2. Beauty as joy to be a beholder of beauty**

### **6.2.1. Beauty as simplicity**

We come to conclusion that many authors insist that it is important to be able to notice beauty in simple things. The more modest way beauty chooses to declare itself, the stronger impression it leaves: *"The plainer the dress, the greater luster does beauty appear."* (E. F. L. Wood).

Oscar Wilde argues that the meaning of true beauty lies in its divine economy, it gives us only what is needed: *"In the beauty – the divine economy, it gives us only what you need"* (Oscar Wilde). The religious metaphor (the divine economy) emphasizes the divine nature of this gift. The same idea is shared by Henry James: *"In art economy is always beauty."* (Henry James). Saving and minimalism are synonyms of beauty.

### **6.2.2. Beauty as versatility and immensity**

The quality of beauty as some complexity and diversity is mentioned in many sayings. Beauty has an infinite number of meanings; it is a symbol of symbols. Beauty demonstrates everything because it expresses nothing: *“Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything because it expresses nothing.”* (Oscar Wilde). Beauty is compared with abundance: *“Navigator exuberance is beauty.”* (William Blake), it is said that it always has many faces, unlike ugliness: *“Beauty is variable, ugliness is constant.”* (Doug Horton).

Universal boundless beauty in everything (beauty in all things) outshines the importance of momentary family happiness: *“The roaring of the wind is my wife and the stars through the window pane are my children. The mighty abstract idea I have of beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness.”* (John Keats). The roar of the wind replaces the wife, and the stars outside the window are children. The power of the abstract universe of beauty is opposed to the fragmented temporal happiness.

Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Even old age is not able to make a person ugly, if you have a sense of sincere love for him. The beauty of a good friend remains the same: *“To me, fair friend, you never can be old. For as you were when first your eye I eyed. Such seems your beauty still.”* (William Shakespeare). Beauty exists only in the mind which contemplates it: *“Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them.”* (David Hume). As many different images arise in the consciousness of the perception of beauty, so many different feelings, emotions, associations, memories arises in humans.

The beauty world has two edges: one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart into several parts: *“The beauty of the world [...] has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder.”* (Virginia Woolf).

### **6.2.3. Beauty as nature**

People will always be in harmony with nature, if he is able to contemplate the beautiful: dew drops on leaves, a wild flower, swaying in the wind, the trees, etc. The theme of natural beauty has been highlighted in numerous aphorisms. The miraculous beauty of nature brings with it the joy of contemplation: *“Nature is painting for us, day after day, pictures of infinite beauty if only we have the eyes to see them.”* (John Ruskin). The author of this statement uses the personification: nature, like an artist, paints pictures for us, tirelessly – day after day. Man should only have eyes that can see the pictures of this infinite beauty.

Many of the authors' statements, considering the nature of beauty, use of superlative degrees of comparison: the beauty of nature is the greatest source of excitement, the greatest source of visual beauty, the greatest source evoking intellectual interest: *“It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.”* (David Attenborough). Beauty is the primary source of various things in our lives, and it is the world of nature that gives meaning to human existence.

The beauty of nature can not be saved for the future, to be put on deposit. It should be tasted and enjoyed at the present moment, here and now: *"Beauty is Nature's coin, must not be hoarded, but must be current, and the good thereof consists in mutual and partaken bliss."* (John Keats). The beauty of nature is revealed if a person is able to realize that he or she is nothing but a part of nature.

### **6.3. Beauty as happiness of being the creator of beauty**

#### **6.3.1. Beauty is the result of good deeds**

Beauty is created by good intentions. This is stated in a number of aphorisms. All the ugly objects appear as a result of a passionate desire to do something beautiful, and beautiful things are created by those who seek to do something useful: *"All ugly things are made by those who strike to make something beautiful, and all beautiful things are made by those who strike to make something useful."* (Oscar Wilde).

This same idea is shared by Richard Steele: *"To give pain is the tyranny; to make happy is the true empire of beauty."* (Richard Steele). The author uses metaphors, emphasizing the idea that to cause pain is a manifestation of tyranny, and to give happiness means to invite people to the realm of beauty.

#### **6.3.2. Beauty as an art**

The beauty of the works of art can give amazing and unforgettable impressions. The moments when we enjoy the beautiful are divine. They enrich us and give us an incentive to achieve perfection. Beauty is the creation, the process and the result of creation. Man is given the gift to be the Creator of beauty, and this is his happiness. Beauty is realized in poetry, music, paintings and architecture.

The main purpose of art is to reveal beauty: *"The purpose of art is to reveal the beauty and conceal the artist."* (Oscar Wilde). In this example, the author uses the opposition, he focuses on the fact that the true art is aimed at demonstrating beauty, the author goes into the shadow, to the background. Poetry is understood as the creation of beauty in a rhythmic form: *"I would define, in brief, the poetry of words as the rhythmic creation of beauty."* (Edgar Allan Poe). Romances and novels depict beauty in colors even more charming than nature, and describe happiness that people have never experienced, but these paintings of unsurpassed bliss are deceptive and illusory: *"Romance and novel paint beauty in colors more charming than nature, and describe a happiness that humans never taste. How deceptive and destructive are those pictures of consummate bliss."* (Oliver Goldsmith).

Beauty is something amazing and incomprehensible that an artist creates from the chaos of the universe in severe mental anguish: *"Beauty is something wonderful and strange that the artist fashions out of the chaos of the world in the torment of his soul."* (W. S. Maugham).

Music is the beauty of loneliness and pain, strength and freedom, disappointments and unfulfilled love, the wild beauty of nature and everlasting beauty of the monotonous life: *"Music has the beauty of loneliness and of pain: of strength and freedom the beauty of disappointment and never-satisfied love, the cruel beauty of nature and everlasting beauty of monotony."* (Benjamin Britten). Parallel constructions emphasize the diversity of beauty.



Art creates life, arouses interest in life, gives it the meaning, and there is no substitute for neither the power nor the beauty of this phenomenon: *“It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance and I know of no substance whatever for the force and beauty of its process”* (Henry James).

In the last two examples, the authors emphasize the extraordinary life force that brings art and a synonym of art is beauty.

## 7. Conclusion

Our study of the concept of "beauty" on the basis of aphorisms by American and British famous people allows us to present this concept as a set of images. The semantic content of the analyzed aphorisms are divided into 7 images and 14 subgroups, which indicates the semantic richness of the concept. In the English-Speaking linguoculture concept "beauty" includes such images as: happiness, woman, time, ideal, something useless, test, truth.

It can be concluded that these images provide cultural value to native English speakers on this stage of development of linguistic culture. The main figurative means representing the concept are metaphors and comparisons. Multiple variable symbol and the complex shades of meaning of the concept “beauty” is an important objective indicator of its relevance, and thus importance, of value to English-speaking culture. The content of the concept of "beauty" is associated with all the spheres of human existence. The value characteristics of "beauty" as a cultural concept can also be established by referring to the analysis of the evaluation judgments expressed in aphorisms about this concept. Most aphorisms (93%) position beauty as a positive value and only 7% of aphorisms note the worthlessness, uselessness and futility of beauty. The study allows us to state that the concept of “beauty” is characterized by a high degree of abstraction, and rich semantic content. The study of the concept helps to understand the peculiarities of the perception of beauty by representatives of English-speaking culture.

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