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HOW LANGUAGE DESCRIBES THE MIND: ENGLISH VERBS OF MENTAL STATE IN CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL “PRIDE AND PREJUDICE”

*This paper explores the semantic and functional potential of English verbs of mental state also referred to as mental-state predicates, with particular attention to their context-dependent behavior in literary discourse. Traditionally classified as stative verbs denoting internal states such as emotion, cognition, volition, and perception, these predicates are often described as relatively stable and resistant to dynamic grammatical forms. However, when examined in narrative contexts, they reveal a high degree of semantic flexibility and functional variability. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of selected examples from iconic Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where emotional, cognitive, volitional, and perceptual predicates are analyzed not only in terms of their lexical meaning but also their role in shaping discourse and narrative structure. The findings demonstrate that these predicates frequently extend beyond their primary semantic functions and perform a range of contextually driven roles. It is found that emotional predicates may function as markers of social evaluation, irony, or character portrayal rather than direct expressions of feeling; cognitive predicates often serve as softening devices, markers of subjectivity, or indicators of retrospective self-awareness; volitional predicates may express interpersonal conflict, intention, or socially conditioned behavior; and perceptual predicates frequently act as triggers of interpretation, mediating between observation and cognition, or creating an illusion of objectivity. Furthermore, these predicates contribute to the organization of narrative perspective and play a significant role in representing the inner world of characters. The analysis shows that mental-state predicates are essential for constructing subjective experience and guiding the reader's interpretation of events and relationships. Thus, the paper argues that such predicates should be viewed not only as lexical units denoting states but also as multifunctional elements that actively participate in the creation of meaning and the expressive richness of literary texts.*

Key words: *mental-state predicates, stative verbs, context-dependent meaning, narrative discourse, semantic functions, *Pride and Prejudice*.*

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ЯК МОВА ОПИСУЄ РОЗУМ: АНГЛІЙСЬКІ ДІЄСЛОВА ПСИХІЧНОГО СТАНУ НА МАТЕРІАЛІ РОМАНУ «ГОРДІСТЬ ТА УПЕРЕДЖЕННЯ»

У цій статті досліджується семантичний та функціональний потенціал англійських дієслів психічного стану, які також називають предикатами психічного стану, з особливою увагою до їхньої контекстної функціональності в літературному дискурсі. Ці предикати зазвичай класифікуються як дієслова стану, що позначають внутрішні стани, такі як емоції, пізнання, воля та сприйняття, і часто описуються як відносно стабільні та стійкі до динамічних граматичних форм. Однак, при розгляді в наративних контекстах вони виявляють високий ступінь семантичної гнучкості та функціональної варіативності. Основою для даного дослідження слугує якісний аналіз вибраних прикладів з культового роману Джейн Остін «Гордість і упередження», в якому емоційні, когнітивні, вольові та перцептивні предикати аналізуються не лише з точки зору їхнього лексичного значення, але й їхньої ролі у формуванні дискурсу та структури наративу. Результати дослідження показують, що ці предикати часто виходять за межі своїх основних семантичних функцій і виконують низку контекстуально зумовлених ролей. Визначено, що емоційні предикати можуть функціонувати як маркери соціальної оцінки, іронії чи характеристики персонажа, а не як прямі вирази почуттів; когнітивні предикати часто служать засобами пом'якшення, маркерами суб'єктивності або індикаторами ретроспективної самосвідомості; вольові предикати можуть виражати міжособистісний конфлікт, намір або соціально зумовлену поведінку; а перцептивні предикати часто діють як тригери інтерпретації, посередники між спостереженням і пізнанням або створюють ілюзію об'єктивності. Крім того, ці предикати сприяють організації наративної перспективи та відіграють значну роль у представленні внутрішнього світу персонажів. Аналіз показує, що предикати психічного стану є важливими для побудови суб'єктивного досвіду та спрямування інтерпретації подій та стосунків читачем. Таким чином, у статті стверджується, що такі предикати слід розглядати не лише як лексичні одиниці, що позначають стани, а й як багатофункціональні елементи, що активно беруть участь у створенні значення та експресивного багатства літературних текстів.

Ключові слова: предикати психічного стану, дієслова стану, контекстно-залежне значення, наративний дискурс, семантичні функції, Гордість і упередження.

Problem Statement. The study of stative verbs, particularly predicates of mental state, has long been central to linguistic research due to their unique semantic and grammatical properties. While traditional approaches have focused on their aspectual behavior and resistance to progressive forms, less attention has been paid to their context-dependent functions in literary discourse. In narrative texts, mental-state predicates not only denote internal states but also serve as tools for structuring perspective, expressing evaluation, and shaping character development. However, the functional and expressive potential of such

predicates in literary contexts remains insufficiently explored, especially within the framework of semantic classification and discourse analysis.

The **aim** of this paper is to analyze the semantic, functional, and contextual roles of mental-state predicates in English, with particular attention to their expressive potential in literary discourse, as exemplified in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The **subject** of the study is mental-state predicates in English, specifically emotional, cognitive, volitional, and perceptual verbs, examined in terms of their semantic characteristics and their functioning within a literary text,

while the **object** is the novel “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen.

To achieve the stated aim, the following **objectives** are pursued:

To review theoretical approaches to the classification of stative verbs and mental-state predicates.

To identify and systematize the main semantic groups of mental-state predicates (emotional, cognitive, volitional, perceptual).

To analyze the use of these predicates in *Pride and Prejudice* through selected contextual examples.

To determine their context-dependent functions in narrative discourse.

To examine their role in conveying subjective experience, character perspective, and expressive meaning.

Literature analysis. Early descriptive accounts (e.g. Viluman, Shapiro, Iofik) established the basic distinction between verbs of action and verbs of state, emphasizing the relative immobility and durativity of the latter. These foundational studies foregrounded the idea that state predicates denote conditions rather than events, a contrast later formalized in numerous typological and aspectual investigations.

Aspectual and morpho-syntactic perspectives (e.g. Comrie, Lakoff, Dowty, Quirk) argue that stativity correlates with limited progressive marking: state verbs typically resist Continuous forms in English. For example, Comrie states that stative verbs do not have progressive forms since this would involve an internal contradiction between the stativity of the verb and the nonstativity essential to the progressive (Comrie, 1976: 36).

Comrie’s insight is developed by Dowty and others, who propose semantic subcategories (emotional, possessive, cognitive, existential) to explain distributional behavior and compatibility with progressive aspect. Quirk & Greenbaum state that if stative verbs are combined with the progressive, a change of interpretation other than the addition of the ‘temporary’ meaning of the progressive aspect is required (Quirk et al, 1985: 200). Dowty assumes a broad definition of movement so that volitional perception verbs entail mental activity (e.g. look at) (Dowty, 1991: 554). Sentience includes perception (e.g. see), cognition (e.g. know), and emotion (e.g. fear) predicates (Dowty, 1991: 554). Thus with the help of such verbs a person can sense their surroundings, form thoughts about them, and have emotional reactions.

Lexical-semantic group theory or lexical field theory provides an organizational framework for studying state predicates. Brinton states that a semantic field denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words (Brinton, 2000: 112).

A similar term “frame semantics” was proposed by Charles Fillmore in the 1970s, demonstrating that verbs can be grouped by their semantic features. Its followers, like Beth Levin, proved the effectiveness of such categorization of verbs (Fillmore, 1977; Levin, 1993).

Pertaining the stative verbs, such methodology treats groups of lexemes as unified by a basic semantic component (e.g., “to be in some state”), enabling hierarchical subclassification and the identification of differential semantic features (e.g., positive vs. negative states, volitional vs. non-volitional).

Results of the Research.

The conducted research of predicates of state denoting mental conditions of a person categorizes them into **four major semantic groups** – emotional, cognitive, volitional, and perceptual – each of which conveys a particular aspect of human mental experience. Emotional predicates (*love, hate, admire*) express feelings and affective attitudes; cognitive ones (*know, believe, think*) denote processes of knowledge and understanding; volitional verbs (*want, hope, intend*) express desire or will; and perceptual predicates (*see, feel, hear*) often function metaphorically to describe awareness. The novel “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen served as the basis for practical study of these predicates’ function in context and their expressive effect in terms of reflecting people’s experience. All examples in this study were taken from the novel.

Semantic and Functional Classification. The analysis used four major semantic groups of predicates, depending on the aspect of the human psyche they represent.

Emotional Predicates

This group includes verbs that denote feelings, emotions, and affective attitudes. They describe how a person experiences the surrounding world emotionally. Typical representatives: love, hate, fear, envy, admire, detest, like, dislike, prefer. Examples:

- It was generally evident, whenever they met, that he did admire her
- ...there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel.
- “I do, I do like him,” she replied, with tears in her eyes; “I love him.”
- *Had you not been really amiable you would have hated me for it.*
- *In spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you.*

Main functions:

1. Marking the emotional dynamics of the plot.
 - Frequent uses of “love”/“admire” appear at climaxes: Darcy’s confession, Elizabeth’s reflections, the final scenes.
 - They signal “surges” of emotion.
2. Creating a character’s subjective perspective.
 - “I do like him.”
 - Such constructions draw the reader into the character’s internal emotional experience.
3. Social evaluativeness.
 - “Admire”, “despise” – are a means of expressing the subtle social hierarchy important to Jane Austen.

Conclusion:

Emotional predicates create the emotional profile of characters and enhance the dramatic plot points, making feelings readable and meaningful.

Cognitive Predicates

Cognitive predicates refer to mental processes connected with knowledge, thought, understanding, or memory. Typical verbs: know, believe, think, understand, remember, forget, realize, consider, doubt. Examples:

– I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave;—that your resentment, once created, was unappeasable.

– “I know little of the game at present,” said he...

– “He must be an oddity, I think,” said she. “I cannot make him out.”

– ...but I verily believe I could forgive him anything and everything, rather than his disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of his father.

– Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?

These verbs are primarily non-dynamic, describing states of knowledge or belief, not mental activity in progress. However, some of them can shift meaning in context:

I think she did take this delight, and I do not think at all the worse of her for it as a woman... – expresses opinion (state)

The latter was thinking only of his breakfast. – expresses mental activity (process)

This semantic alternation demonstrates that cognitive predicates can function both statically and dynamically, depending on the communicative intention.

Main functions:

1. Reflection of thought processes and points of view.

– “I think...”, “I know not...” – frequency markers of Elizabeth's internal reasoning.

2. Creating an introspective focus.

– Cognitive verbs “slow down” the narrative, immersing the reader in the hero's mind.

3. Marking changes in the perception of reality.

– Indirectly note character development (she begins to think differently).

4. Semantic variability (static ↔ dynamic).

– think can be:

– a state: “I think you are right” (belief)

– a process: “I am thinking about what you said” (deliberation)

Conclusion:

Cognitive predicates organize the mental optics of the novel, demonstrating the character growth, their doubts, mistakes, and reassessments.

Volitional Predicates

Volitional predicates express the will, intention, or readiness to act. Typical verbs: want, wish, hope, intend, expect, plan, decide, refuse. Examples:

– Do not you want to know who has taken it?

– When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me

– I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you that I do not want to dance a reel at all; and now despise me if you dare.

– *I did not expect such a compliment.*

– ...but she was not so unwilling to comply with their brother's proposal...

These predicates indicate inner motivation or decision-making and occupy an intermediate position between purely emotional and purely cognitive states. They also illustrate the link between mental condition and future-oriented behavior.

Main functions:

1. Expression of desire and purpose.

– The characters' will is the driving force of the plot: marriage, social strategies, personal decisions.

2. Marking choices and turning points.

– “I refuse...”

– “I hope...”

– It is at these moments that the plot takes a sharp turn.

3. Conflict or harmony between the characters' desires.

– Elizabeth “doesn't want” to accept Mr. Collins's proposal, but he “hopes” for it.

– This is where the drama comes from.

Conclusion:

Volitional predicates show motivation, goals, and internal determination or resistance, being instruments of the dramaturgy of choice.

Perceptual Predicates

These verbs describe sensory or perceptual experiences initially meaning those perceived by the human body and organs, but are often reinterpreted in English as mental awareness rather than physical sensation. Typical verbs: see, hear, feel, smell, notice, observe, touch. Examples:

– I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Mr. Darcy.

– I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly.

– I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve.

– She does not touch what she did not feel herself called to paint.

– *“I see your design, Bingley,” said his friend.*

Here, perception functions metaphorically, denoting a mental interpretation of external stimuli. This shows how physical perception in English easily shifts to cognitive and emotional understanding, merging sensory and mental domains.

Main functions:

1. Creating a visual and sensory scene.

– Perceptual verbs transform the text into an observation, “coloring” the space.

2. Conveying the character's perspective. (focalization).

– “Elizabeth saw...”, “She noticed...”

– The reader sees through the eyes of the heroine.

3. The role of triggers for cognitive and emotional change.

– Something seen changes attitude: a visit to Pemberley.

4. The dynamics of plot development through observation.

– First, a character “sees,” then “thinks,” then “feels,” and then “acts.”

Conclusion:

Perceptual predicates establish perspective and point of view, creating an atmosphere of observation and interpretation that is intrinsic to Austen's fiction.

Contextual functions.

Emotional predicates

Contextual function 1: Ironic reevaluation of emotions.

An emotional predicate is not used to directly express a feeling, but to create irony or distance between the word and the real attitude.

Example: “*She told the story, however, with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which **delighted** in anything ridiculous.*”

Here, ‘delighted’ does not so much denote genuine joy as it participates in an ironic portrayal of Elizabeth's character – the emotion is presented as a temperamental trait, and not as a deep feeling.

Thus, the emotional predicate becomes a means of characterological irony, rather than emotional expression.

Contextual function 2: Shifting focus from feeling to social evaluation.

Emotion is used as a marker of social acceptability / unacceptability, rather than an internal experience.

Example: “*It was generally evident, whenever they met, that he did **admire** her;*”

‘Admire’ here functions not as an intimate feeling, but as socially observable behavior, accessible to the outside eye.

The emotional predicate is objectified and transformed into a social signal visible to others.

Cognitive predicates

Contextual function 1: Epistemic uncertainty.

A cognitive predicate is used to soften a statement rather than to convey a thought as it is.

Example: “*I **think** him very disagreeable.*”

Here ‘I think’ is not about the process of thinking or a stable opinion, but about a polite limitation of the categorical nature of the statement.

Thus, the cognitive predicate performs a discursive mitigating function, regulating social interaction.

Contextual function 2: Retrospective self-realization.

A cognitive predicate is used to evaluate one's own past perception.

Example: “*How little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought*

*together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she now **thought.***”

‘Thought’ here frames a retrospective cognitive commentary rather than an act of thinking in the here and now.

Example: “*Till this moment, I never **knew** myself.*”

‘Know’ signifies not just knowledge, but the recognition of one's own error and a change in self-perception. The cognitive predicate marks a turning point in character development.

In this case, the cognitive predicate becomes a means of narrative distancing between the past and the present.

Volitional predicates

Contextual function 1: Conflict between the wills of the characters.

The volitional predicates is used to reveal the asymmetry of desires, which creates tension in the scene.

Example: “*You could **not** have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to **accept** it.*”

There is an implicit refusal (‘not accept’) here, expressing a direct conflict of will between Elizabeth and Darcy.

Volition is used to create dramatic tension through the discrepancy of desires.

Contextual function 2: Ethical self-regulation.

Example: “*I **have not the pleasure** of understanding you, Miss Lucas.*”

Here ‘have not the pleasure’ (a volitional construction) disguises an outright refusal as politeness.

Contextual function 3: A polite or socially conditioned desire.

This is also connected with the previous function of polite refusal.

Example: “*I **wish** you very happy and very rich, and by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being otherwise.*”

‘Wish’ does not necessarily express genuine feeling – it is a socially expected formula, one that uses disguise again.

Volitional predicates serve as a tool for socio-moral positioning.

Perceptual predicates

Contextual function 1: Trigger of a cognitive shift.

The perceptual predicate is used as a trigger to change the evaluation.

Example: “*Elizabeth **saw** directly that her father had not the smallest intention of yielding.*”

‘Saw’ in this case is not about physical sight, but rather a moment of awareness that triggers a change in attitude.

Example: “*She **saw** instantly that her cousin's manners were not altered by his marriage...*”

Here ‘saw’ denotes the immediate interpretation of the cousin's behavior. The perceptual predicate acts as a cognitive trigger, translating perception into understanding.

Contextual function 2: The illusion of objectivity.

The perceptual predicate creates the effect of “neutral observation”, although perception is subjective.

Example: “*Elizabeth noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness...*”

‘Noticed’ presents a subjective interpretation as if it were an objective fact.

In this way, the perceptual predicate disguises the evaluative judgment as an observation, enhancing the credibility of the narrative.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. The study has shown that mental-state predicates in English, traditionally treated as stative verbs denoting emotion, cognition, volition, and perception, demonstrate considerable semantic flexibility in literary discourse. The analysis of examples from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* confirms that these predicates extend beyond their primary lexical meanings and perform a range of context-dependent functions. Emotional predicates contribute to social

evaluation and characterization; cognitive predicates function as markers of subjectivity, hedging, and self-reflection; volitional predicates express intention and interpersonal conflict; and perceptual predicates mediate between observation and interpretation. Together, they play a crucial role in structuring narrative perspective and representing the inner world of characters.

The findings suggest that mental-state predicates should be viewed not only as indicators of internal states but also as important discourse tools shaping meaning and interpretation.

Further research may expand the scope of analysis by examining larger corpora, different literary traditions, or cross-linguistic patterns. It would also be productive to explore the interaction of mental-state predicates with categories such as modality, evaluation, and focalization in order to gain a deeper understanding of how subjective experience is constructed in discourse.

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