

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЇ НАДЗВИЧАЙНИХ ІСТОТ В АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ КАЗКАХ / PECULIARITIES OF SUPERNATURAL CREATURE'S VERBALIZERS ENGLISH FAIRY-TALES

Науковий керівник:

Колесник О.С.

доктор філол. наук, професор

Журба К.М.

здобувачка вищої освіти магістерського рівня

Кафедра германської філології

Київський столичний університет

імені Бориса Грінченка, Україна

Abstract

The article investigates the verbalization of supernatural creatures in English folk fairy tales within the framework of Possible Worlds Theory. Magical thinking is viewed as a cognitive mechanism that rationalizes the irrational and the unknown, giving rise to beliefs in the supernatural and, consequently, to mythological and fairy-tale narratives. Fairy tales are interpreted as alternative semantic worlds whose structure is linguistically instantiated and governed by specific ontological, axiological, and pragmatic rules.

The study focuses on lexical units naming supernatural beings and treats them as structural components that shape the fictional world of the fairy tale. Using a multi-level methodological approach that combines semasiological, onomasiological, cognitive, and discourse-pragmatic analyses, the research examines English folk narratives, including Jack the Giant Killer and Jack and the Beanstalk.

The findings demonstrate that the naming of supernatural creatures follows systematic ontosemantic patterns and directly correlates with their narrative roles, value orientation, and communicative behavior. It is argued that nomination is inseparable from narrative function, as supernatural beings are encoded as agents of conflict whose verbal actions contribute to the construction of power relations and the restoration of order within the fairy-tale world.

Key words: fairy-tale discourse; possible worlds theory; mythic space; supernatural beings; nomination; ontosemantics; narrative pragmatics; cognitive linguistics.

The **aim** of this study is to identify the principles governing the verbalization of supernatural creatures in English folk fairy tales within the framework of Possible Worlds Theory.

To achieve this aim, the study sets out the following **objectives**:

1. to conceptualize the fairy-tale universe as an alternative possible world;
2. to analyze lexical units naming supernatural creatures from semasiological and onomasiological perspectives;
3. to develop an ontosemantic classification of supernatural beings;
4. to examine their narrative, pragmatic, and axiological functions;
5. to demonstrate the interdependence between nomination, narrative role, and communicative behavior.

Magical thinking, as a specific type of categorizing that rationalizes the irrational and the unknown, gave rise to belief in the supernatural, which in turn led to the creation of myths and fairy tales. The concepts of fairy tales and mythic space are closely connected to the theory of alternative worlds.

The theory of possible worlds is a formal model developed by logicians for the purpose of defining the semantics of modal operators-primarily those of necessity and possibility, but other operators have been suggested. The theory has two concepts to propose to textual semiotics: the metaphor of "world" to describe the semantic domain projected by the text; and the concept of modality to describe and classify the various ways of existing of the objects, states, and events that make up the semantic domain [1]

The notion of possible worlds has been the subject of scholarly reflection for centuries, evolving from a philosophical abstraction into a fully developed analytical framework applied in linguistics, logic, narratology, and semiotics.

This research is grounded in the theory of possible worlds, originating from Aristotle's ontological distinction between actual and the potential modes of being. The emergence of the term "possible worlds" and the development of this concept are attributed to G. Leibniz, who was the first to formulate the idea of the existence of multiple alternative models of reality that are logically possible but not actualized [2]

The modern application of this theory to fiction and narrative originates from the works of Doležel, Pavel, Eco, Vaina, Lewis, and Maitre, who treat fictional universes as structured modal systems with distinct rules of ontology, causation, value, and knowledge.

Cognitive adaptations of Fauconnier's mental space theory and Carnap's linguistic-semiotic interpretation, reinforce the principle that fictional worlds become possible only when they are linguistically instantiated [3]

Thus, verbal units naming supernatural creatures are treated as structural elements shaping the fictional world of the fairy tale.

Methodology

The study employs:

- semasiological analysis (meaning-oriented approach),
- onomasiological analysis (motivation and naming patterns),
- component and cognitive analysis (conceptual modelling),
- discourse-pragmatic analysis (functional and narrative roles of creatures).

The dataset includes English folk tales such as Jack the Giant Killer, Jack and the Beanstalk, and material from Edwin Sidney Hartland's English Fairy and other FolkTales, alongside additional folklore sources.

Preliminary Findings

The fairy-tale universe in English folklore demonstrates systematic naming strategies for supernatural creatures. Based on an ontosemantic classification, the following types emerge:

Table 1 - Ontosemantic classification of English supernatural creatures

Type	Examples	Defining Feature
Anthropomorphic	giant, witch, wizard	human-like form, speech, social behaviour
Zoomorphic	dragon, wolf-spirit	animal-based image with supernatural traits
Quasi-zoomorphic / hybrid	troll, werewolf, mermaid	combination of multiple ontological models
Theomorphic / enchanted beings	fairy, fae, oracle	association with magic, fate, higher forces
Elemental	fire spirit, storm-being	embodiment of natural forces
Undead	ghost, phantom	detached from biological life

Illustrative Example

In Jack the Giant Killer, the lexical unit giant demonstrates:

- agentive semantics (threat, ruler of territory, guardian of wealth),
- stable negative axiological marking,
- pragmatic and discursive prominence, as giants engage in verbal acts such as threatening, asserting dominance, or negotiating power.

This suggests that naming is inseparable from the creature's narrative function and cultural role.

The concept of the GIANT is revealed within the scenario typical of fairy tales in which the "Hero defeats the Enemy." In this narrative pattern, the HERO(Jack) triumphs over the giant through intelligence and cunning, having dug a pit larger than the giant himself. This victory ultimately leads to Jack's public recognition and the conferral of the title "Giant Killer": "There he fell to work at once, and before morning he had dug a pit twenty-two feet deep, and almost as many broad. He covered it over with sticks and straw, and strewed some of the earth over them, to make it look just like solid ground. He then put his horn to his mouth, and blew such a loud and long tantivy, that the giant awoke and came towards Jack, roaring like thunder: "You saucy villain, you shall pay dearly for breaking my rest; I will broil you for my breakfast." He had scarcely spoken these words, when he came advancing one step farther; but then he tumbled headlong into the pit, and his fall shook the very mountain".

This episode represents the prototype scenario HERO OVERCOMES ENEMY, where the HERO (Jack) and ENEMY (the Giant) occupy stable model roles marked by asymmetry of physical power vs intellectual superiority.

The frame structure may be summarized as follows: setting (St. Michael's Mount – a liminal, elevated, dangerous space) – participants (HERO: Jack; ENEMY: Giant) - trigger event (giant awakens and detects the intruder) - conflict dynamics (threat → deception → downfall) – resolution (hero kills the creature and restores order).

The setting functions as a cognitive marker of the Otherworld, reinforcing the conceptual domain of supernatural danger.

The lexeme giant generates a blended conceptual space, combining:

- Human mental model (HUMAN) → speech ability, intentional action, appetite, social awareness
- Non-human monstrous model (MONSTER/BEAST) – abnormal size («He was eighteen feet high, and three yards round; and his fierce and savage. looks were the terror of all his neighbours»), animalistic consumption, predatory lifestyle «He dwelt in a gloomy cavern on the very top of the mountain, and used to wade over to the main land in search of his prey. When he came near, the people left their houses; and after he had glutted his appetite upon their cattle, he would throw half-a-dozen oxen upon his back, and tie three times as many sheep and hogs round his waist, and so march back to his own abode»

The confrontation is structured through verbal exchange representing conflicting pragmatic intentions “You saucy villain, you shall pay dearly for breaking my rest; I will broil you for my breakfast”

The giant's utterance “You saucy villain, you shall pay dearly for breaking my rest; I will broil you for my breakfast” represents a series of speech acts that construct his dominant communicative position within the confrontation. The opening insult, “you saucy villain,” functions as an expressive act, intended to assert moral and hierarchical superiority and to position Jack as inferior and transgressive. This is followed by the commissive “you shall pay dearly,” which conveys the speaker's intention to inflict harm, thus marking the utterance as threat-oriented and projecting imminent violence. The final clause, “I will broil you for my breakfast,” introduces a predatory metaphor that not only amplifies the severity of the threat, but also evokes fear through imagery of consumption and brutality. Together, these elements reflect a communicative strategy centered on dominance, intimidation, and psychological coercion.

Once the giant is trapped, Jack's response —“O ho, Mr. Giant! Have you found your way to the bottom so soon? How is your appetite now?”— constitutes a sequence of strategically crafted speech acts that invert the previously established power hierarchy. The mocking vocative “Mr. Giant” serves as a role-reversal device, transforming the former threat into an object of ridicule. The subsequent questions function as ironical pseudo-questions: they do not seek information but act as rhetorical tools designed to assert control and publicly diminish the enemy. Additionally, Jack's

final remark acts as an echoic quotation of the giant's earlier threat about eating him, now reframed to undermine its seriousness and symbolically reclaim authority. These linguistic moves activate conceptual values associated with wit, courage, justice, and heroic triumph, demonstrating that Jack's strategy is competitive and grounded in irony, belittlement, and moral positioning. His speech confirms that the true source of his superiority lies not in physical strength, but in intellectual refinement and strategic verbal dominance.

Conclusion and Future Work

The preliminary analysis confirms that the verbalization of supernatural creatures in English fairy tales represents a structured system that reflects mythological logic, cultural symbolism, and narrative pragmatics.

Further research will examine:

- semantic and narrative roles of specific creature types;
- patterns of speech behaviour and discourse genres associated with supernatural beings;
- axiological, emotional, and ethnocultural meaning components of the corresponding lexical units.

References

1. Marie-Laure Ryan Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory 1991
2. Leibniz G.W. Two Fragments about Freedom // Leibniz G.W. Collection 1982..., vol. I. – P. 307–317.
3. Rudolf Carnap Introduction to Semantics and Formalization of Logic 1959