

REINFORCING CREATIVE THINKING AND IMAGINATION THROUGH ADJECTIVES: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

In children's literature, adjectives are important linguistic elements, as they serve as a tool to stimulate creativity, critical thinking and moral development. This study investigates the semantic, functional and cognitive role of adjectives on discourse attributes such as narrative depth and reader engagement, using an integrated semantic-cognitive framework of adjectives particularly designed for this study. Computational tools TagAnt and AntConc were used to extract and categorize adjectives from a corpus of 20 children's novels. Analysis suggests that descriptive adjectives are most common, generating detailed sensory imagery to visualize narrative settings and characters. Temporal and evaluative adjectives (e.g. old, good) are used to advance moral reasoning and further the narrative along helping readers to consider moral and generational themes. The functional roles of adjectives, i.e. imaginative enrichment, characterization etc., are used to demonstrate their role in engaging young minds in curiosity, empathy and maintaining relational understanding. More importantly, symbolic adjectives help to develop themes and cognitive engagement. Adjectives are emphasized in the findings and the importance of making linguistic and cognitive experiences available to young readers. The study is significant for authors, educators, and researchers to recommend the adequate and deliberate application of a variety of adjectives to affect children's cognitive and emotional development.

Keywords: adjectives, Children's Literature, Semantic-Cognitive Framework, corpus-based linguistic analysis, creativity and imagination

Introduction

Children's literature certainly is a known vehicle for creativity, imagination and critical thinking in young minds. Through well-crafted narratives, children's literature is able to immerse readers in imaginary worlds that help stimulate cognitive development and a well-developed emotional intelligence. Artful deployment of language, in particular adjectives, is one of the critical tools that authors use to achieve this. Adjectives are linguistic building blocks that allow us to describe, liven, and make the reader feel something. Adjectives are an underexplored element in the study of children's literature, and in particular in their role in stimulating critical thinking and imagination.

In this study, adjectives in children's literature are investigated using a corpus based approach to examine their semantic, functional and narrative contributions. It integrates qualitative and quantitative methods in order to assess the role of these linguistic elements in cognitive and imaginative engagement in readers. This study further extends R.M.W. Dixon's (1977) semantic framework for adjectives and Ronald W. Langacker's (1987) Functional-Cognitive Model to the thematic, cognitive, and imaginative requirements of children's narratives.

Background of Study

Although the term generally is understood to refer to literary works written for young audiences, this group includes picture books, board books, narrative poetry, folktales, myths, fables, religious and secular stories, and all other narrative forms—within the plain cloth covers of this volume—created specifically for young audiences. Such literature is important

because language in such literature is very important in engaging young readers and developing their interpretive and cognitive skills. For that critical purpose of descriptive and evocative purposes of making scenes, characters, and themes accessible and memorable, all of these adjectives are crucial.

The descriptive, evaluative, and cognitive roles of adjectives in language are founded in R.M.W. Dixon's (1977) semantic framework for adjectives and Ronald W. Langacker's (1987) Functional-Cognitive Model. This study combines and extends these frameworks to examine how adjectives are used in children's novels to encourage imagination and critical thinking. The research bridges linguistic theory and practical analysis by focusing on a corpus of twenty children's novels, providing a comprehensive understanding of adjectives' semantic, functional, and cognitive contributions in an underexplored domain of literary study.

Statement of the Problem

The role of language in children's literature is well known, but there are few studies on the use of adjectives to promote imagination and critical thinking. The theoretical basis for existing linguistic frameworks, such as Dixon's Semantic Framework (1977) and Langacker's Functional-Cognitive Model (1987), do not directly apply to the imaginative and narrative contexts of children's books. This research fills this gap by integrating and modifying these frameworks to analyze adjectives in a targeted corpus of children's novels, providing a comprehensive analysis of their semantic, functional, and cognitive roles.

Purpose of Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate how adjectives in children's literature help in critical thinking and imagination. It aims to discover the frequencies, diversities, and narrative roles of adjectives and to explore their possibility for engaging young readers cognitively and creatively.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to:

- analyze the frequency and diversity of adjectives in children's literature
- examine the semantic and functional roles of adjectives in fostering imagination and critical thinking
- explore the narrative significance of adjectives in relation to major themes in children's novels
- examine how adjectives stimulate cognitive and imaginative engagement in young readers, enhancing creativity and emotional connection to the narrative

Research Questions

The study answers the following questions:

1. What are the frequencies and diversities of adjectives in the selected corpus of children's novels?
2. How do adjectives function semantically and functionally in the narrative structure of children's literature?
3. How are adjectives aligned with the major themes and imaginative contexts of children's novels?
4. How do adjectives contribute to cognitive and imaginative engagement in young readers?

Significance of Study

This study holds significant value for multiple fields, including linguistics, education, and children's literature, by offering a deeper understanding of how adjectives function within narratives to engage young readers. It expands existing linguistic frameworks by applying them specifically to children's literature, thereby bridging the gap between theory

and practical application. In addition to informing literary analysis with the contribution that language makes to shaping storylines and character development, the findings will benefit educators and authors in understanding how to use adjectives to assist children in developing critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence through reading. Finally, this research seeks to influence children literature adjectives usages in such a way that they can stimulate cognitive and imaginative development, crucial to growth as a child.

Delimitation of Study

The corpus of twenty novels used in this study consists of *A Little Princess*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Black Beauty*, *Little Women*, *Peter and Wendy*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Lightning Thief*, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Treasure Island*, and eight books from the *Harry Potter* series. These works were selected based on their importance to children's literature, their varied thematic coverage and appeal to young readers. The findings demonstrate the way adjectives are used in children's literature, but they may not generalize to other genres or adult audiences.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that adjectives in children's literature are important in helping young readers become more cognitively and imaginatively engaged. In particular, adjectives are required to enrichment the story by describing it in vivid terms, making audience feel emotion, and stirring thoughts. Through their use we expect adjectives will help deepen our understanding of characters, settings and themes as well as help readers imagine and appreciate the story world better.

Literature Review

Adjectives are important in developing a language, for the different types of imaginative play demanded by the language of children's literature, for bringing richness to language, and for flexibility in thought. The existing literature reviews research on the functional, cultural, and developmental roles of adjectives, considering both their semantic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions as they inform creative writing by young readers.

Theoretical Foundations

Dixon (1977) critiques the universality of adjective classes as a grammatical category, and examines the across language variability of such classes. He suggested a semantic framework for the roles of adjectives in categorizing properties using a typological and functional grammar methodology. What the study found is that not all languages have a separate class for adjectives, some use nouns or verbs in place of adjectives to talk about adjectival meanings, thus indicating the language variety and its plasticity. In seeking to illustrate the flexibility of syntactic categories, Dixon's research is limited by its reliance secondary data and selection of the languages under consideration but nonetheless provide the foundational insights into the nature of language typology.

Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004) investigated the typological classification of adjective classes across languages, and their interaction with nouns and verbs, and their semantic properties. Using typological and semantic-syntactic analysis, the study revealed significant variation in the size, function, and grammatical roles of adjective classes, depending on language structure. While the study concludes that adjectives are a universal class, their identification criteria vary widely. However, the focus on typological analysis limits practical applications and lacks detailed cross-linguistic implementation examples.

Langacker (1987) proposed a cognitive grammar framework, emphasizing that linguistic structures are symbolic representations of conceptualizations. The study aimed to integrate semantics and grammar, challenging traditional views of grammar as autonomous. Using a usage-based model, Langacker demonstrated that grammar and the lexicon form a

continuum, underpinned by concepts like image schemas and conceptual structures. Although the work lacks empirical validation and focuses on theoretical constructs, it offers significant insights into the interplay between meaning and structure, shaping subsequent research in cognitive linguistics.

Davidse and Breban (2019) explored adjective order in English noun phrases, identifying six core functions—classifier, epithet, noun-intensifier, secondary determiner, focus marker, and metadesignative—using a cognitive-functional framework. They concluded that word order is shaped by functional-structural relations but noted limitations in focusing solely on pre-nominal modifiers and excluding cross-linguistic analysis.

Prosodic and Semantic Features of Adjectives

Hupp, Jungers, Rardon, Posey, and McDonald (2024) examined the effects of prosodic congruency on novel adjective learning in adults and children through experimental methods. Using congruent and incongruent prosodic training with implicit and explicit learning tasks, the study found that prosodic congruency enhances memory and learning, particularly in explicit tasks. While the study highlights the benefits of prosodic alignment, its focus on English speakers and limited prosodic types restricts generalizability.

Silk (2019) explored evaluational adjectives through formal semantics, distinguishing them from standard gradable adjectives by their context-dependence and sensitivity to perspective. The study revealed that evaluational adjectives significantly influence discourse dynamics, challenging traditional linguistic views on subjectivity. However, the reliance on theoretical analysis without empirical data limits the applicability of the findings.

Davies, Lingwood, and Arunachalam (2020) investigated syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic variability of adjectives in child-directed speech (CDS) using corpus-based analysis. The study found that prenominal frames were more frequent, descriptive adjectives outnumbered contrastive ones, and contrastive forms, though rare, were more developmentally useful. It highlighted a mismatch between input children receive and forms that facilitate learning. Despite its insights, the study's limited English-only dataset calls for broader cross-linguistic analysis.

Linguistic Analysis of Children's Literature

Fareed, Sultan, and Shireen (2021) examined linguistic errors and storytelling quality in five Pakistani English storybooks for children. The study identified issues such as spelling, grammar, adverb placement, and sentence structure, alongside gender role imbalances and shallow thematic content. It concluded that these storybooks require improved linguistic editing, balanced gender representation, and stronger storytelling elements. However, the study's findings are limited by its small sample size and focus on locally produced English-language books in Pakistan.

Temirova and Maxsumov (2024) analyzed linguistic features, cultural themes, and societal values in traditional English and Uzbek children's poetry. The study used linguo-cultural and comparative literature analysis to show how the poems have distinct cultural identities and values, and how children's literature reflects national identity and affects young readers. The comparative focus provides useful insights into the language, but the study concerns itself only with traditional, not with modern, poetry.

Using Systemic Functional Linguistics, Liu (2021) analyzed ideational grammatical metaphors and readability strategies in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and its eight adaptations. Five key adaptation strategies, addition, maintenance, revision, unpacking, and demetaphorization, were found to directly impact readability across various audience levels. The research provides insights into adapting children's literature, but is limited to ideational grammatical metaphors, not interpersonal and textual aspects.

Corpus-Based Analyses of Adjective Usage

Using a corpus based approach, Labrador (2022) investigated descriptive modifiers in children's short stories to support TEFL teacher training. The study analyzed a 517,321 word corpus using SketchEngine and identified high frequency descriptive words and their grammatical patterns, which were found to be useful teaching resources for genre awareness. The study also provides pedagogical insights, but is constrained to one language and relatively small size of corpus.

Using corpus-based and mixed effects modeling, Durrant and Brenchley (2023) analyzed noun phrase (NP) complexity in children's writing across genres. The results show that NP complexity increases with age, especially with the use of postmodifiers such as prepositional phrases and relative clauses, and that genre-specific differences appear in later years. The research offers important insights into developmental and genre specific patterns, but the scope of the research is limited to a single educational context and a limited set of genres.

Adjectives and Creative Engagement

In an article that is part of a larger thesis, titled *How the Delivery of Children's Literature Establishes Context for the Potential Development of Learning and Creativity upon the Listener's Ability to Connect with the Narrative Style and Use of Language*, Afash (2024) sought to understand language use, vocabulary, and narrative styles in children's literature, using it as a tool to promote learning and creativity, as well as empathy. The study found that children's literature encourages self-discovery, emotional intelligence and creative engagement, and is an educational tool. Yet, the evidence created for this study is limited compared to the empirical measure of cognitive impact.

In her paper 'Fear in Ted Hughes's children's poetry', Chrzanowska-Kluczevska (2021) studies the cognitive and emotional effects that fear-related language has on young readers in the poetry of Ted Hughes. The study analyzed Hughes' use of imagery, metaphors, and descriptive vocabulary to create fear and to teach children how to process anxiety through stylistic and semantic analysis. It concludes that Hughes' poetry provokes resilience and emotional growth, fear as an educational tool. However, as the study looks at only one author, this is not broadly applicable.

Using the container image schema, Antonova (2020) investigated the cognitive basis of English adjectives describing mental and moral traits. The study revealed that this schema influences around 20% of such adjectives, emphasizing boundaries and substance, which shape their evaluative meanings. While the research highlights the schema's role in enriching adjective semantics, its focus on a single cognitive model leaves scope for further exploration of alternative frameworks.

Foucault et al. (2022) examined how children comprehend recursive possessive structures and recursive gradable adjectives, revealing greater difficulty with recursive adjectives, especially at three-level embeddings. The study attributed this to the syntactic and semantic complexities of adjectives compared to possessives. It concluded that recursive embedding poses distinct developmental challenges based on structure but is limited to English-speaking children and focuses only on possessive and adjectival recursion.

Dawson, Hsiao, Tan, Banerji, and Nation (2021) compared the lexical richness of children's books and child-directed speech, finding that books offer a more diverse and sophisticated vocabulary, with higher frequencies of nouns and adjectives. This lexical richness supports vocabulary development and advanced language acquisition. However, the study is limited to UK-based data and does not account for socio-cultural or linguistic variations across regions.

Alekseevich (2019) analyzed adjectives describing color, light, size, temperature, and mood in Arctic landscapes within Jack London's *Northern* stories. The study highlighted how adjectives vividly portray the Arctic's harsh yet majestic environment, emphasizing emotional and environmental details. While providing valuable insights into London's descriptive style, the study is limited to Arctic landscape descriptions and one author's works, lacking broader linguistic comparisons across authors or genres.

Gender and Cultural Perspectives in Adjectives

Čermáková and Mahlberg (2022) analyzed gendered body language patterns in 19th-century and contemporary children's literature using a corpus-based approach. The study found male body language described more frequently and with greater variety, while female characters were often portrayed in relational terms. Contemporary literature shows increased similarity in male and female body language representations. Despite its focus on English and British literature and limitations in cluster frequency for statistical comparisons, the study is strengthened by its combined quantitative and qualitative analysis and coverage of historical and modern texts.

Adukia et al. (2022) analyzed gendered depictions and stereotypes in 100 years of award-winning children's literature using word embeddings and NLP tools. The study found females frequently associated with appearance and family roles, while males were linked to competence and business. Despite its insights into persistent stereotypes in both mainstream and diversity collections, the study is limited by a small sample of non-binary characters and OCR errors caused by illustrations in children's books.

Implications for Acquisition, Learning and Teaching

Davies, Lingwood, Ivanova, and Arunachalam (2021) examined three-year-olds' processing of size adjectives and their ability to make contrastive inferences. Using eye-tracking and gaze analysis, the study found that children could integrate adjectives and nouns for reference resolution but struggled with contrastive inferences in naturalistic contexts. This suggests that inferencing abilities develop incrementally. However, the use of naturalistic stimuli may have limited insights into their developing reasoning processes.

Davies et al. (2022) explored adjective semantics and metalinguistic interventions, focusing on the SHAPE CODING system for teaching children with developmental language disorder (DLD). The study found that SHAPE CODING effectively supports adjective learning, improving communication and academic outcomes for children with DLD. While it provides valuable recommendations for clinical and educational practices, the study is limited by small-scale applications and the absence of large-scale empirical testing.

Sholihah et al. (2021) investigated the use of figure character media in teaching English adjectives to children, finding it significantly enhanced student engagement and teacher effectiveness. The interactive approach increased students' interest and facilitated easier teaching. While effective, the study is limited by a small sample size and lack of diversity in educational settings, reducing the generalizability of its findings.

Burceva and Reveliņa (2021) examined methods for teaching adjectives in Latvian elementary schools, highlighting a preference for illustrative and reproductive techniques over heuristic and research-based approaches. The study emphasized the importance of interactive tools to improve reading literacy and competency-based learning. While it provides valuable insights, the scope is limited to 3rd-grade teaching methods and a small sample size of 15 teachers.

Manggala and Nirwinastu (2019) analyzed adjectives reflecting attitudes (Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation) in short stories by creative writing students. Using Martin and White's appraisal framework, the study found that adjectives describing main characters primarily conveyed Judgement, while other entities were described with Appreciation.

Female child characters were often portrayed negatively as powerless and incapable. However, the study's scope is limited, as it only analyzed two short stories, restricting broader generalizations.

Gaps in the Literature

There are still large gaps in our understanding of how adjectives help children's literature foster creativity and imagination. Although Dixon's (1977) semantic analysis and Langacker's (1987) cognitive grammar offer important contributions, their lack of integration into a unified semantic-cognitive model hinders holistic analysis. Silk (2019) and Afash (2024) focus on structural or emotional roles but ignore the role of adjectives in imaginative thinking. Labrador (2022) and Durrant and Brenchley (2023) are corpus based research on short texts, but they do not consider the impact of adjectives in novel length narratives. Beyond that, emotional functions associated with dot painting in works of Chrzanowska-Kluczevska (2021) are discussed, but their cognitive potential is not explored or theoretical models do not receive full coverage.

Rationale for the Current Study

This study fills these gaps by examining the role of adjectives in promoting creativity and imagination in 20 children's novels using an integrated semantic cognitive framework based on Dixon's and Langacker's models. The research overcomes limitations of earlier studies on shorter texts by analyzing novel length narratives and sheds light on the prolonged effects of adjectives on imagination. The findings are intended to help educators and authors use adjectives to increase creativity and engagement in young readers, and to advance cognitive linguistics and education.

Methodology

Research Framework

The Integrated Semantic-Cognitive Framework for Adjectives combines linguistic and cognitive theories to study how adjectives work in children's literature. The model presented here expands upon R.M.W. Dixon's (1977) categorization of adjectives into descriptive, evaluative and relational types and uses cognitive principles found in Langacker's (1987) Functional Cognitive Model. The framework, however, concentrates on four key categories: Semantic Dimensions, Functional Roles, the Level of Creative Engagement, and Narrative and Structural Analysis to address the question of what adjectives do in order to contribute to better storytelling, foster imagination, and encourage critical thinking. Through this structured approach, linguistic analysis and cognitive development are bridged allowing us to understand how adjectives develop in children's narratives holistically.

Key Features of the Framework

The four main dimensions of the framework are then identified as prominent subcategories, and the functional and cognitive contributions of adjectives are described. Every category is a tool for listing how adjectives create vivid imagery; elicit emotional responses and the depth of thematically expression.

Table 1: *The Integrated Semantic-Cognitive Framework for Adjectives*

Category	Sub-Category	Role in Children's Literature	Cognitive and Conceptual Impact	Types of Adjectives	Examples
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Semantic Dimensions	Physical Descriptors	Provide vivid imagery by describing size, shape, or texture.	Enhances conceptual visualization.	Descriptive	big, tiny, smooth, rough
	Temporal and Age	Situate characters/events in time or age contexts.	Constructs temporal and developmental perspectives.	Relational	ancient, young, modern, recent
	Evaluative and Affective	Convey judgments or emotions, influencing perceptions.	Highlights subjective and emotional dimensions.	Evaluative	beautiful, horrible, joyful
	Color and Visual Attributes	Enhance sensory richness through visual details.	Increases sensory salience and imagery.	Descriptive	bright, red, sparkling
Functional Roles	Imaginative Enrichment	Expand creative engagement through immersive descriptions.	Enhances imagination and conceptual elaboration.	Descriptive	magical, vivid, sparkling
	Characterization	Define character traits and behavioral tendencies.	Shapes cognitive perception of character depth and roles.	Descriptive, Relational	brave, selfish, courageous
	Setting and Atmosphere	Create mood and tone to enrich narrative environments.	Builds spatial and emotional contexts.	Descriptive	gloomy, serene, eerie
Levels of Creative Engagement	Surface-Level Descriptions	Clarify sensory details to aid visualization.	Facilitates direct and concrete conceptualization.	Descriptive	large, blue, quiet, soft
	Emotional Engagement	Foster emotional connections with characters or events.	Activates empathy and emotional resonance.	Evaluative	happy, sorrowful, triumphant
	Cognitive Activation	Stimulate abstract thinking, empathy, and creativity.	Encourages higher-order cognitive engagement.	Evaluative, Relational	thought-provoking, profound

Narrative and Structural Analysis	Pacing	Control the rhythm and flow of the narrative.	Structures narrative tempo and reader attention patterns.	Descriptive, Relational	quick, gradual, slow
	Thematic and Symbolic Representation	Align adjectives with story themes and motifs.	Guides thematic coherence and deeper conceptual insight.	Evaluative, Descriptive	symbolic, central, thematic

Relevance to the Study

This framework is significant in the current research, as it is consistent with the aims of the current research to investigate adjectives' semantic, cognitive, and narrative roles in children's literature. The dual function of linguistic tools and cognitive stimulants is emphasized by the model's emphasis on descriptive, evaluative, and relational adjectives. For example, descriptive adjectives like bright and tiny help us imagine, things like beautiful or horrible help us experience and reflect on. The ancient or modern, relational adjectives connect readers to temporal and developmental contexts and bring more narrative understanding to readers. The four dimensional structure provides a holistic approach that combines quantitative analysis of frequency and diversity with qualitative interpretation of cognitive and narrative functions. The framework offers a systematic taxonomy that helps exploring how adjectives invigorate imagination and enhance cognitive development at a fine grain without losing sight of this goal.

Research Design

The adjectives in children's literature are the subject of this study which employs a mixed methods research design, comprising both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative aspect is to measure the frequency and diversity of adjectives in a corpus of twenty children's novels. This analysis tracks the occurrence and distribution of adjectives to show how they are prominent and variable across texts and how they contribute to narrative structure.

The qualitative aspect analyzes the semantic work of adjectives, their functional role in readability, including the cognitive and narrative work. Adjectives are investigated in relation to their descriptive, evaluative, or relational functions as writers are interested in adjectives as parts that contribute imagery, emotion, and character. The study's aim to explore cognitive and narrative impact of adjectives in children's literature is addressed by this dual approach that guarantees a complete reading of the potential of adjectives to promote creativity and critical thinking, and encourage imaginative engagement.

Data Collection

The data for this study is a corpus of twenty carefully selected children's novels, compiled to represent a diverse range of themes, narrative styles, and historical contexts. *A Little Princess*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Black Beauty*, *Little Women*, *Peter and Wendy*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Lightning Thief*, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Treasure Island*, and eight books from the *Harry Potter* series are the selected works. The compilation of the corpus followed a structured procedure:

1. **Data Sourcing:** The texts were obtained in digital format from publicly available archives, authorized repositories, and e-book platforms, and the text files were error free and of high quality for analysis.

2. **Corpus Compilation:** To facilitate corpus analysis, the digital texts were standardized by converting them into plain text files (.txt format) using AntFileConverter software. In order to remove extraneous metadata such as page numbers and publisher information from the texts, they were cleaned up.
3. **Corpus Management:** The corpus was organized into folders and tagged with metadata (the title, author, year of publication, and genre) for efficiency of handling and analysis.

Sampling

The corpus of twenty novels was selected using a **purposive sampling** method. It was chosen to make sure the sample would be a wide cross section of narrative styles, themes, and contexts from children's literature. The selected novels featured as they were some of the most popular, critically acclaimed and most relevant to the study's focus on imagination and critical thinking.

Data Analysis

A combination of tools was used to analyze the texts to support both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. The research objectives are addressed by integrating computational and manual techniques in the analysis.

The first step for the **quantitative analysis** was to tag the corpus data with TagAnt part of speech (POS) tagger to accurately extract adjectives from the texts. To measure the frequency and diversity of adjectives, the tagged data was then processed in AntConc, a corpus analysis tool. For example, Microsoft Excel was used to create tables for these adjectives, their frequencies, and other diversity indices, resulting in the visualization and comparison of the adjective use in the selected novels.

For the **qualitative analysis**, adjectives were interpreted using the integrated framework developed for this study. The modified model was used to analyze their semantic roles, functional categories and contribution to narrative structure. It offered a textured, text specific understanding of how adjectives contribute to the cognitive and imaginative engagement of young readers. The exploration of the adjectives' effects on creativity, cognitive engagement and narrative depth were thus scrutinized thoroughly.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process of this study. All novels analyzed are in the public domain or were accessed legally through authorized sources. In this case, no human participants were used, such that consent or even privacy concerns weren't involved. All literary works are attributed for use in the analysis, and care is taken to avoid misattributing theoretical frameworks.

Analysis

Adjectives in children's literature are important in helping to shape the cognitive, emotional and imaginative engagement of young readers. This section examines adjectives in children's literature with respect to their semantic, functional, and narrative roles. The findings are categorized and critically evaluated to foreground how they have helped stimulate creativity, critical thinking and imaginative engagement in young readers.

Findings

The findings show the distribution and functional roles of adjectives in semantic categories and their importance in enriching narratives and engaging young readers. Adjectives were extracted and categorized using tools such as TagAnt (Anthony, 2024) for part of speech tagging and AntConc (Anthony, 2024) for corpus analysis, to determine their frequencies and functional roles for quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis shows how they contribute to the development of creativity, critical thinking and moral learning in children's literature.

Table2: *Quantitative Distribution of Adjectives in the Corpus*

	Token words	Unique words	Percentages
Whole corpus	2107928	33811	1.60%
Adjectives	121737	6305	5.18%
Percentages	2.78%	18.65%	

The quantitative table shows the linguistic importance of adjectives in the corpus. The corpus consists of 2,107,928 token words, of which 121,737 (5.78%) are adjectives, which are consistently present in the text for descriptive and evaluative purposes. Secondly, we find that 6,305 (18.65%) of 33,811 unique words are unique adjectives, highlighting their importance in increasing lexical diversity and specificity. Adjectives specifically make up a massive amount, because while they make up only 5.18% of unique words which are 1.60% of the entire corpus, they are unique words. These numbers reveal that adjectives are central to the development of creativity and imagination in children's literature as they supply the descriptor richness and the evaluative particularity of clause meanings that energize young struggling readers cognitively and affectively. This quantitative evidence supports the study's hypothesis which is that adjectives are what make engagement in the cognitive and imaginative sense stimulating.

Table 3: *Distribution of Adjectives by Category and Frequency in Children's Literature*

Category	Sub-Category	No. of Adjectives	Total Frequencies
Semantic Dimensions	Physical Descriptors	1523	22647
	Temporal and Age	468	13850
	Evaluative and Affective	719	23327
	Color and Visual Attributes	125	8420
Functional Roles	Imaginative Enrichment	144	2815
	Characterization	1092	8530
	Setting and Atmosphere	340	13026
Levels of Creative Engagement	Surface-Level Descriptions	742	6287
	Emotional Engagement	636	15596
	Cognitive Activation	382	2183
Narrative and Structural Analysis	Pacing	21	3207
	Thematic and Symbolic Representation	113	1849
TOTAL		6305	121737

The distribution of adjectives across different categories and subcategories is quantitatively illustrated in this table, which is consistent with the objectives of the study to investigate their semantic, functional, and cognitive contributions in children's literature. Within a Semantic Dimensions category (22,647 frequencies, 1,523 adjectives), Temporal and Age markers (13,850 frequencies, 468 adjectives), Evaluative and Affective adjectives (23,327 frequencies, 719 adjectives), and Color and Visual Attributes (8,420 frequencies, 125 adjectives), the adjectives add to the vivid imagery and sensory richness of a phrase. According to the framework, these descriptors correspond to boosts in conceptual visualization and thematic depth. Interestingly, Evaluative and Affective and Physical

Descriptors have a high distribution, indicating their essential features in creating reader perceptions and supplying descriptors.

In the Functional Roles category, adjectives are shown to be used for imaginative enrichment (2,815 frequencies, 144 adjectives), characterization (8,530 frequencies, 1,092 adjectives), and setting/atmosphere creation (13,026 frequencies, 340 adjectives). This complements the framework's use of adjectives as instruments of depth in narrative, emotional and immersion storytelling. These words are most distributed in Characterization and Setting and Atmosphere and underscore their importance to establish characters and to create rich atmosphere; they are less frequent (relatively) in Imaginative Enrichment and suggest a more specific role.

Levels of Creative Engagement prove adjectives foster imagination and empathy whilst promoting cognitive activation, which aligns with the study's goal of creating critical and imaginative engagement. (Surface Level Descriptions revealed 6,287 frequencies and 742 adjectives; Emotional Engagement revealed 15,596 frequencies and 636 adjectives; and Cognitive Activation revealed 2,183 frequencies and 382 adjectives in this category). However, Emotional Engagement is found to have significant frequency, reflecting its pivotal link in forming deep emotional connection with readers, and the frequency of Cognitive Activation is descriptively low, implying that those cognitive devices only act selectively to create thought.

Lastly, the Narrative and Structural Analysis category reports that adjectives serve to Pacing (3,207 frequencies, 21 adjectives) and Thematic and Symbolic Representation (1,849 frequencies, 113 adjectives) in guiding the narrative flow and in reinforcing key themes. Distribution among these sub categories is comparatively low, and that is due to their more specialized narrative function. At the total frequency level (121,737) and count level (6,305), adjectives are clearly foundational to children's literature and corroborate the hypothesis that adjectives contribute to cognitive and imaginative engagement, by means of descriptive richness, emotional resonance, and narrative coherence. Further variations in distribution across categories also point to the many and various ways that adjectives are used target learners and fulfill narrative and cognitive goals.

Table 4: *Categorization and Frequency Analysis of Top 200 Adjectives in Children's Literature*

Category	Sub-category	Adjectives	Frequency	Adjectives	Frequency	Adjectives	Frequency
Semantic Dimensions	Physical Descriptors	little	3439	large	835	small	766
		big	618	heavy	324	tiny	311
		thin	301	thick	297	ill	271
		soft	255	tall	246	sharp	218
		enormous	209	wide	208	stout	207
		huge	204	round	199	fat	166
		sick	156	dry	148	light	144
		wet	142	clean	126	flat	124
		narrow	123	weak	117	broad	116
		giant	116				
	Temporal and Age	old	1955	last	1867	first	1174
		new	928	young	904	next	850
		second	508	third	237	late	203
		past	119				

	Evaluative and Affective	good	2902	great	1723	best	821
		poor	636	better	581	bad	536
		nice	466	wrong	400	fine	390
		common	340	free	317	fair	307
		sweet	294	strong	280	worse	260
		beautiful	246	dangerous	222	terrible	211
		pretty	204	horrible	198	rich	187
		pleasant	180	worst	175	lovely	173
		wonderful	164	handsome	158	powerful	155
		dreadful	150	excellent	145	famous	137
		nasty	134	comfortable	131	lucky	131
		dull	123	awful	122	ugly	121
		useful	121				
	Color and Visual Attributes	black	910	white	664	dark	647
		red	575	green	495	blue	381
		bright	350	golden	334	pale	246
		gray	240	brown	183	silver	176
		yellow	161	purple	141	pink	119
Functional Roles	Imaginative Enrichment	strange	318	funny	268	odd	261
		wild	228	magical	218	invisible	125
	Characterization	other	2443	own	1349	same	882
		different	324	stupid	276	alive	260
		kind	180	single	162	humane	155
		careful	154	brave	141	alone	140
		clever	124	friendly	124	honest	123
		silly	118				
	Setting and Atmosphere	full	887	open	797	dead	740
		cold	495	low	448	high	426
		empty	420	deep	371	quiet	369
		loud	322	hot	304	close	282
		front	271	asleep	250	warm	233
		busy	232	silent	231	fresh	229
		cool	155	distant	148	left	135
		awake	123				
Creative Engagement	Surface-Level Descriptions	whole	563	hard	434	usual	388
		clear	336	easy	250	very	227
		okay	168	simple	151	normal	129
	Emotional Engagement	sorry	528	happy	508	dear	492
		afraid	415	glad	401	angry	356
		safe	285	tired	255	pleased	218
		mad	214	surprised	204	hungry	189
		proud	187	frightened	182	anxious	177
		fond	161	interested	160	nervous	150
		worried	150	serious	147	scared	144
		curious	137	sad	135	excited	128
		merry	118				
	Cognitive	more	1713	sure	1207	right	1172

	Activation	few	1085	many	1045	much	963
		such	662	able	523	only	518
		ready	503	several	502	true	429
		real	413	least	401	most	364
		enough	350	half	271	possible	245
		important	228	certain	220	difficult	169
		less	165	worth	154	familiar	149
		impossible	127	interesting	122		
Narrative and Structural Analysis	Pacing	long	1332	short	401	sudden	268
		quick	237				
	Thematic and Symbolic Representation	quoth	158	secret	143		

Analysis of the top 200 adjectives in this table shows their semantic, functional, and narrative contributions to creativity, critical thinking, and moral reasoning in line with the study's framework.

Under semantic dimensions, adjectives like little (3439) and tiny (311), ground narratives in sensory details, for readers to picture the story world. For example, in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, "*There was a little bottle on the table*" (Carroll, 1865), is the example of emphasizing peculiar proportions, and thereby fires our imagination, whereas in "*There was a tiny, shut up room that smelled musty*" (Burnett, 1911) thereby infers mystery and secrecy, and emphasizes spatial awareness. Adjectives dealing with time, temporal adjectives, such as old (frequency: 1955) position the narrative in time as in "*The old tiger's growl could be heard deep in the jungle*" (Kipling, 1894) and bridging generational contrasts. Moral alignment is guided (among other evaluative adjectives) by good (2902) and bad (536) such as "*The children had never seen a more beautiful place than Neverland*" (Barrie 1911), promoting awe or "*She was treated so terribly by her owner*" (Sewell 1877), creating empathy. Sensory depth is created through color adjectives from red (575) and golden (221) alike in "*The bright red Hogwarts Express stood gleaming in the sunlight*" (Rowling, 1997) this creates excitement, and in "*The golden leaves fell gently in the forest*" (Pyle, 1883), serenity.

Imaginative enrichment on adjectives, which are strange (318) and magical (218) instigate curiosity, to wit "*There was a strange smell in the air, like something ancient and powerful*" (Riordan, 2005) and underwrite. Here in characterization, the qualities we tend to define are traits like brave (141) and kind (180) which read: "*Tom was brave enough to face the cave alone*" (Twain, 1876) or elicit admiration and "*Sara was always kind to everyone*" (Burnett, 1905) or inspire empathy. The adjectives setting such as these dark (495) create mood, "*The dark sea stretched endlessly before them*" (Stevenson, 1883) indicates mystery or "*It was a quiet evening by the river*" (Grahame, 1908) provides in serenity.

Adjectives also help readers to be creative. Surface level descriptors such as clear (563) make things accessible, as in "*The clear sky promised a good day for adventure*" (Pyle, 1883) and help visualize. Emotional adjectives such as: happy (508) and afraid (415) engage our empathy as witnesses of "*Beth was happy when her sisters sang to her*" (Alcott, 1868) or "*Percy felt afraid as he faced the monster*" (Riordan 2005). Cognitive adjectives such as more (1713), and real (413), promote abstract reasoning and are used when considering brave, for example in "*Harry was in more danger than ever before*" (Rowling, 2007).

Pacing is the function of adjectives in narrative structure; they can pace quickly, as in “*They made quick escape from the river bank*” (Grahame, 1908), or they can pace with perseverance, as in “*The long journey was testing their patience*” (Stevenson, 1883). Thematic adjectives such as secret (143) symbolize depth in “*The secret garden of a place of magic and healing meant development and transformation*” (Burnett, 1911). It illustrates how adjectives play the vital bridge between semantic, cognitive and symbolic dimensions of storytelling by leading these to creativity, empathy and critical thinking.

Discussion

This study finds that adjectives in children’s literature help shape young readers’ cognitive, emotional, and imaginative engagement. Analysis of the semantic, functional and narrative roles of adjectives does exactly that, and it critically evaluates their relevance to answer the research questions of the study within the semantic-cognitive framework.

Semantic Roles of Adjectives

Adjectives are shown to ground narratives in sensory detail and temporal context through their semantic dimension, as in categories such as Physical Descriptors and Temporal and Age. For example, *practice of extensive use of adjectives like little and tiny* helps in conceptual visualization so that very young readers can visualize the details of the narrative (Dixon, 1977). Also serving this function are temporal adjectives (e.g. old, young) that construct cognitive scaffolding to temporal contrasts *and character development* (Langacker, 1987). These results are consistent with the research question on the semantic functions of adjectives, showing that they serve to link linguistic forms and cognitive processes.

The evaluative and affective adjectives good and bad were found to affect moral reasoning and emotional alignment with characters in line with Silk’s (2019) analysis of the context dependent functions of evaluative language. For example, “She was treated terribly by her owner” incites empathy and ethical contemplation that aids in moral judgment. But this supports the hypothesis that evaluative adjectives do more than just add color to narratives; they also compel young readers to analyze critically ethical dilemmas.

Functional Roles and Reader Engagement

Adjectives serve vital, functional roles in Characterization and Setting and Atmosphere; in that these roles imply relational understanding and story immersion. This set the tone for the use of Dlugosh’s purview of characterization in which adjectives such as brave and kind denote moral virtues, which I found to be similar to the results involving interpersonal modifiers that alter the relational dynamics Davidse and Breban (2019) mentioned. For instance, example of resilience and compassion is a model as, “Sara was always kind to everyone,” which heightens their emotional and moral involvement in the reading.

For imaginative enrichment, and the spark of and abstract thinking, strange and magical adjectives are there for the taking. These results are consistent with Langacker’s (1987) cognitive grammar framework, which holds that linguistic elements such as adjectives trigger higher order cognitive processes by means of conceptual integration. However, the fact that imaginative adjectives are much less frequent than descriptive ones indicates that children’s literature may not make the most of the potential of imaginative adjectives to extend readers’ cognitive engagement beyond concrete imagery.

Cognitive and Emotional Activation

Emotional Engagement and Cognitive Activation adjectives are dual purpose in that they promote empathy and critical thinking. Hupp et al. (2024) support emotional adjectives (such as happy and afraid) make readers empathetic by providing examples that shows the linguistic features like prosody and adjective congruency improve the readers’ emotional resonance and memory retention. For *example*, the sentence, “Beth was happy when her

sisters sang to her” gives readers an opportunity to connect with a character’s experience and meaningfully immerse themselves in the narrative.

Adjectives as real, more, in cognitive activation prompt abstract reasoning, and so cognitive activation helps to engage in critically thinking about authenticity and exploration, two of the theme. Antonova’s (2020) analysis of cognitive schemas addressed cognitive structures such as cognitive process and conceptual schema, demonstrating how adjectives play an evaluative role in shaping readers’ conceptual understanding of abstract traits, such as honesty or ambition, *finds synergies with this finding.*

Narrative and Structural Roles

Pacing and Thematic and Symbolic Representation categories of adjectives control narrative rhythm and reinforce symbolic themes. Pacing words like quick and long impact structure, and adjectives such as secret can give the work symbolic depth. These findings support the research question on the narrative functions of adjectives, and confirm Dixon and Aikhenvald’s (2004) assertion that adjectives play both syntactic and thematic roles in all linguistic systems. As an example, “The secret garden was a place of magic and healing” conveys the idea that it was a place of growth and transformation and inspires the reader to think about concepts like renewal, concealing and revealing potential.

Alignment with the Semantic-Cognitive Framework

The results support the integrated semantic-cognitive framework by showing that adjectives serve as linguistic tools and cognitive stimulants. The corpus is dominated by descriptive adjectives, which meet the framework’s emphasis on sensory engagement. Relational and evaluative adjectives are, however, less frequent relatively, and this may limit a development to its complete cognitive and imaginative potential for the children. This is in line with critiques by Labrador (2022) and Durrant and Brenchley (2023) that children’s narratives require genre specific vocabulary to diversify linguistic patterns.

The results stress the role of adjectives in determining narrative depth, moral learning, and creative engagement. Sensory adjectives meet developmental needs for the expression of concrete imagery; however, the inclusion of an increased number of relational and symbolic adjectives may heighten critical and imaginative thought. This resonates with Afash’s (2024) findings that children’s literature is a potent educational tool for encouraging empathy, creativity and encouraging self-discovery.

Limitations of the Study

Despite a comprehensive analysis, there are certain limitations of this study as some of the semantic, functional, and cognitive roles of adjectives in children’s literature are not explored. The first is that the dataset contains 20 selected children’s novels, which may or may not fully represent the diversity of linguistic style within the genre. The generality of the findings is thus limited to a broader spectrum of children’s literature. Second, the analysis is largely limited to functional dimensions, leaving open the possibility for a more in depth examination of the cultural and sociolinguistic influences on the use of adjectives. Third, tools like TagAnt and AntConc allowed the efficient analysis of corpus but reliance on pre-structured tagging may occasionally result in misclassification of linguistic elements. Finally, this study looks at adjectives in isolation, apart from other parts of speech, that could affect their functional and narrative roles.

Implications of the Study

The implications of this study are important for educators, authors, and researchers. The findings are important for educators to consider the need to include adjective rich texts in teaching practice to help students develop their descriptive and critical thinking skills. The insights can be used by authors to construct more dynamic, cognitively dynamic narratives which promote a constant negotiation among sensory and evaluative adjectives to promote

learning via imagination and moral learning. The integrated semantic–cognitive framework suggested in this study can be used by researchers to investigate linguistic elements in other genres, extending the study of language’s involvement in emotional and cognitive engagement. The study also highlights the educational worth of children’s literature as a teaching medium for empathy, creativity and abstract reasoning.

Recommendations by This Study

This study suggests that children’s literature should use a balanced use of descriptive, evaluative, and symbolic adjectives to have the greatest impact on young readers. To create a stimulus of curiosity and abstraction authors should include imaginative enrichment adjectives such as magical and strange. To improve contextual literacy, educators should present curated reading materials that will cultivate linguistic and critical engagement that incorporates diverse adjective use. Researchers are invited to investigate the interactions between adjectives and verbs, as well as nouns, to see how they contribute to constructing a narrative. Furthermore, extending the corpus to include multilingual children’s literature will reveal comparative patterns in linguistic patterns carried across cultures.

Future Trends

The study presents emerging trends in the analysis and application of linguistic elements in children’s literature. Future research can take the use of more advanced computational tools for looking at adjectives from more populous and more varied corpora. This could be a topic for cross linguistic studies that explore how adjectives vary among different languages and cultures and how global practices of children’s storytelling vary as well. Additionally, adverb use in digital and interactive children’s media, such as e-books and educational games, can be examined, since here visual and linguistic elements meet. Finally, the combination of psychological and educational perspectives could be elucidated through interdisciplinary studies of children’s emotional development and cognitive growth from the perspective of adjective rich narratives.

Conclusion

In this study, the semantic, functional and cognitive roles adjectives within children’s literature were analyzed and the importance of adjectives in inspiring creativity, critical thinking and imaginative thought in the readers was emphasized. The study examines 20 selected novels using corpus tools TagAnt and AntConc to show how adjectives add to narratives by providing vivid imagery, shaping character traits, and reinforcing thematic depth. The results support the integrated semantic cognitive framework, and suggest the strategic use of descriptive, evaluative, and symbolic adjectives to trigger readers’ emotional and cognitive processes. While its limitations are clear, this study highlights the importance of adjectives in bridging language and thought, and provides important implications for authors, educators, and researchers. This research moves the field forward in interdisciplinary and cross-cultural explorations of the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of children’s storytelling.

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