

## ANALYSIS OF PEJORATIVE VOCABULARY IN THE NOVEL SOPHIE'S WORLD BY JOSTEIN GAARDER

### АНАЛІЗ ПЕЙОРАТИВНОЇ ЛЕКСИКИ В РОМАНІ «СВІТ СОФІЇ» ЮСТЕЙНА ҐОРДЕРА

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The scientific article presents a comprehensive linguostylistic and functional analysis of pejorative vocabulary in the fictional discourse of Jostein Gaarder's novel "Sophie's World". The relevance of the research is due to the necessity of studying the mechanisms for verbalizing negative evaluation in texts that combine philosophical, didactic, and artistic elements, as well as the need to detail the criteria for identifying a pejorative that extend beyond traditional lexicographical markers. It is emphasized that the criteria for selecting pejorative vocabulary must necessarily include parameters such as: the word's belonging to a low style, the presence of a synonym in a neutral lexical layer, the interaction of the denotative and connotative components of meaning, and the presence of an emotive microcomponent (emoseme).

The purpose of the work is to carry out a multifaceted analysis of the corpus of pejorative units of the novel and to critically determine their role in reflecting the judgments and prejudices of the characters, and in realizing the author's meta-narrative goal – the encouragement of philosophical, critical thinking. To achieve this goal, pejoratives directed at both abstract philosophical concepts and social identities were identified and classified.

The research process utilized the following methods: continuous sampling for forming the corpus of units, lexico-semantic analysis for determining the evaluative connotation, as well as contextual and stylistic analysis for distinguishing dictionary pejoratives from the contextual pejoration of neutral lexemes, which is the dominant mechanism in the text.

The obtained scientific results prove that the use of pejorative vocabulary in the novel is strategic and functional. It was established that pejoratives fulfill two key functions: didactic (directing the reader toward a critical evaluation of ideas) and illustrative (when characters use pejoratives to render their judgement, biases that philosophy is intended to overcome). This function of the pejorative confirms that the author consciously employs negatively charged vocabulary to highlight philosophical ideas and moreover he turns ordinary words into pejoratives that serve as a tool of philosophical criticism.

Also, the analysis demonstrates how these linguistic units correlate with Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of «language games,» illustrating that the meaning and evaluative weight of a word completely depend on the context of its use. Thus, pejoratives serve as narrative signals to engage the reader in a critical reflection on language as a tool of power and manipulation. The conclusions emphasize that pejorative vocabulary models the intellectual and social «failures» that philosophy is called upon to correct. Prospects for further exploration include further study of the functioning of pejorative vocabulary, as well as an empirical study of the influence of this vocabulary on the perception of the text by readers.

**Key words:** pejorative, linguistic evaluation, emotive microcomponent, language games, author's intent.

У науковій статті проведено комплексний лінгвостилістичний та функціональний аналіз пейоративної лексики в художньому дискурсі роману Юстейна Ґордера «Світ Софії». Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю вивчення механізмів вербалізації негативної оцінки в текстах, які поєднують філософський, дидактичний та художній елементи, а також потребою деталізації критеріїв ідентифікації пейоративу, які виходять за межі традиційних лексикографічних маркерів. Наголошується, що критерії відбору пейоративної лексики мають обов'язково включати такі параметри, як: приналежність слова до зниженого стилю, наявність синоніма в нейтральному лексичному шарі, взаємодію денотативного і конотативного компонентів значення, а також наявність емотивного мікрокомпонента (емосеми).

Метою роботи є здійснення багатоаспектного аналізу корпусу пейоративних одиниць роману та критичне визначення їхньої ролі у відображені суджень, упереджень персонажів, і, зрештою, у реалізації мета-наративної мети автора – заохочення до філософського, критичного мислення. Для досягнення цієї мети було виявлено та класифіковано пейоративи, спрямовані як на абстрактні філософські концепції, так і на соціальну ідентичність.

У процесі дослідження використано методи: суцільної вибірки для формування корпусу одиниць, лексико-семантичний аналіз для визначення оцінної конотації, а також контекстуальний та стилістичний аналіз для розрізнення словникових пейоративів від контекстуальної пейоративізації нейтральних лексем, що є домінантним механізмом у тексті.

Отримані наукові результати доводять, що використання пейоративної лексики в романі є стратегічним і функціональним. Було встановлено, що пейоративи виконують дві ключові функції: дидактичну (скеруючи читача до критичної оцінки ідей) та ілюстративну (коли персонажі використовують пейоративи для передачі своїх суджень та упередженості, яку філософія має подолати). Ця функція пейоративу підтверджує, що автор свідомо використовує негативно забарвлений лексику для досягнення своїх цілей, пеертворюючи нейтральні слова в пейоративи, які слугують інструментом філософської критики.

Також, аналіз демонструє, як пейоративні мовні одиниці корелюють із концепцією «мовних ігор» Людвіга Вітгенштейна, ілюструючи, що значення та оцінка вага слова повністю залежать від контексту його використання. Таким чином, пейоративи слугують наративними сигналами для залучення читача до критичної рефлексії над мовою як інструментом влади та маніпуляції. Висновки підкреслюють, що пейоративна лексика моделює ті інтелектуальні й соціальні «невдачі», які покликана виправляти філософія. Перспективи подальших розвідок включають подальше вивчення функціонування пейоративної лексики, а також емпіричне дослідження впливу цієї лексики на сприйняття тексту читачами.

**Ключові слова:** пейоратив, лінгвістична оцінка, емотивний мікрокомпонент, енантіосемія, мовні ігри, авторська інтенція.

**Defining the Problem.** Linguistic evaluation is a fundamental and pervasive category in language use, serving as a primary mechanism for the formation of meaning, the emotional framing of a text, and the realization of the author's underlying ideological or communicative intent [1]. In literary discourse, particularly within works that ingeniously merge philosophical instruction with narrative fiction, such as Jostein Gaarder's "Sophie's World", the verbalization of negative assessment – specifically through pejorative vocabulary – gains unique significance. Pejoratives are defined as words or expressions primarily used to convey negative emotions, often carrying connotations that are insulting, dismissive, or demeaning to the individuals, concepts, or groups to which they are applied [2].

**Connection to Important Tasks.** The scholarly examination of pejoratives in literary texts holds crucial theoretical and practical value. It contributes to linguistics by clarifying the criteria and mechanisms of pejoration (e.g., the transition of a neutral term to a negatively charged one) [3]. For literary studies, it helps decode the author's axiological system (system of values) and idiolect, offering a deeper understanding of character motivation and narrative issues [4]. Most importantly, from a sociolinguistic and pedagogical perspective, studying pejoratives helps us understand how language operates to establish social hierarchies, perpetuate stereotypes, and can be used to influence or change attitudes [5]. The novel's use of pejoratives serves as a device for critical analysis, inviting the reader to deconstruct the power dynamics inherent in linguistic usage.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** Contemporary linguistic research asserts that the criterion for identifying pejorative vocabulary solely based on conventional lexicographical labels (e.g., dictionaries) is profoundly insufficient. A more holistic approach necessitates the integration of contextual, functional, and semantic criteria, including: the word's stylistic affinity (e.g., belonging to a lowered style); the presence of a neutral semantic equivalent; the interplay between the denotative and connotative components of meaning; and the emotive microcomponent – the presence of emosemes (units of emotional meaning). Scholarly

consensus suggests that virtually any linguistic unit can acquire a pejorative meaning when embedded in an appropriate context [2].

The lexical layer of pejoratives is dynamically supplemented by the creation of occasional authorial pejoratives, the emergence of stable pejorative collocations, and the operation of the phenomenon of enantiosemey (where a word carries two opposing meanings, often positive and negative). While «Sophie's World» has been analyzed for its philosophical content and didactic structure, a comprehensive linguo-stylistic and functional analysis of its pejorative vocabulary – as a deliberate mechanism for realizing authorial intent and fostering critical inquiry – remains underdeveloped.

While studying intertextuality and self-reflexivity, Sdiq, Bushra & Almaaroof, Ansam in their article 'A Study of Jostein Gaarder 's Sophie's World as a Meta-fictional Work' emphasizes that author's intent is "not only give the reader a deeper knowledge of the philosophical ideas being discussed in the book, but also encourage them to think about how these ideas have been treated in other works of literature [6, p. 135]. It proves that the author is using a meta-narrative objective to boost reader philosophical inquiry. Pejoratives, thus, serve as a means of provoking critical thinking. This statement is supported by Rants N. that "Sophie's World" is "certainly thought-provoking" [7].

#### Identification of Previously Unresolved Parts of the General Problem

Despite contributions to the study of the philosophical underpinnings of J. Gaarder's novel, as well as the importance of pejoratives's usage to support author's intent, the following key research gaps persist: systematic functional analysis – a complete categorization and functional assessment of the corpus of pejorative units in the novel, moving beyond mere identification to determine *why* they were employed in that specific narrative context; pejorative as a didactic tool – a detailed examination of how the character-driven use of offensive or dismissive language (concerning identity factors like race, gender, and religion) functions within the book's larger philosophical mission – specifically, how these instances serve to illustrate and condemn the social biases

that critical thinking is meant to overcome; linguistic power dynamics – an exploration of the novel's subtle engagement with philosophical theories concerning the power and impact of language (e.g., L. Wittgenstein's influence) as illuminated through the use of pejorative language. Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of «language games» is important for understanding the strategic function of pejoratives in the book. He claims that the meaning of a word is not determined by its essence, but by its use in a certain context – and this is our story.

**Task Setting.** The main goal of this article is to conduct a multi-layered linguo-stylistic and functional analysis of pejorative vocabulary in Jostein Gaarder's «Sophie's World» and to critically determine its role in reflecting character biases, illustrating linguistic power structures, and ultimately serving the author's meta-narrative objective of promoting philosophical inquiry.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks must be addressed:

1. Identify and classify the corpus of pejoratives, separating those aimed at abstract philosophical concepts from those targeting identity factors.

2. Analyze how the characters' deployment of pejorative language – particularly when used dismissively – is employed by the author to model some intellectual limitations and prejudices that the philosophical journey seeks to transcend.

3. Substantiate the argument that the novel's use of pejorative language is a deliberate literary device that engages with and reinforces philosophical ideas related to linguistic relativism and power (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of «language games»).

#### Presentation of the Main Research Material

The study employed methods of continuous sampling to isolate the pejorative units, followed by descriptive and lexico-semantic analysis. Crucially, a contextual and stylistic analysis was used to distinguish inherent (dictionary-level) pejoratives from contextual pejoratives – a frequent mechanism in the novel (denotation versus connotation).

The continuous sampling method was used to ensure the completeness of the data corpus. After isolating the corpus of units, descriptive and lexical-semantic analysis was applied to classify and determine the estimated weight of each pejorative. Among the stages of vocabulary analysis we used the following ones: the definition of an emoseme – emotional microcomponent; the identification of a specific type of negative assessment (for example, contempt, indignation, irony); the determination of the word's belonging to a reduced, colloquial or

vulgar style; the search for a neutral synonym (for example, for the phrase “totally dim” (completely dumb), a neutral synonym could be “ignorant” or “uncritical”, which emphasizes the reducing effect of the chosen lexeme; the stage of distinguishing inherent pejoratives from contextual pejoratives (denotation vs. connotation) was carried out meaning that it is the most critical and dominant mechanism in a research, as philosophical texts often use neutral vocabulary for criticism. But the most important stage was the separation of contextual pejoratives – neutral lexemes, whose denotation is neutral, but connotation acquired in the context of the novel becomes negative. This approach allowed us to prove that the author, Justin Gaarder, uses language strategically – he turns ordinary words into tools of philosophical criticism. The pejoration of neutral tokens serves as a didactic function, causing the reader to critically re-evaluate even the most mundane aspects of life that philosophy considers “failures”. It is crucial as ‘Gaarder's direct address to the reader, his revelation as the author, and his comments on the nature and purpose of the novel all demonstrate self- reflexivity’ [6, p. 134].

**Pejoratives Directed at Abstract Philosophical Concepts.** The pejoratives employed against philosophical concepts serve a primary didactic function, marking ideas that are to be treated with suspicion or skepticism by the reader:

*Over the millennia a wild profusion of mythological explanations of philosophical questions spread across the world. The Greek philosophers attempted to prove that these explanations were not to be trusted [p. 19].*

“Wild profusion” has a negative connotation, emphasizing uncontrollability, excess and the absence of a single system in mythology – critics of Chaos. This serves as a didactic contrast to the ordered and systematic philosophy that will appear later. Here, “not to be trusted” is a direct assessment that early Greek philosophers gave to mythological explanations. It is an intellectual pejorative that rejects myth as an untrue or unscientific method of cognition – the condemnation of unreliability. Time to think.

*Sophie saw that the philosopher was right. Grownups took the world for granted. They had let themselves be lulled into the enchanted sleep of their humdrum existence once and for all [p. 18].*

The whole expression ‘be lulled into the enchanted sleep’, despite having positive and neutral connotations gain a negative meaning with an emoseme of disdain. The author metaphorically pejorizes non-philosophical life as a state of ignorance

from which one must “wake up”. This prompts the reader to take an active philosophical position.

*For the first time it was said that the myths were nothing but human notions [p. 23].*

The phrase “nothing but” (nothing but) is a classic tool of reduction, philosophical in our case, which undermines religious authority by devaluing it. The words ‘nothing’ and ‘but’ belong to a neutral level of vocabulary but contextually gain negative meanings aiming at belittling the concept of myths.

**Pejoratives Directed at Identity.** The analysis confirms that pejorative language in “Sophie’s World” is strategically used by characters as a linguistic mechanism that vividly illustrates their own intellectual limitations, biases, or fundamental lack of understanding. This use is not gratuitous but is central to the novel’s pedagogical structure. Moreover, the use of pejorative vocabulary by characters serves as a linguistic indicator of their state of consciousness and level of philosophical maturity. Let us consider the following examples.

*Ladies and gentlemen,” they yell, “we are floating in space!” But none of the people down there care. “What a bunch of troublemakers!” they say. And they keep on chatting... [p. 17].*

The crowd (representing uncritical adulthood) uses this label to devalue the philosophers’ actions (yelling “we are floating in space!”). The word “troublemakers”, apart from belittling the philosophers, serves as a linguistic defense mechanism, protecting their comfort and routine from challenging intellectual inquiry. It shows they prioritize social order over philosophical truth.

*Sophie found the questions pretty stupid, but nevertheless they kept buzzing around in her head all evening [p. 25].*

Sophie uses the label “stupid”, a direct pejorative, to quickly categorize the questions as unworthy of her attention, thereby protecting her current, comfortable worldview. The questions challenge her conventional scientific and religious assumptions (e.g., about miracles or composition of matter). It’s a spontaneous mechanism to reject what is unfamiliar or difficult. The use of “stupid” directly reflects her intellectual ignorance (her bias). She dismisses the questions because she doesn’t understand their historical or philosophical significance.

*“What on earth are you talking about?” “I’m talking about you getting so used to everything. Totally dim, in other words.” “I will not be spoken to like that, Sophie!” [p. 18].*

Sophie is directly criticizing her mother (or adults in general) for lacking the childlike sense of wonder that philosophers embrace. Sophie uses the

harsh pejorative phrase “totally dim” (meaning intellectually slow or stupid) with a scornfully brutal emoseme to perform an act of intellectual dismissal. She is not merely insulting her mother; she is categorically rejecting the lifestyle of taking the world for granted (according to the text).

*We who live here are microscopic insects existing deep down in the rabbit’s fur [p. 13].*

This is a metaphorical devaluation of the social status of humanity in the universe. Although a pejorative metaphor with scornful emosemes, it illustrates how philosophy reduces proud human identity to an unimportant biological entity – a perfect illustration of human nullity regarding its social status.

*The earliest Greek philosophers criticized Homer’s mythology because the gods resembled mortals too much and were just as egoistic and treacherous. [p. 23].*

Criticism of the Greek gods for their resemblance to humans as *egoistic and treacherous* is a moral pejorative phrase that denies the idea that gods can be perfect or omnipotent, and people as well, thus requiring the search for a better explanation (rational) and expressing a moral condemnation.

**Conclusions.** The strategic use of pejoratives is intricately linked to the novel’s philosophical exploration of language itself. By showcasing characters using evaluative language that is clearly biased, the author reinforces the relevance of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of «language games» who, especially in his later writings («Philosophical Studies»), argued that the meaning of the word – is not its correspondence to a certain object, but its use in a certain social or cultural context, which he called «language games». In Wittgenstein, each sphere of life (science, religion, everyday conversation, philosophy) has its own «language game» with its own rules (grammar, dictionary, goals) [8].

The novel illustrates these language games – a meaning is contextual. A word’s pejorative weight depends entirely on the «game» being played; ordinary words are turned into tools of philosophical criticism. The pejoration of neutral words serves as a didactic function, causing the reader to critically re-evaluate even the most mundane aspects of life that philosophy considers «failures». The novel also illustrates that language shapes reality – the use of pejorative language by a character frames their perception of the world, and helps provoke reader thinking.

The pejoratives thus function as a meta-linguistic device, inviting the reader to engage in critical awareness of how language can be used to influence

and manipulate, thereby making the philosophical journey highly personalized and immediately relevant.

The conducted analysis confirms that pejorative vocabulary in Jostein Gaarder's «Sophie's World» is far from incidental; it is a systemic, functional, and highly didactic stylistic tool. The deployment of pejoratives against abstract philosophical ideas and against identity solidifies the novel's comprehensive pedagogical goal. The core finding is that the pejorative units function as narrative cues for critical engagement, reflecting the deep influence of philosophical theories on linguistic usage and awareness, and the most important that the author turns ordinary words into pejoratives that serve as a

tool of philosophical criticism as pejoratives and as a means of provoking critical thinking.

Future research should focus on intertextual analysis – an in-depth investigation of the relationship between the novel's use of pejoratives and the explicit discussion of L. Wittgenstein's «language games,» providing a complete model of how linguistic theory is actualized within the fictional narrative as well as a reader-response studies – empirical research focusing on how the novel's use of potentially pejoratives affects the reader's engagement, moral judgment, and subsequent philosophical reflection. And the most important – a complete categorization and functional assessment of the corpus of pejorative units in the novel must be completed.

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