

Seasonal Reference Points of Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels from the Perspective of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract

This study employs the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics to examine the seasonal reference points in four Chinese modern classical local novels: Lu Xun's *Hometown*, Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, Zhao Shuli's *The Marriage of Xiao'Er Hei*, and Jian Xian'ai's *Water Burial*. The research explores the embodied cognitive functions and cultural significance of seasonal reference points in literary narratives. Findings reveal that spring, summer, autumn, and winter, as key seasonal reference points, function not only as temporal markers but also as carriers of embodied cognition and cultural connotations. Seasonal reference points transcend natural temporal frameworks to serve as tools for embodied cognitive construction, integrating nature with culture and individuals with collectives. By activating embodied cognitive schemas and incorporating the authors' personalized cultural experiences, these reference points deepen narrative logic and emotional expression. This study highlights the multifaceted role of seasonal reference points in literary language, narrative strategies, and cultural critique, offering a novel perspective and theoretical approach to Chinese modern classical local novels.

Keywords: Embodied Cognitive Linguistics, Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels, Seasonal Reference Points, Literary Narrative Strategies, Cultural Connotations in Literature

Introduction

Research Background

As a significant branch of 20th-century Chinese literature, Chinese modern classical local novels vividly depict rural customs, natural landscapes, and human emotions, enriched by profound cultural connotations and unique artistic charm. Through meticulous narrative techniques and distinctive expressions, these works recreate the life scenes of China's traditional agrarian civilization, serving as vital references for cultural heritage and societal reflection. However, existing research primarily focuses on the social content and character development in Chinese modern classical local novels, with relatively limited attention given

to natural reference points, particularly seasonal reference points. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic exploration from the perspectives of embodied cognitive linguistics and cultural studies.

Seasonal reference points are not only integral to the narrative and thematic construction of rural novels but also carry profound cultural and philosophical implications. In these works, authors often use the cyclical changes of the seasons and natural rhythms as a backdrop, employing dynamic depictions to shape rural landscapes, create narrative atmospheres, and convey philosophical reflections. These seasonal images, serving as core narrative reference points, connect human and natural relationships while reflecting the rural society's deep understanding of life cycles, ethical values, and cultural significance. Therefore, a systematic study of seasonal reference points can expand the breadth and depth of rural literature research, contribute to preserving Chinese culture, and address contemporary issues such as the relationship between humans and nature and the evolution of social civilization.

In terms of research progress, while significant achievements have been made in modern Chinese literature studies, attempts to analyze Chinese modern classical local novels through the lens of embodied cognitive linguistics remain in the early stages. Existing studies on seasonal reference points are largely descriptive, lacking theoretical depth and systematic exploration. This study aims to introduce embodied cognitive linguistics as a theoretical framework to comprehensively examine the linguistic representation, embodied cognitive foundations, and cultural connotations of seasonal reference points from both experiential and cultural dimensions. This perspective not only addresses existing research gaps but also promotes interdisciplinary integration between embodied cognitive linguistics and literary studies, providing innovative academic pathways for advancing modern literature research.

Research Significance

The significance of this study can be summarized in three key aspects:

(a) Deepening Literary Interpretation and Broadening Research Horizons

By examining seasonal reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels from the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, this study seeks to uncover how authors construct natural reference points through embodied cognition and resonate with readers' cognitive experiences. Such an interpretation enhances the understanding of narrative logic and emotional cores in classic works, enriching the methodological framework of literary criticism. Additionally, seasonal reference points often embody philosophical reflections and cultural memories, serving as an important entry point for exploring the humanistic spirit in Chinese modern classical local novels. This research will deepen and broaden rural literature studies and provide theoretical support for the reinterpretation of modern literary classics.

(b) Promoting Theoretical Innovation and Highlighting Interdisciplinary Value

Embodied cognitive linguistics emphasizes the interaction between language, bodily experience, and cognitive processes, offering a new perspective to analyze the cognitive mechanisms of literary imagery. Applying this theory to seasonal reference points can reveal the experiential and cognitive foundations of literary language and its cultural characteristics while fostering the application of embodied cognitive linguistics in literary studies. Furthermore, this research integrates literary criticism and cognitive poetics to explore the

expressive features and ideological connotations of rural novels, providing a model for interdisciplinary research.

(c) Preserving Cultural Traditions and Addressing Contemporary Challenges

In the context of globalization, issues such as ecological imbalance, cultural erosion, and the loss of values have become increasingly prominent, necessitating wisdom drawn from the nation's outstanding traditional culture. Chinese modern classical local novels, with their unique narrative perspectives, vividly portray idyllic scenes of harmony between humans and nature, encapsulating the ecological philosophy of "unity between heaven and man" and a call for pure humanity. By deeply analyzing seasonal reference points, this study aims to help people reexamine the relationship between nature and humans, reflect on the drawbacks of industrial civilization, and provide guidance for ecological civilization and social development. Furthermore, these works embody national spirit and cultural memory, and studying their cultural connotations reinforces cultural confidence and contributes to constructing a discourse system with Chinese characteristics.

Research Objectives

This study focuses on the seasonal reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels, including *Lu Xun's Hometown*, *Shen Congwen's Border Town*, *Zhao Shuli's The Marriage of Xiao'er Hei*, and *Jian Xian'ai's Water Burial*. By conducting close reading, extracting linguistic features, and analyzing the underlying embodied cognitive mechanisms, the study aims to systematically explore the multifaceted roles of seasonal reference points in narrative construction, emotional interaction, and cultural significance. The specific research objectives include:

(a) Exploring the Selection and Construction of Seasonal Reference Points

Analyze how authors select and construct seasonal reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels, uncover their linguistic representation characteristics and embodied cognitive foundations, and interpret their unique functions in narrative content and structure.

(b) Examining the Role of Seasonal Reference Points in Emotion and Cognition

Investigate how seasonal reference points assist readers in constructing an embodied cognitive framework of the story world, analyze their specific roles in emotional resonance and cognitive understanding, and reveal the interaction mechanisms between the text and readers.

(c) Interpreting the Socio-Cultural Significance of Seasonal Reference Points

Delve into how seasonal reference points bridge social and cultural contexts, deepen narrative meanings, and explore the humanistic spirit, value concepts, and their contributions to the inheritance of social and cultural traditions.

(d) Summarizing Academic Value and Expanding Research Directions

Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the academic value of integrating embodied cognitive linguistics with literary criticism, explore the potential applications of seasonal reference point studies in literary linguistics and cognitive poetics, and provide new directions and theoretical support for future research.

Literature Review

In the field of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics, the concept of the embodied cognitive reference point is a pivotal notion, derived from and developed based on the theoretical foundation of cognitive reference points. Wang Yin (2021c) suggests that individuals, through their lived experiences with "physical reference points," gradually form the principle of "embodied cognitive reference points" in their cognitive processes. Embodied cognitive reference points not only inherit the core ideas of cognitive reference points but also extend them into the realm of human perception and bodily experience. The primary connection between the two lies in their shared focus on how reference points are used to organize and interpret information. The distinction, however, is that cognitive reference points emphasize psychological and conceptual dimensions, while embodied cognitive reference points highlight the role of physical and sensory experiences in language understanding and usage.

Given that the theory of embodied reference cognitive points has evolved from the foundation of cognitive reference points, and that specialized literature on embodied cognitive reference points remains relatively scarce, this study's literature review will primarily focus on exploring cognitive reference point theory while integrating relevant research on embodied cognitive reference points. This comprehensive approach aims to construct a more holistic theoretical framework, enabling a deeper understanding of the application and development of embodied cognitive reference point theory in the analysis of literary discourse.

Existing studies on the application of embodied cognitive reference point theory in literary discourse analysis have achieved significant breakthroughs. Wang Yin (2005, 2011), Li Yaqun (2013), Ai Xin (2015), and Li Taizhu and Pan Le (2015) have focused on the application of cognitive reference point theory in understanding and analyzing textual coherence, deepening our understanding of how cognitive reference points facilitate the analysis and construction of discourse. Yang Bin (2019) further emphasized the core role of cognitive reference points in literary creation, particularly in local novels, where authors break cognitive conventions to innovatively construct discourse. Gou Na (2022) proposed the "Cognitive Reference Fractal Model (CRFM)," offering a novel perspective for understanding the generation of proverbs in local novels. Studies by Cai Yansheng (2005), Zeng Wan (2018), Yuan Xiaoshan (2020), Wu Yuanjia (2021), and Chen Zhangxu (2022) have summarized the various forms of temporal or spatial reference points in literary works, providing new insights into how spatiotemporal reference points function in literary texts. He Biqi (2023) highlighted the importance of the selection and transformation of cognitive reference points in literary works, offering theoretical support for the cross-cultural understanding of local novel discourse.

Although the aforementioned studies have made significant progress in applying embodied cognitive reference point theory to literary analysis, several limitations remain that require further exploration and refinement:

(a) Existing research predominantly focuses on theoretical interpretations, lacking in-depth investigation into how embodied cognitive reference points convey the physical and mental experiences of authors. Furthermore, the rationale behind authors' selection and construction of reference points, as well as how these points facilitate interaction and deepen

cognitive understanding between authors and readers, remains underexplored.

(b) Most studies concentrate on a single dimension of reference points, such as time or space, without fully addressing the deeper meanings and structures of literary works through a broader lens of multidimensional reference points, including sociocultural dimensions. Moreover, there is a need for more detailed analysis of how readers use these reference points to construct embodied cognitive frameworks of story worlds and how these points aid in understanding the cultural and social contexts within novels.

(c) Current research has yet to fully uncover the complex interaction among reality, cognition, and language in embodied cognitive linguistics, particularly in the specific genre of local novels. The application of embodied cognitive reference point theory in this field requires further depth and systematic exploration. Specifically, more work is needed to investigate how authors and readers establish connections through embodied cognitive reference points during the creation and interpretation of local novels, and how these points influence the understanding and depiction of rural culture and social realities. Additionally, an in-depth examination is required to determine the role of embodied cognitive reference points in shaping the linguistic style of local novels and how they interact with rural cultural characteristics to construct a unique aesthetic realm.

Building on previous research, this study aims to address these issues by thoroughly examining the application of seasonal reference points in discourse analysis of Chinese modern classical local novels.

Research Questions and Methodology

This study focuses on reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels, aiming to explore their multifaceted roles in narrative construction, emotional interaction, and cultural significance. Specifically, it addresses the following three core questions:

(a) How do authors select and construct seasonal reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels?

(b) Do seasonal reference points assist readers in constructing embodied cognitive frameworks of story worlds and play a role in fostering emotional resonance and cognitive understanding?

(c) Do seasonal reference points serve as critical tools for bridging social and cultural contexts and enhancing narrative significance?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a qualitative research approach with textual analysis as its primary method. The research focuses on four classical local novels: *Lu Xun's Hometown*, *Shen Congwen's Border Town*, *Zhao Shuli's The Marriage of Xiao'Er Hei*, and *Jian Xian'ai's Water Burial*. These works, set respectively in spring, summer, autumn, and winter, use seasonal reference points to reflect the authors' multifaceted embodied cognitions of natural phenomena, sociocultural contexts, and human emotions. This seasonal division not only highlights the distinct seasonal characteristics of each work in terms of narrative content and emotional expression but also provides diverse case studies to investigate how seasonal reference points construct the temporal framework, cultural symbolism, and narrative functions within these novels.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, this study examines the interaction between language, bodily experience, and cultural context, exploring how reference points are constructed and convey the authors' emotions and value judgments. Through close reading of the texts, the study investigates the roles of reference points in narrative structures, analyzing how they activate readers' emotional memories and cognitive understanding. Finally, the research addresses the cultural significance of reference points, adopting a cross-cultural perspective to analyze their role in bridging diverse cultural contexts and revealing their potential for constructing sociocultural meanings in literary works.

By combining theoretical analysis with case studies, this research aims to uncover the multifaceted functions of reference points in Chinese modern classical local novels, deepening the understanding of the narrative mechanisms and cultural transmission significance of local literature. The study not only provides a new perspective on literary research through embodied cognitive linguistics but also offers methodological support for exploring the interaction between culture and emotion in literary narratives.

Theoretical Framework

Core Concepts of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics

Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL) is an extension of Cognitive Linguistics, developed by Wang Yin (2014, 2020) within the context of Chinese language and culture. Its core principle, reality (body)--cognition (mind)--language, reveals that the formation and use of language are deeply rooted in human bodily experience and cognitive processes. ECL emphasizes that experience is the foundation of cognition, cognition is the refinement of experience, and language serves as the organic integration of the two (Wang, 2014, pp. 61, 63).

The innovative aspect of this theory lies in its dynamic and practical nature, offering new perspectives on the interaction between language, bodily experience, and cultural contexts. ECL not only examines how language expresses individual cognition and emotion but also investigates how language constructs meaning through cultural adaptation and social practices. By emphasizing the dialectical relationship of "reality--cognition--language", ECL establishes a unique analytical framework that provides theoretical support for research in linguistics and literature.

Integration of Embodied Reference Point Theory with Literary Analysis

Reference Point Theory, initially proposed by Langacker (1993) within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, posits that human cognition operates through a reference point structure. When understanding a complex target (T), individuals often select a reference point (R) that is easier to perceive and process. This reference point establishes a psychological link to the target, facilitating its understanding and localization (Liu et al., 2022). As a foundational concept in Cognitive Linguistics, Reference Point Theory emphasizes the dynamic and hierarchical nature of human cognition.

Within the framework of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), Reference Point Theory has been further developed. ECL not only expands the types of reference points but also highlights their dynamic, practical, and culturally adaptive characteristics, thereby broadening

their applications in language generation and comprehension. Embodied Cognitive Reference Point Theory, an important extension of Reference Point Theory in ECL, underscores how individuals select salient reference points (R) to locate and understand targets (T) during processes of comprehension and expression. This process, grounded in the interaction between bodily experience and cognitive processing, simplifies complex linguistic phenomena into specific cognitive pathways, promoting efficient semantic construction and dissemination.

Embodied Cognitive Reference Points hold significant value in the analysis of literary texts. For instance, seasonal imagery in literary works can function as embodied cognitive reference points. By depicting the passage of time and natural landscapes, such reference points guide readers in understanding the cultural connotations and emotional expressions embedded within the text. Furthermore, language generation and comprehension are typically embedded in specific contexts. Situated cognition emphasizes the dynamic interaction between reference points and contexts, where authors use reference points to infuse specific emotions and cultural meanings into the narrative, and readers reconstruct textual meanings by interpreting these reference points.

The selection and application of reference points reflect not only the interaction between language and cognition but also the deeper functions of language in emotional transmission and cultural adaptation. These extended concepts enhance the embodied cognitive and cultural significance of reference points, making them not only central to semantic construction but also a crucial tool for analyzing literary texts. They offer a novel perspective for examining the structure, themes, and cultural contexts of literary discourse.

Analysis of Seasonal Reference Points in Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels

The Four Seasons in Universal Embodied Cognition

In universal embodied cognition, the four seasons are not merely markers of natural temporal sequences but also embody profound cognitive meanings and cultural symbols. The cyclical transitions of the seasons are reflected through language, culture, and social practices, gradually forming rich embodied cognitive schemas that profoundly influence human understanding of time, life, emotions, and social phenomena.

Spring, characterized by the rejuvenation of nature and flourishing vitality, activates the embodied cognitive domain of hope, renewal, and life force. On the natural level, spring symbolizes rebirth after the harshness of winter, marked by the sprouting of plants and heightened activity among animals, representing the starting point of production and growth. On the cultural level, spring is closely associated with activities like sowing and setting out on new journeys, metaphorically reflecting fresh beginnings and aspirations for the future. For example, linguistic expressions such as "full of the joys of spring" and "blossoming in springtime" reinforce spring as a positive symbol in embodied cognitive models. Additionally, the variability of spring weather (e.g., fluctuating between warm and cold) implies uncertainty, providing a rich source for narrative tension and embodied resources in storytelling.

The blazing sunlight, lush vegetation, and abundant energy of summer embody the peak and intensity of vitality, forming an embodied cognitive schema of vibrancy and prosperity.

Simultaneously, summer is also a season of frequent extreme weather events in nature, such as sudden rainstorms, lightning, and scorching heat, which metaphorically reflect impermanence and danger. In literary narratives, summer is often employed to depict passion, busyness, and dramatic changes in life. Culturally, summer is closely associated with festivals and agricultural activities, such as the Dragon Boat Festival and harvest rituals. These events not only highlight the abundant characteristics of summer but also convey philosophical reflections on the unpredictability of life. The dual nature of summer—flourishing and impermanence—provides diverse possibilities for storytelling, making it equally suitable for portraying intense emotions as well as latent crises.

Autumn embodies the dual characteristics of abundance and decline, reflecting the completeness of life and its inevitable decay. On a natural level, autumn is the season of bountiful harvests, closely tied to human labor and the joy of accomplishment. Yet, it is also a time of falling leaves and the onset of decay, symbolizing the unavoidable passage and conclusion of life. In literary narratives, autumnal imagery such as "golden autumn," "autumn winds sighing," and "fallen leaves returning to their roots" evokes a cognitive domain of praise for life's maturity, while frequently being employed to convey a sense of melancholy and solitude. Culturally, autumn is strongly associated with themes of ancestor worship and nostalgia, and its characteristic decline adds emotional depth to narratives.

Winter, characterized by cold and frost, activates an embodied cognitive domain associated with survival challenges and the suspension of life. In nature, winter signifies a period of dormancy for most flora and fauna, symbolizing a temporary cessation of life. In literary narratives, imagery of winter, such as "the coldest days of winter" and "a world of ice and snow," is often used to portray emotions of loneliness, desolation, and despair. At the same time, it carries the latent promise of renewal (e.g., "after winter comes spring"). On a cultural level, winter is connected with year-end traditions, family reunions, and reflection on survival struggles, serving as a transitional period of hope for the future. The duality of winter—stagnation and hope—provides literature with a complex emotional structure, enriching its narrative and thematic dimensions.

From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, the four seasons, as fundamental units of natural temporal order, construct a unique embodied cognitive context and emotional resonance in literary narratives by activating human bodily experiences and embodied cognitive schemas. Seasonal reference points not only serve as the temporal framework for narration but also function as embodied cognitive reference points, engaging deeply with readers' bodily experiences and cultural memories to generate multidimensional cognitive and emotional meanings.

Within the framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, the natural phenomena of the four seasons activate universal embodied cognitive domains through metaphorical mapping. Spring's "renewal" evokes embodied cognitive domains of hope and rebirth, summer's "vitality" activates embodied cognitive domains of life's vigor and impermanence, autumn's "harvest and decline" establish a contrast between maturity and decay, and winter's "coldness and dormancy" elicits embodied cognitive schemas of survival challenges and life's suspension. These metaphorical mappings, rooted in humanity's prolonged interaction with the natural environment, gradually become internalized as cultural memories and serve as

crucial tools in literary narratives for constructing embodied cognition and fostering emotional interaction.

From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, the literary functions of seasonal reference points are reinterpreted in a novel way. They are not only universal embodied cognitive schemas and markers of time but also serve as core mechanisms through which embodied cognitive reference points achieve embodied cognitive integration, cultural adaptation, and emotional transmission in literary narratives. In Chinese modern classic local novels, authors skillfully utilize these seasonal reference points, employing linguistic representation and embodied cognitive mapping to construct unique narrative tension and symbolic significance.

The Embodied Cognitive Construction and Emotional Activation of Seasonal Reference Points

In Zhao Shuli's *The Marriage of Xiao' Er Hei*, the seasonal reference point of the transition between spring and summer is constructed through representations such as "spring drought," "sowing," and "summer rain," forming a multi-layered embodied cognitive schema. The act of sowing in spring symbolizes the entrenched nature of the old social order, reflecting the exhaustion and rigidity of outdated systems. In contrast, the harvest in summer signifies hope and vitality for a new life, implying the inevitability of revolution and the emergence of a new order. These seasonal reference points not only activate readers' embodied understanding of the cyclical nature of agrarian society but also highlight the tension of the spring-summer transition, showcasing the complex interplay between epochal change and individual destiny.

Shen Congwen's *Border Town* places summer as its core reference point, depicting the midsummer landscapes of western Hunan to create an embodied cognitive schema where vitality coexists with impermanence. The portrayal of traditional folk activities, such as "dragon boat racing" and "duck herding," illustrates the vibrancy and order of rural life. However, sudden thunderstorms and floods disrupt this harmony, metaphorically representing the abruptness and unpredictability of fate. The stark contrast between the abundance of summer and its inherent volatility reflects Shen Congwen's profound embodiment of life's transience while conveying his deep affection for the culture of western Hunan.

In Jian Xian'ai's *Water Burial*, the autumnal reference point constructs an embodied cognitive schema reflecting both the end of life and a critique of societal norms. The "golden rice fields" symbolize maturity and abundance, the "rustling pine branches" carry an undertone of deathly chill, and the "lifeless sky" foreshadows the finality of individual existence. These autumnal reference points not only resonate with the tragic fate of the characters but also create a profound social embodied cognitive schema critiquing the oppression of individual life by feudal rituals. The desolation of autumn metaphorically intertwines with the cruelty of feudal ceremonies, revealing the constraints imposed by societal traditions on personal destiny with a critical lens.

In Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the winter reference point runs throughout the narrative, from the opening line, "braving the bitter cold, I returned to my hometown," to childhood memories of "snowfall perfect for catching birds," and finally to the "cold afternoon" reunion with Runtu. Winter imagery embodies both the natural cold and stagnation and serves as a

metaphor for the decline of the homeland and the alienation of society. Expressions like "biting cold" and "gloominess" activate the readers' embodied cognitive perception of the winter schema, yet Lu Xun's language choices integrate these universal perceptions with deeply personal emotional experiences. This interplay deepens the expression of "things have changed" and accentuates his profound critique of the transformation of his hometown and the underlying societal issues.

The Multifaceted Functions and Symbolic Significance of Seasonal Reference Points

From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, seasonal reference points in Chinese modern classical rural novels function not merely as temporal markers but as critical mechanisms for constructing embodied cognitive contexts, activating embodied cognitive understanding, and deepening thematic expression through layered metaphors.

Seasonal reference points interact profoundly with narrative development, driving the intensification and resolution of conflicts. For instance, in Zhao Shuli's *The Marriage of Xiao'Er Hei*, the spring drought serves as a seasonal reference point that creates a tense survival crisis, propelling the characters into conflict. The subsequent summer harvest, in contrast, symbolizes hope and vitality for a new life, aligning with the natural rhythm to pave the way for a turning point in the story.

Seasonal reference points not only activate universal embodied cognitive domains but also encapsulate the authors' individualized emotional embodied cognition. For example, in Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the desolation of winter is not merely a depiction of the natural landscape but is imbued with profound emotional embodied cognitive recognition. Linguistic representations such as "biting cold" and "gloom" utilize metaphorical mechanisms to transform natural states into symbols of societal stagnation and shattered ideals, poignantly expressing the author's sorrow and disillusionment with the realities of his hometown.

In Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, the emotional contrast evoked by summer's sunlight, rain, and floods further intensifies the reader's embodied cognitive experience. The serene life shared by Cuicui and her grandfather during the first summer evokes admiration and longing for the idyllic rural life of western Hunan, while the devastation of the final summer's flood shatters this idyllic vision, highlighting the unpredictability of fate and the fragility of life. This emotional juxtaposition amplifies the narrative's affective tension, underscoring Shen Congwen's profound embodied cognitive recognition of human complexity and the rhythms of life.

Seasonal reference points also integrate agricultural rhythms and societal culture, serving as symbolic carriers of the collision between tradition and modernity. In Jian Xian'ai's *Water Burial*, the austere imagery of autumn, represented through expressions like "golden rice fields" and "desolate pine branches," juxtaposes themes of harvest and decay, hope and death. These symbols poignantly reveal the oppression of individual freedom and the erasure of life under feudal rites, embedding deep social critique within the narrative.

In Chinese modern classical local novels, seasonal reference points serve as significant tools for narrative construction and symbolism, bearing multiple functions and meanings. From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, seasonal reference points integrate

the rhythms of natural temporal sequences with the complexities of human emotions and cultural connotations through metaphorical mapping and the activation of embodied cognitive domains.

In Zhao Shuli's *The Marriage of Xiao'Er Hei*, the interplay between spring and summer, grounded in natural seasonal cycles, reflects the rhythm and logic of social transformation. In Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, summer not only showcases the unique cultural features of western Hunan but also symbolizes the unpredictability of fate. In Jian Xian'ai's *Water Burial*, the withering imagery of autumn forms a metaphorical connection with the critique of feudal ethics. In Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the cold and gloomy winter embodies societal stagnation and the intellectual's spiritual dilemma.

The flexible application of these seasonal reference points demonstrates modern writers' keen grasp of embodied cognitive mechanisms. These elements not only advance narrative progression and amplify emotional tension but also, through their profound integration with cultural imagery, construct rich embodied cognitive contexts and symbolic meanings. By skillfully employing seasonal reference points, Chinese modern rural novels achieve a unification of emotional resonance and cultural critique, offering vivid literary examples for the application of embodied cognitive linguistics.

Conclusion

In summary, seasonal reference points, as key elements of Chinese modern classical local novels, are not only grounded in universal human embodied cognition to construct embodied cognitive schemas but also enriched through their integration with the authors' individualized experiences, thereby enhancing the symbolic and cultural depth of literary texts. From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, seasonal reference points achieve an embodied cognitive transformation from natural imagery to cultural symbols, adding multidimensional emotional tension and philosophical depth to the narrative. This narrative strategy, centered on seasonal reference point, reflects the profound understanding of the relationship between nature and society in Chinese modern classic rural novels. Moreover, it provides a bridge for embodied cognition and emotional interaction for readers, highlighting the significance of seasonal reference points as a critical subject in the study of embodied cognitive linguistics.

Conclusion

Research Summary

This study, grounded in the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, focuses on four modern classic Chinese local novels: *Hometown* by Lu Xun, *Border Town* by Shen Congwen, *The Marriage of Xiao'Er Hei* by Zhao Shuli, and *Water Burial* by Jian Xian'ai. It systematically explores the forms of seasonal reference points, their multiple functions, and cultural significance. By applying the concept of embodied reference points to the analysis of seasonal reference points, this research reveals the profound connections between literary language, embodied cognition, and cultural expression, offering a new perspective on the narrative strategies and thematic expressions of Chinese modern classical local novels.

Firstly, from the perspective of embodied construction, seasonal reference points activate universal human bodily experiences to establish stable embodied cognitive domain frameworks, which provide readers with a foundational understanding of the emotional

tension and narrative logic within the texts. For instance, in Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the winter reference point uses "coldness" and "desolation" as metaphors for societal stagnation and personal spiritual crisis. This embodied cognitive domain not only evokes experiential comprehension in readers but also serves as a crucial link between natural imagery and cultural metaphor.

Secondly, from the perspective of narrative function, seasonal reference points closely interact with plot development to enhance the depth of character portrayal and emotional expression. For instance, in Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, the summer reference point embodies the dual qualities of "flourishing" and "sudden change", encapsulating the fluctuations of the characters' fates. The contrast between the bright summer scenery and the torrential rains and floods not only drives the narrative forward but also symbolizes the fragility of life and the unpredictability of human affairs. This bidirectional interaction between plot and seasonal reference points fully demonstrates the author's creativity in constructing narrative language.

Furthermore, from the perspective of cultural connotation, seasonal reference points, integrated with agricultural traditions and folk activities, reveal the profound embodied understanding of human-nature relationships and societal transformations held by modern local writers. For example, in Zhao Shuli's *The Marriage of Xiao' Er Hei*, the imagery of spring transitioning into summer not only reflects the rhythms of rural production but also implies the inevitability of social change. Similarly, in Jian Xian'ai's *Water Burial*, the desolate imagery of autumn serves as a critical lens to expose the oppressive impact of feudal ethics on individual lives. Through the cultural adaptation of seasonal reference points, rural novels illustrate the tension between tradition and modernity, highlighting the writers' cultural critique and social consciousness.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that seasonal reference points, as embodied cognitive reference points, are not merely representations of natural temporal sequences but also serve as complex carriers of multilayered embodied cognition, emotion, and cultural significance. Through the lens of embodied cognitive linguistics, this research reveals the critical roles of seasonal imagery in constructing embodied cognitive schemas, deepening narrative logic, and generating cultural symbols, providing an innovative theoretical perspective for the linguistic study of modern Chinese rural novels.

Research Implications and Future Directions

This study's systematic analysis of seasonal reference points through the framework of embodied cognitive linguistics not only deepens the understanding of linguistic phenomena in modern Chinese classical local novels but also offers a new theoretical framework and practical approach for literary research.

Firstly, the study of seasonal reference points highlights the profound exploration of the relationship between humans and their environment in modern rural novels. From Zhao Shuli's depiction of the seasonal rhythm and social implications in the transition from spring to summer, to Shen Congwen's portrayal of summer's vibrancy and unpredictability, Jian Xian'ai's autumnal imagery of desolation and decay, and Lu Xun's evocation of winter's stagnation and bleakness--these seasonal reference points recur in the authors' linguistic

constructions, becoming essential symbols imbued with cognitive and cultural significance. The perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics reveals how these seasonal reference points in local literature unify personal reflection and societal expression through experiential cognition.

Secondly, the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics provides a robust tool for investigating the dynamic mechanisms underlying narrative strategies in rural literature. As embodied triggers, seasonal reference points activate readers' embodied cognitive experiences, building an embodied cognitive interactive bridge between authors and readers. This mechanism offers new possibilities for the multidimensional construction of literary narratives in linguistic practice and infuses traditional imagery analysis with theoretical innovation.

Finally, the findings of this study offer expansive opportunities for future research. The theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics can be further applied to the analysis of other narrative elements, such as spatial reference points, to comprehensively explore the embodied cognitive logic and cultural significance of linguistic phenomena in rural literature. Additionally, cross-cultural perspectives in embodied cognition studies hold significant value, such as comparing the cognitive differences in seasonal imagery across cultures, thereby uncovering the unique cultural characteristics and zeitgeist of Chinese modern rural novels.

In summary, this study, through the exploration of seasonal reference points from the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, innovatively elucidates the interactive relationship between literary language and embodied cognitive mechanisms. It provides valuable insights for deepening the study of Chinese modern rural novels and expanding the application scope of embodied cognitive linguistics.

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