

**Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences  
Faculty of Humanities**

**THESES OF PHD DISSERTATION**

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**A Spatial Semantic Approach to Hungarian folksongs**

**Doctoral School in Linguistic Sciences  
Doctoral Programme in Hungarian Linguistics**

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## 1. Problem outline

A significant group of Hungarian folksongs include a so called **natural image**, in which natural entities profile primarily in space. The natural image and the spatial relations in it typically metaphorise, while at the same time are part of the emotional message of the text. This notion, named "natural starting image" in the related literature has long been part of folklore and text linguistics studies, however, the semantic analysis of folksongs still covers a number of open questions. A cognitive linguistic approach to texts implies a semantic unity (Tolcsvai Nagy 2001: 64), and its novel viewpoint reveals a number of answers, which broaden either our understanding of the texts or knowledge of the text type. The main question of the dissertation is the following: **How do the (mainly metaphorical) spatial relations in the natural images reveal the general subjective, emotional semantic content of the song?**

A significant element of natural representation, which relies basically on visual perception, is spatial relations elaborating in the dynamic construal of discourse universe. Holistic cognitive linguistics offers a suitable framework for the investigation of the metaphorical potential of spatial representation, in as much as linguistic notions appear in their unity of meaning and form and also natural supporting matrix. Another important factor of text analysis is taking account of the structural and dynamic nature of texts (Eysenck–Keane 1990, Langacker 2000, Verschueren 1999). The research therefore is centered around some cognitive notions related to the concept of construal.

The spatial semantic study of folksongs establishes a claim to a model which employs a complex viewpoint and a wide range of empiric devices. The reason on the first place is that the text type implies both the modes of understanding in lyrics and in folklore texts posited on the border of oral and written literature. Folk conceptualization pervades all folklore text types, and this conceptual network produces an even stronger intertextual connection among folksongs. Secondly, the empiric method of the study suggests directing the focus of research on such notions which characterize and define folksongs the best. The corpus in use is a representative collection of Hungarian folksongs, which was compiled for the purpose of textual studies. (Ortutay–Katona 1975): the 47 thematic groups of 2438 songs "give a full account of historical, geographical and ethnic relations" (Ortutay 1975: 7).

The thesis therefore employs primarily the methods of holistic cognitive linguistics (Langacker 1987, 1991), but also makes use of the results of spatial semantics (Talmy 2000, Zlatev 2007), the Hungarian research in cognitive linguistics (Tolcsvai Nagy 1999, 2006b, Laczkó 2008, Kövecses 2003, 2008, Szilágyi N. 1996), pragmatics (Levinson 1983, Verschueren 1999), cognitive psychology, and folklore studies (Bernáth 1986, 1987, Katona

1979, 1998, 2002, Küllös 1976, 1988, Lükő 1942/2001, Mona 1959, Ortutay 1975, Pócs 1983, Vargyas 1988, Voigt 1969). The framework of analysis thus established is centered around the notion of **construal**, which is approached from two directions: the first is the general processes of meaning construction, where the speaker's viewpoint is of high priority (Bühler 1934, Sanders–Spooren 1997, Tolcsvai Nagy 2006a), and also the ways of representation from his perspective (Tátrai 2011, Tomasello 2002, Varhagen 2007). They include the grounding of entities in the discourse universe (Langacker 1987, 2002a, 2002b) their connections in reference point constructions (Rosch 1975, Langacker 1999, van Hoek 2007, Tolcsvai Nagy 2005), and further, from a broader perspective, the linking and construction of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, 2007, Fauconnier–Sweetser 1996). The second approach is from below: the common conceptual network that prevades folksongs motivates drawing up the complex profiling matrix of certain concepts and revealing the spatial, especially force dynamic relations between entities (Talmy 1983, 2000). The conceptual content that emerges from spatial relations of folksongs can be interpreted in the synthesis of the two basic approaches. The spatial semantic analysis relies also on the common ways of space and time orientation, which are proposed in the works of cognitive psychology (Evans 2004, Tversky 1993, 2003).

The primary aim of the thesis is **the analysis of spatial construal in Hungarian folksongs that involve a natural image** according to the model detailed above, where the linguistic phenomena appear as integrates of one semantic unity. The second purpose of the study is a **presentation of some significant marks of the text type**, contributing to a better understanding of folksongs and, in an indirect way, a finer definition of text itself (Kocsány 1989, 2002, Tolcsvai Nagy 2001, 2006b).

Having shown the guideline of the problem, some more specific subquestions are to be raised for further discussion:

- What emotional semantic content emerges from the different types of spatial grounding of nouns?
- What kind of viewpoint construction is typical in folksongs and how do the personal vs. communal characteristics manifest in them?
- What mental process is mapped in the spatial line of driving the attention via reference point constructions?
- What mental spaces frame the construal, and what emotional attitude do they present?
- Is spatial profiling in terms of concepts typical in folksongs; what kind of metaphorical meanings are expressed in the profiles?

- Is there an analogical correlation in the conceptual network in terms of certain profiles, their semantic functions and thematic contexts?

My preliminary hypothesis is that **the different forms of spatial representation construing in the discourse universe of folksongs map metaphorically the mental processes related to the emotional semantic content of the texts.**

The novelty of the problem is indicated in the fact that there has been no overall cognitive linguistic analysis made to present the major construal operations of the text type. The thesis proposes a new model of interpretation, which not only provides an opportunity for spatial semantic research, but for the reconstruction of its conceptual network and extension of its typological features. The process of the study requires us to define some terms, such as the text unit of analysis, or what natural image means, due to the various forms of construal. The thesis therefore forms an organic part of empiric cognitive linguistic research, more specifically, a functional approach to folklore texts, which is still at an early stage (Szelid 2007, Takács 2006).

## 2. The results of the thesis

In the first section the focus of research is on some basic construal operations, taking the conceptualizer as a starting point: **grounding, viewpoint and perspective construction, reference point constructions, and mental spaces.**

As for grounding, the different degrees of spatial grounding have their semantic correspondences. **Distal deixis**, which is frequent in initial position, draws the attention to an object, which later opens a new fictive scene. The function of deixis is therefore to provide a mental distance between the speaker and the referential scene; while he watches some desired event, he continuously preserves his spatial position. The **proximal deixis** similarly brings some object closer to the speaker, representing actual reality and mental closeness, mapping a positive emotional attitude. In both cases the perceptual relation designates the boundaries of actual and fictive reality. The analysis of **nouns** focused on four formal possibilities: nouns with definite and indefinite articles, proper nouns, and nouns without an article. In folksongs **definite** nouns do not necessarily refer to an object which is easily accessible in the actual discourse universe, rather one that is well known in the conventional experience: definiteness does not mean uniqueness but easy identification based on the schematic features of the object. **Indefinite nouns**, however, imply novelty and difficulty of access in space as well as mental terms. **Nominal constructions** often come up as initials in the stanza in either repetitive form or as a list of phrases. This atemporal, ungrounded way of construal creates the basic structure of the discourse universe in a special way: the inherent schematic features

of the concept designated by nominal expressions establish in themselves a roughly outlined image of the text world. The object of attention has a great semantic potential, its following semantic function can not be anticipated in the beginnings, therefore the real semantic role of the noun manifests in the retrospective reading.

(1) *Ej-haj, gyöngyvirág,  
Teljes szegfű, szarkaláb,  
Bimbós majoránna!  
Ha kertedbe mehetnék,  
Piros rózsát szedhetnék,  
Szívem megújulna.*

*My, my, lily,  
Full carnation and larkspur,  
Budding marjoram!  
Could I enter your garden,  
I could pluck red roses,  
And my heart would renew.  
(Love songs: 39/1)*

**Proper nouns** are also unique in restrained circumstances: they are only partly grounded as important reference points whose semantic function is to emphasize that a place (i.e. the setting of an event) belongs to the living space of community.

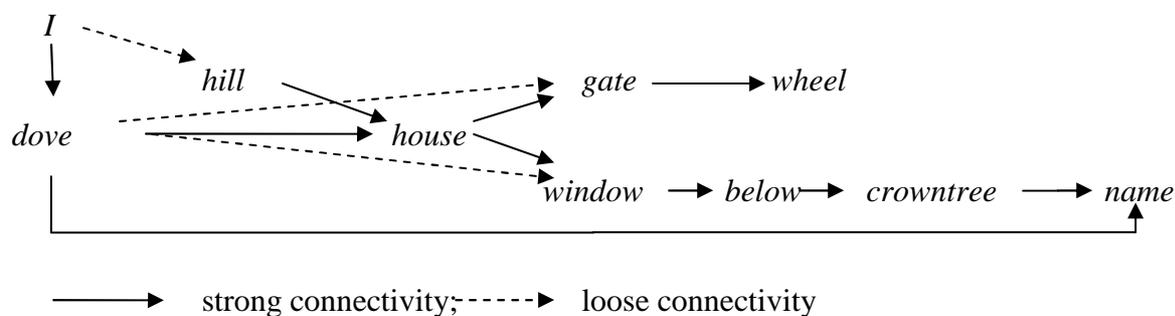
Strongly related to grounding is the investigation of viewpoint, where a main point is the difference of linear and retrospective interpretation: many expressions have the potential of a dual perspective: **personal** and **communal** at the same time. The initial natural images can be thus interpreted from two viewpoints, depending where the subject of consciousness is placed. Both perspectives may be valid simultaneously, because the speaker himself is one of the community. This linguistic potential is allowed by expressions such as adjectives implying multiple reference points. By the act of pointing to a conventional truth and then presenting his own situation, the speaker is profiled first as part of the community, and later as an individual. The temporal aspect of the **dual interpretation** leads to the following observations: in the process of construal the speaker becomes from implicit to explicit, the subject of consciousness from communal to personal, the event viewed from a communal perspective is re-interpreted from an individual point of view at a later stage of the text, which also involves an act of re-construal. Further, the distance between the speaker and the referential event reduces in physical as well as mental respects. The function of apostrophe is to establish a link between objects situated at distant locations or even alternating mental spaces of the discourse universe. While indirectness is a definitive feature of folksongs, apostrophe is an effective way to bridge such a reserved mode of construal. Apart from apostrophe, there are other approaching strategies, such as citation, or a partial disposition of starting point. In connection with viewpoint I finally studied the **interaction of perspectives**. The general basis of juxtaposition of two perspectives is the idea that natural processes are accepted for the speaker as beyond question, and on the basis of them he can predict reasons and consequences for his own life. In some cases personal expectations and the rules of nature come into conflict, which means a negative attitude towards his own situation.

In the next chapter I express a crucial observation, namely, that in a certain group of folksongs discourse universe develops in **reference point constructions**, and this notion forms a typological mark of folksongs. In reference point organisations *I* has a basic role as primary reference point. In the semantic construction of the text one entity is accessed from different reference points, and the closer the net, the more prominent is the entity at hand is. There are more complex chains of reference point constructions, which map a long and difficult route to an entity (mostly the lover) – in physical space and in the speaker’s mental dimension. The objects in succession outline a path, which is followed by the speaker constantly transferring his position of vantage point.

<p>(2) <i>Az én galambomnak dombon van a háza; Két keréken fordul csikorgós kapuja, Az ablakja alatt két szép koronafa, Kire a galambom neve van ráírva.</i></p> <p><i>Ha én madár volnék: oda fészket raknék, Ott minden hajnalban szépen énekelnék; Az én galambomnak elébe repülnék, Piros orcájára egypár csókot vinnék.</i></p>	<p><i>My dove has on the hill her house; On two wheels turns her gate, Under her window there are two nice crowntrees, On whom my dove’s name is written.</i></p> <p><i>Were I a bird: there I’d build a nest, There every dawn I’d sing nicely; I’d fly to meet my dove, On her cheek I’d put some kisses.</i> (Love songs: 22)</p>
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**Figure 1**

The reference point network of the first and second stanzas of song (2)



The reference point constructions forming a chain depict a way, while a nested-type of chains map the gradual access to a prominent entity. Similarly, the lack of connection between constructions also has analogical correspondences: it presents the break-up of the coherent unity of reality. Drawing attention via reference point constructions has a further objective: I call "inverse logic" a specific construal structure, where the causes of emotional states are first presented as natural processes, and only at a later stage are the real non-natural reasons revealed. The natural image itself may also function as a reference point, as it comes in a primary position before the emotional content; and there are semantic and associative

relations between the two; further, it is based on physical, often actual perception, while the emotional event is more abstract; finally, it is metaphorical.

The last chapter, the study of **mental spaces**, strongly relies on the previous chapters. The main mental spaces construed in folksongs are the following: Perceptual space is characterised by actual reality, mainly visual perception, and natural imagery; the Indirect space opens through apostrophe; Desire space may construe in various spaces; the Universal experience space presents natural processes and rules; the Personal state space shows longer states based on earlier experiences; finally, Natural and Non-natural space may also be distinguished. Defining mental spaces, as in the case of viewpoint, a definitive feature of the text type is **ambiguity**, which appears especially in the Perceptual space – Indirect present space, the Universal space – Perceptual space, the Possibility space – Anticipated future space, or the Perceptual space – Desire space terms. The possibility of interpreting different mental spaces as actual perception or vice versa emerges from different linguistic notions such as the ambiguity of grounding, the multiple function of Present Tense in Hungarian verbs, the dynamicity of viewpoint following the events, or the transparent link between mental spaces.

The embedding of one mental space to another has a typical construction form, namely, an element of an event construing in the Perceptual space opens a new event, mostly a desired one. The new space means establishing a distance between the speaker and the event of reference, but transparent transition from one space to the other reduces the distance. At the same time, regarding that the linking entity is perceptually accessible, desire becomes also more easily accessible, closer mentally to the discourse participants. As desire develops from actual reality, it appears as if it were integrated in reality.

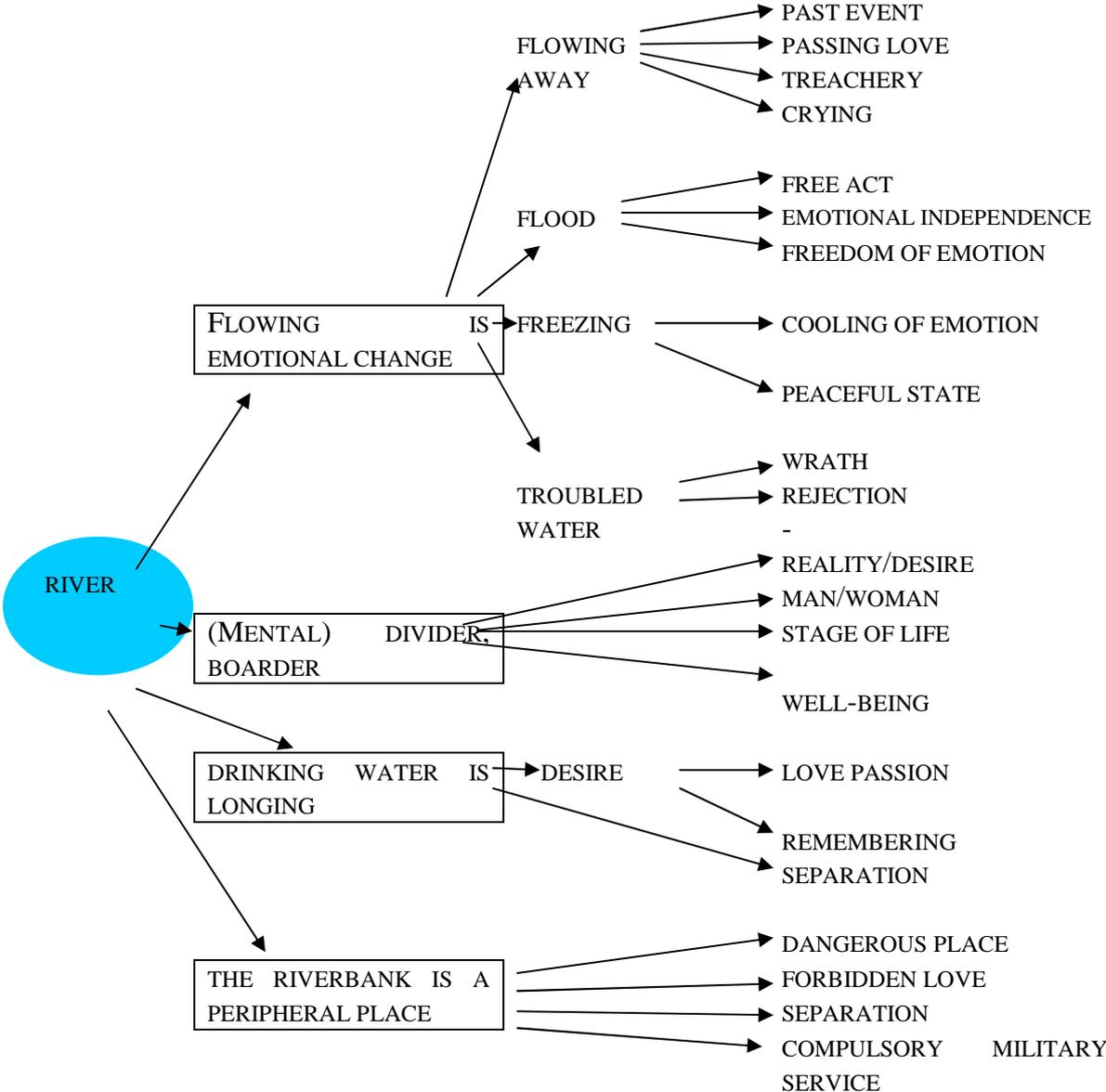
The above model focusing on some major cognitive notions is a framework of spatial semantic analysis, which can only be complete with a close research of **conceptual construal**. In the second section of the thesis the focus is on the analysis of four concepts of various kinds relating to nature, namely WOOD, RIVER, WIND, and CLOUD/CLOUDY SKY and relation in terms of **force dynamics**.

The concepts of dynamic and static nature do not provide a full view of the conceptual network of folksongs, however, they give an example of spatial semantic analysis. The questions concerning the profiling of a concept are: a) what are the semantic correlations of certain profiles; b) what other factors (attributes) take part in profiling; c) what contexts are these profiles situated in. The overall observation is that the profiles belonging to a concept assume an implicit conceptual matrix and such matrixes make up a complex conceptual network that defines folksongs specifically. There are correspondences among formal

features, attributes and semantic functions: e.g. the attribute *round* in the case of WOOD profiles it as a LOCATION and it expresses it is closed. In the metaphorical sense a closed space means separating a peace from the rest of the space for further functional purpose: thus it may become the location of a love scene. The main conceptual categories of WOOD is LOCATION, STRUCTURE and LIVING ORGANIZATION, and they share common sections as well.

The semantic function of RIVER may be approached through three portions of the entity: profiles are either connected to its spatial structure or its substantial element, i.e. water, or some event in linked to river. The RIVER, which has both static and dynamic features, implies the following semantic and metaphorical domains: FLOWING IS EMOTIONAL CHANGE, RIVER IS A MENTAL DIVIDER, BOARDER, DRINKING WATER IS LONGING, THE RIVERBANK IS A PERIPHERAL PLACE. These domains include further, more specific meanings.

**Figure 2**  
The reconstruction of the metaphorical profiles of the RIVER



The profile RIVER IS A (MENTAL) BOARDER construes in the event of going over the river, which metaphorically images a lad hesitating to pass a crucial milestone in his love relationship and making a decision to bind himself to marry her.

(3) *Mély a Tiszának a széle,  
De még mélyebb a közepe.  
Barna legény kerülgeti,  
Átal akar rajta menni.*

*Átal akar rajta menni  
Tearózsát szakítani.  
Tearózsa, ne illatozz!  
Reám, babám, ne várakozz!*

*Mert ha reám várakozol,  
Akkor meg nem házasodol.  
Gyenge vagy a házasságra,  
Nem illik a csók a szádra.*

*Deep is the side of Tisza,  
Yet even deeper its middle,  
A brown lad is going round it,  
He wants to go over it.*

*He wants to go over it  
To pluck a tea-rose.  
Tea-rose, don't smell so sweet!  
My darling, don't wait for me!*

*Because if you keep waiting for me,  
Then you will not get married.  
You are weak for marriage,  
A kiss doesn't suit your lips.  
(Love songs: 406)*

The event of GOING OVER presents the emotional complexity connected to the life stage: fear, risk, courage, anticipating potential danger and positive outcome. The event expresses the function of RIVER in space, time and mental dimensions.

The WIND is profiled as a natural resource mainly by its motions. The research shows that the direction of motion (horizontal or vertical) and its quality of moving objects (removing or shifting) have significant semantic differences and involve alternating contexts. Similarly, the CLOUD/CLOUDY SKY as images are characterised by different spatial properties in dimensional features and motions. Finally I studied the interaction among entities in terms of force balance between agonists and antagonists – in space as well as in respect of emotions. While some force entities tend to appear as agonists, some are more likely to present antagonist roles. However, the patterns of interaction are far more complex than a dual relationship: The case of love obstruction reveals that a number of other elements of an event weaken or strengthen the force entities.

### 3. Overview

The fundamental questions of the thesis viewed from a broader perspective draws the attention to what the general semantic function of natural image in Hungarian folksongs is. The metaphorical potential emerges from the idea that the conceptualizer steps out of the scene of everyday life and conveys his emotions to a natural scene. The mental processes appearing in nature develop in the relation of *I* and some entities of nature. The role of natural objects in the relation can be negative (obstruction), positive (helping) or balanced

(solidarity). Many natural entities are powerful resources and the act of placing the vantage point of the conceptualizer on an entity means extending his bounds of possibility. The natural events often present some determined processes, which map metaphorically either the anticipated outcome or the opposite of one's personal situation. Natural events in this respect are fundamental reference points for the conceptualizer, a basis for conclusions in the personal space.

To sum up the observations of the thesis, **the metaphorical potential of space** in folksongs manifest in some generic characteristics and correspondences.

- The structural and dynamic properties of physical space map mental processes; they develop in the relation of the conceptualizer and the referential scene and the spatial construal of conceptual entities in terms of their location, dimensional or motional etc. qualities and the interactions among them.
- Spatial representation frequently appears in an initial position of the stanza, thus putting a mark on the whole process of construal.
- The natural entities, which are construed in physical space, structure space: some objects confine (wood, hill, garden), some separate (river, ditch, mountain), or connect (road, plank, bird). The conceptual matrixes as well as the force dynamic interactions show that there are patterns relating the semantic function of conceptual entities and the representation of emotions.
- A fundamental spatial dichotomy is CLOSE–FAR whose referential centre is the origo marked by the location of the conceptualizer.
  - a) CLOSE refers to MENTAL PROXIMITY, achieved by proximal deixis, some definite nouns, or personal pronouns. The mental space construed close to the conceptualizer is Perceptual space.
  - b) FAR is related to desired events, or events of future or past, reflecting a MENTAL DISTANCE of the speaker. Some linguistic expressions and operations remove from the speaker, such as distal deixis, the chains of reference point constructions, indefinite nouns or ungrounded nouns. The mental spaces construed FAR are fictive ones: Indirect space, Desire space, Possible future space, or Irreality.
  - c) The fictive events construed FAR mostly represent desire, and the conceptualizer's attraction to them is represented in his approaching and connecting intention. The physical relation of CLOSE–FAR space is a perceptually visible object, thus the transition of the two spaces is transparent. A constant link to the objects in the far event is deixis and a permanent *I* reference point – either as a primary or a secondary RP. The function of approaching is fulfilled by reference point construction chains,

apostrophe, the employment of a mediator entity (e.g. bird), citation, or a temporary disposition of viewpoint.

Some further observations characterising construal:

- A certain group of folksongs is characterised by **ambiguity**, which means a high semantic potential. The linguistic notions that involve ambiguity are grounding, viewpoint construction, and also reference point construction and mental spaces.
- In the process of interpretation the linear construction is often reinterpreted retrospectively. This happens in the case of an event construed for a communal perspective and reinterpreted at a later stage from personal perspective. Another case is the so called reverse way of construction where the reason of an internal (emotional) process is pointed out first in an external (natural) event and then in the real internal cause.

The spatial semantic model outlined in the dissertation opens a new perspective of folksong analysis. The framework of cognitive linguistics allows understanding such basic construal operations which have so far been unknown in the descriptions of the text type. The results correlate with the lyric nature of folksongs, i.e. directness, procedural understanding, folklore characteristics, implicate conceptual network, and schematic profiling. Albeit a number of questions have been answered, the research is to be continued in the proposed direction. One crucial point of study is a close investigation of SPACE–TIME connection, or sketching the conceptual matrix of further entities. The spatial semantic description of folksongs should also be extended to more texts of folksongs and lyrics with different metaphors.

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