

Symbolic Act in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Cognitive-Semantic Study

Researcher

Athraa Hussein Jabbar AL-Fatlawi

athraah.alfatlawi@student.uokufa.edu.iq

Asst. Prof. Dr.

Hadi Mahdi Abu-Krooz Hasan

University of Kufa - College of Art

hassan.mahdi@uokufa.edu.iq

الفعل الرمزي في رواية "قلب الظلام" لجوزيف كونراد: دراسة معرفية - دلالية

الباحثة

عذراء حسين جبار الفتلاوي

الأستاذ المساعد الدكتور

حسن هادي مهدي أبو كروز

جامعة الكوفة - كلية الآداب

Abstract:-

Despite extensive analysis of Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad for its European colonialism critique there exists space to examine its postcolonial aspects through symbolic acts. The analysis crosses cognitive-semantic and postcolonial evaluation models to study symbolic acts within the novella. This investigation evaluates darkness, the Congo River and Kurtz character as cognitive tactics which challenge colonial beliefs and mental outcomes. This paper employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) together with Image Schema Theory (Johnson, 1987) to classify political cultural and social symbolic acts through their cognitive-semantic structures which demonstrate postcolonial implications. Darkness functions as a metaphorical representation of European African perceptions and imperialistic moral deterioration while the Congo River operates as a dualistic tool between colonial passage and European conquest and self-destruction as well as embodying Kurtz who stands for the certain burdens of total colonial power collapse. The paper indicates that Heart of Darkness demonstrates how imperialism showcases its cognitive-semantic breakdown in addition to dismantling the cultural opposition between civilisation and savagery. Postcolonial interpretation gains new depth through this paper which proves that cognitive-semantics produces better interpretations of colonial text by demonstrating language-power-thought relationships in writing.

Keywords: Heart of Darkness, symbolic acts, postcolonial criticism, cognitive-semantics, colonial discourse, Joseph Conrad

المخلص:-

على الرغم من التحليل المُستفيض لرواية "قلب الظلام" لجوزيف كونراد، والتي تتناول نقد الاستعمار الأوروبي، إلا أن هناك مجالاً لدراسة جوانبها ما بعد الاستعمارية من خلال الأفعال الرمزية. يجمع هذا التحليل بين نماذج التقييم المعرفية-الدلالية وما بعد الاستعمارية لدراسة الأفعال الرمزية داخل الرواية. تُقيم هذه الدراسة الظلام، ونهر الكونغو، وشخصية كورتز، باعتبارها تكتيكات معرفية تتحدى المعتقدات الاستعمارية والنتائج الذهنية. تستخدم هذه الورقة البحثية نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية (لاكوف وجونسون، ١٩٨٠) إلى جانب نظرية مخطط الصورة (جونسون، ١٩٨٧) لتصنيف الأفعال الرمزية السياسية والثقافية والاجتماعية من خلال بنيتها المعرفية-الدلالية التي تُظهر دلالات ما بعد الاستعمار. يعمل الظلام كتمثيل مجازي للتصورات الأوروبية الأفريقية والتدهور الأخلاقي الإمبريالي، بينما يعمل نهر الكونغو كأداة ثنائية بين العبور الاستعماري والغزو الأوروبي والتدمير الذاتي، كما يجسد شخصية كورتز الذي يمثل الأعباء الحتمية لانهايار السلطة الاستعمارية الكاملة. تُشير هذه الورقة البحثية إلى أن رواية "قلب الظلام" تجسّد كيف يُبرز الاستعمار انهياره المعرفي-الدلالي، بالإضافة إلى تفكيكه للنائية الثقافية بين الحضارة والوحشية. ويكتسب التفسير ما بعد الاستعماري عمقاً جديداً من خلال هذه الورقة، التي تُثبت أن الدلالات المعرفية تُنتج تفسيرات أفضل للنصوص الاستعمارية عبر توضيح علاقات اللغة والسلطة والفكر في الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قلب الظلام، الأفعال الرمزية، النقد ما بعد الاستعماري، الدلالات المعرفية، الخطاب الاستعماري، جوزيف كونراد.

Introduction:

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is often regarded as a profound critique of European colonialism in Africa. The novella, set in the late 19th century, follows the journey of Marlow, an English sailor, into the Congo River basin, where he encounters the brutal realities of colonial exploitation (Conrad, 1983). While much of the scholarship on *Heart of Darkness* has focused on its colonial themes, this paper seeks to explore the postcolonial symbolic acts within the novella through a cognitive semantic framework. Cognitive semantics, which examines the relationship between language, thought, and meaning (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 2), provides a useful tool for analyzing how Conrad's use of symbolic acts critiques the colonial project and its lingering effects.

A new approach to cultural analysis known as postcolonialism, which aims to analyze conflicts between various cultures, typically those between a colonial power and its corresponding colonized (Huang, 2017, p. 310). Edward Said (1994, p. 19) released *Orientalism* in the academic fields in 1978. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013, pp. 7-8), postcolonialism "is a way of reading and rereading the history, culture, and politics of colonised societies to understand the processes and effects of colonization". The word "post" suggests that colonial legacies and their effects have long since faded. It also demonstrates the impact of neocolonial histories, which continue to foster a colonial understanding of the world, and the exclusion of non-Western societies by Western knowledge and power structures. Postcolonial philosophy seeks to understand not only the world as it is but also its potential. It focuses on disparities in global wealth accumulation, power, and control over others. Postcolonialism challenges earlier strategies and provides fresh perspectives on historical and contemporary events since it poses issues like these (Vogel, 2012). Compared to earlier perspectives, postcolonialism provides a more direct understanding of significant concepts like power, authority, and security. For instance, the colonial world was forced to accept the idea of sovereignty and the modern state by European powers (Alhmdni & Sabeeh, 2022, p. 757).

The concept of symbolic action was first articulated by Kenneth Burke in 1957. Then, Clifford Geertz (1973a) popularized it. These

theorists sought to highlight the distinctive cultural nature of actions, emphasizing how they are irrational rather than logical, expressive rather than instrumental, and more akin to theatrical performance than commercial trade. (Alexander & Mast, 2006, p. 2)

This study argues that Conrad's symbolic acts, such as the representation of "darkness," the "Congo River", and the character of "Kurtz" serve as cognitive strategies that challenge colonial ideologies and expose the moral and psychological consequences of imperialism. By employing a cognitive semantic approach, this paper aims to uncover the deeper layers of meaning in Conrad's narrative, revealing how his symbolic acts function as a postcolonial critique.

Aim of the Study:

The purpose of this paper is to study Postcolonialism in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness using an eclectic model.

Models of Symbolic Act and Postcolonialism

Heart of Darkness gets analyzed through symbolic acts by utilizing an Eclectic Model which combines Cognitive Semantics and Postcolonial Criticism. The analysis employs the Conceptual Metaphor Theory from Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and Image Schema Theory from Johnson (1987) and Postcolonial Analysis from Said (1994) and Spivak (1999) to generate a sophisticated view of Joseph Conrad's novella's expression of colonial elements and their critiques.

Through this cognitive-semantic assessment, readers gain insight into how Conrad constructs colonial symbolism by analysing his language, which uses spatial and metaphorical elements to create colonial expressions. The unified framework enables a structured linguistic analysis of Heart of Darkness to join with cultural and ideological evaluation.

An analytical model with three stages explores Heart of Darkness's symbolic acts through the combination of Postcolonial Criticism and Cognitive Semantics for a complete reading.

1. The Symbolic Act Classification process marks the initial stage. The symbolic acts within the novella fall into political, cultural and social classifications.

2. The second stage of Cognitive-Semantic Analysis. Through the application of the Conceptual Metaphor Model (CMM) along with the Image Schema Model (ISM) researchers determine how symbolic acts get structured.
3. In the last stage of the analysis called Postcolonial Interpretation the study checks whether symbolic expressions uphold or fight against colonial ideologies.

The three stages of symbolic acts, cognitive structures and postcolonial critique function together through this model to create an organized interdisciplinary method for analyzing *Heart of Darkness*' colonial discourse.

Thus, the research is not intended to be an exhaustive postcolonial reading of Conrad's work but rather uses specific texts to illustrate how cognitive-semantic theories can inform our understanding of symbolic acts within a postcolonial framework. Consequently, the model could be diagrammed as:

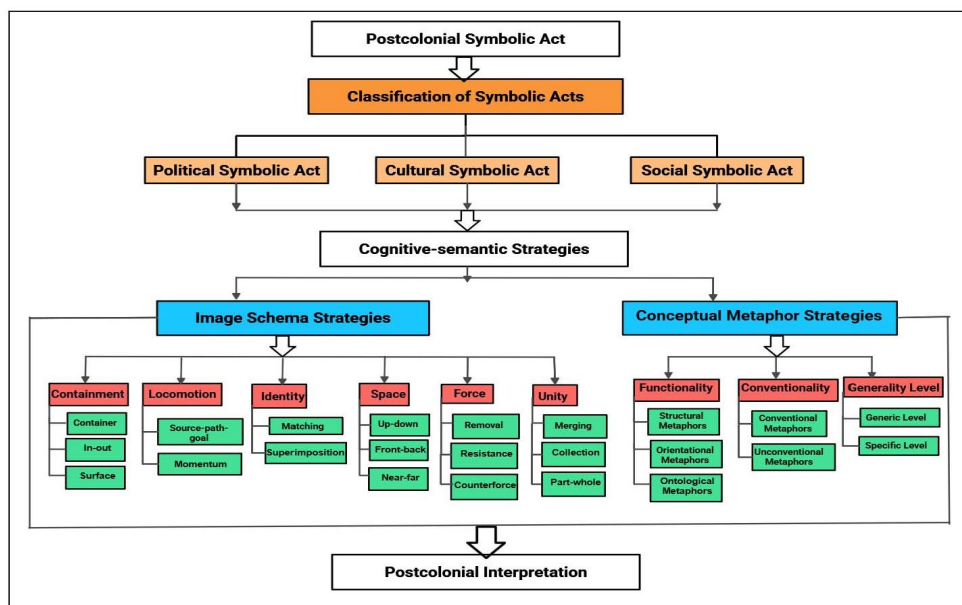


Figure (1) An Eclectic Model for the Cognitive-semantic Analysis of Postcolonial Symbolic Act (PcSA)

Postcolonial Symbolic Acts in Heart of Darkness:

The Symbolic Act of "Darkness":

Joseph Conrad employs **darkness** in Heart of Darkness as **multiple symbolic meanings** which operate in political and cultural and social dimensions. The absence of light serves as a profound metaphorical concept which sets the direction for all essential themes and conceptual elements in the novella. Through the **Eclectic Model**, this paper examines darkness as a symbolic act, which is analyzed from three linked stages that begin with **classification** and proceed to **cognitive-semantic analysis** before ending with **postcolonial interpretation**.

Through its **political symbolic act**, darkness functions as a metaphor which highlights **imperial deception** while displaying **colonial brutality** together with **European imperial corruption**. It reveals obscure colonial violence, which demonstrates how European expansion ended in spreading deeper repression along with violence instead of introducing enlightenment. The Eurocentric view of Africa, which the Cultural Symbolic Act of darkness represents, links African cultures to mysterious and primitive characteristics as well as the categories unrecognizable to European eyes.

The analysis of darkness as symbolic act becomes apparent through the study of Cognitive-Semantic Analysis, which examines both its linguistic and conceptual dimensions. The meaning of darkness develops through various Conceptual Metaphors (CMT), which provide structural elements to its definition. The **structural metaphor** "Darkness is Evil" establishes darkness as evil, promoting the colonial viewpoint that links Africa with barbarism and immorality. Through the **orientational metaphor** "Light is Civilization, Darkness is Barbarism" establishes false dualities, which assert their right to rule. The **ontological metaphor** "Darkness is a Force" demonstrates that darkness represents beyond just African characteristics because it proves to be a powerful force which completely destroys people who come in contact with it in a way that leads to their complete disintegration. Through its "Darkness is Ignorance" epistemic metaphor, Africa becomes represented as a domain that requires European oversight as well as the acquisition of their knowledge.

Through this moral metaphor "Darkness is Sin and Corruption" imperialism receives opposing evaluations and justification within a single ideological perspective.

The analysis through **Image Schema Analysis** (IST) identifies the ways Spatial and Cognitive schemas strengthen the understanding of darkness. According to the **Containment Schema** darkness presents itself as both confining and heavy which results in challenging escape attempts thus symbolizing an untouchable moral decay. The **Space Schema** characterizes Africa as a mysterious chaotic land which matches colonial ideas about unexplored territories. According to the **Locomotion Schema** which Marlow experiences during his journey depicts the **Source-Path-Goal** sequence because he undertakes a literal voyage yet also progresses towards the heart of imperial brutality. Through the **Force Schema** researchers observe how darkness directly affects Kurtz to create mental collapse and moral failure during his rapid deterioration. Through the **Unity Schema** the European colonial enterprise portrays itself as one unified objective that proves in reality fragmented and ethically corrupt.

According to **Postcolonial Interpretation** analysis, Conrad uses "darkness" at first to reinforce colonial ideology by associating it with Africa, savagery and ignorance. The novella proves the metaphor wrong by revealing the existence of darkness within the European imperialists. Darkness in the political context functions as an attack on imperial projects because they declare to deliver civilization yet extend violent wrongdoing and exploitative practices. European cultural discourses define Africa through the stereotype of darkness, but The Novella shows that European colonial powers impose darkness onto African territories, thus debunking colonial myths about the continent. Social and mental conditions turn the physical environment of darkness into moral degradation faced by colonial agents. The voyage of Marlow into Africa exposes his descent into the internal darkness of the human spirit as he witnesses the collapse of the European veneer due to its hypocritical nature.

A study of darkness in Heart of Darkness through the Eclectic Model demonstrates its multiple ambiguous significances. The narrative first presents colonial day-night divisions during its opening but establishes European moral rot as it develops later in the story.

Throughout Heart of Darkness, “**darkness**” serves as more than a simplistic colonial symbol for primitive states because it perfectly critiques both imperial rule and human evil and the unsafe condition of society. The use of symbolic elements, cognitive structures and ideological analysis creates a lasting symbol of contradiction, which belongs to the core of colonial discourse, according to Conrad's work. The Congo River as a Symbolic Act of Colonial Exploitation:

The Congo River as a Symbolic Act of Colonial Exploitation:

Another crucial symbolic element that Conrad employs in Heart of Darkness to assess colonialism exists through the representation of the Congo River. The **Congo River** in Heart of Darkness functions as a significant symbolic act which represents the **exploitation of colonization**. As unusual as natural landmarks could be, the Congo River objects as both imperial travel pathway and willful colonial deceit and mental effect of imperialistic desire. This analysis uses the Eclectic Model to examine the Congo River as a symbolic act by conducting three studies: **themed classification**, **cognitive-semantic analysis**, and **postcolonial interpretation**, which help explain how Conrad shows and criticizes imperial exploitation.

Through this **political symbolic act** the Congo River functions as an imperial path that allows European advancement into African territory. The river functions as the backbone for resource and enslaved labor transportation because it enables European transgression deep into Africa and provides a path for colonial establishment. The colonial expansion would not be possible because the Congo River grants entry into regions that typically remain inaccessible. Though the river allows European control, it demonstrates how the **imperial mission contains both destruction and violence** and shows how colonial power depends on forced movement together with total displacement and exploitation.

The river establishes itself as a **Cultural Symbolic Act** to create European stereotypes about Africa. The narrative shows the Congo River as an unpredictable entity and **ominous power** because these attributes assist in supporting the postcolonial European perspective of Africa as a **chaotic wild place**. To European imperialists the Congo River embodies an unknown powerful element which they feel obliges them to assert their dominance through control in a way that

reflects broader colonial ideas to establish European civilization in an area they mistakenly view as primitive. The space along the river serves as a cognitive-semantic symbolic act of **European defeat** because it shows Africa standing against colonial rule while both **empires rest on lies and fantasies**.

Socially the river operates as a **Symbolic Social Act** that demonstrates the **mental and spiritual consequences of colonial exploitation**. The river journey reveals itself as more than an **actual** navigation because it allows a person to **conceptualise metaphoric moral degradation**. The deeper Marlow penetrates into the interior region he drifts away from **European standards of order and civility** toward complete confrontation with imperial brutality. The water signifies an **ethical mirror** through which exploitative people can examine their **corruption** when they leverage the river as part of their control methods. The river serves as a metaphor, which guides the Europeans toward moral decline and leads Kurtz to a total collapse after his journey reaches its end.

The **symbolic construction of the Congo River** finds its semantic and conceptual basis through a **Cognitive-Semantic Analysis (CMT & IST)** of "The Heart of Darkness. Through the **structural metaphor** "The River is a Path to Power", the author uses waterways to demonstrate how fitness for power in Africa requires the mastery of native spaces. The **orientational metaphor** "Up the River" metaphorically represents imperial downfall although its symbolism depicts a downward descent that leads to dark frustrating territory. Through its **ontological metaphor** "The River is a Living Force" the text gives the river powers to actively oppose European control and demonstrate the **wild nature of colonial rule**.

The **Image Schema Analysis (IST)** presents the method by which **spatial and cognitive structures** drive interpretation of the Congo River beyond metaphors. In the **Source-Path-Goal Schema** the Congo functions as an **invasive medium** that transports European traders together with soldiers and mission preachers to deep African territories. The voyage differs fundamentally from standard journeys because it produces **madness** followed by **universal destruction** and **defeated ideals**. The river proves to be a trap according to the **Containment Schema** because it traps all travelers through their ongoing experience of greed and violence and

moral damage. During colonial times, African workers and resources were moved through forced displacement a phenomenon the **Locomotion Schema** represents thus showing how imperialism operated as an extractive system. Throughout the **Force Schema** the river emerges as a powerful vital force which Europeans fail to control because it represents both European colonial control and African resistance movements. Through its **Unity Schema** the text shows the pure hypocrisy of colonial missions by demonstrating that their promise of civilization and unity produces nothing but **chaos** and **destruction** alongside societal **division**.

Initially the Congo River appears in **Postcolonial Interpretation** to embody colonial theory because it shows itself as an untamed savage that requires control according to **colonial ideology**. Throughout the novella's development the Congo River develops into a representation of European imperial efforts which ended in failure. The political analysis reveals that attempts by colonisers to employ the river for power fail because the river's **unpredictable forces cause their downfall**. The river manifests culturally against colonial history by showing imperialists to be the **true origin of chaos and devastation not the indigenous people**. Through social symbolic act, the river shows how colonial officials experience mental falls into **moral breakdown** and **existential crisis** while pursuing power.

A study through the **Eclectic Model** demonstrates that the **Congo River** serves as both real geography and metaphor to express colonial exploitation. This waterway functions as both an **avenue for imperial invasion** yet demonstrates how it fights against **imperial thinking**. From the beginning, the river seems devoted to **imperial objectives** but later displays its inability to achieve these goals by highlighting both the inconsistencies of colonial administration and the ethical failure of European colonial leaders. The domain of the **Congo River** moves beyond straightforward civilization advancement through linear development because it loops as a natural element which signifies the **inevitable collapse of colonial administration**. European characters travel further into self-serving wickedness instead of experiencing intellectual advancements after they encounter the river.

The **Congo River** uses its **intricate cognitive** and **symbolic systems** to reveal the genuine facts of **imperial powers** which

amount to only lies combined with complete obliteration and absolute collapse. Conrad demonstrates through his novella that genuine “**darkness**” exists exclusively in the human hearts of people pursuing African exploitation.

Kurtz as a Symbolic Act of Colonial Corruption:

In Heart of Darkness the character Kurtz functions as a **powerful symbolic act to represent the corrupt brutality and greedy** mental decline that imperial European dominance produced. The having of his identity shift from European civilization agent to power-addicted corrupt man demonstrates how colonial rule carried multiple opposing components. This investigation of Kurtz’s symbolic status uses the Eclectic Model to study his role through **three fundamental analytical stages** which begin with classification and continue into cognitive-semantic analysis before reaching postcolonial interpretation.

The **Political Symbolic Act interpretation** depicts Kurtz as an embodiment of freedom provided by imperial power that allows its agents to exercise limitless authority. The mission sent him to Africa for **enlightenment purposes** resulted in his embrace of brutal conduct which European colonizers denounced. The colonial system allows corruption to thrive because Kurtz adopts an ivory obsession while giving himself divine power to the native population and engaging in immoral conduct in pursuit of unlimited control. The imperial system produces Kurtz as a **natural outcome since it functions by means of exploitation and violent practices**.

As a **cultural symbolic act**, Kurtz represents the collapse of colonial efforts to spread culture while demonstrating European dishonesty about their moral authority. During his barbaric evolution Kurtz demonstrates how colonising agents lose themselves to **brutal actions** which surpass colonized savage tendencies thus breaking down the coloniser-colonised split. Through Kurtz the novella shows how colonial greed eats away at European colonial people to the extent where they become parallels to African savagery. Native people in Africa worship him as a God which demonstrates that traditional views about colonial narratives reverse since he accepted the violent “**savage**” practices **he was sent to terminate**.

Socially, Kurtz's physical and psychological deterioration represents the **breakdown of identity, morality, and reason in the face of absolute power**. He is a man who has been completely unrestrained by the checks of European society, and as a result, he **descends into madness and self-destruction**. His final words, "The horror! The horror!", reveal his ultimate realization that colonial conquest is not about progress but about exploitation, suffering, and moral decay. He recognizes too late that **his own corruption is a direct result of the imperial ideology he once championed**.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) with Image Schema Theory (IST) deliver a **Cognitive-Semantic Analysis** of Kurtz's character that shows the construction of his ruin. Different important metaphors illuminate Kurtz's symbolic way of representation. Through the **Structural Metaphor**, the metaphorical connection between **colonialism** and **disease**, presents Kurtz as representing the essence of **imperial corruption** and **ethical corruption** that afflicts both **individuals** and **global systems**. Similarly, the **Oriental Metaphor** "Power is Ascent, Corruption is Descent" reflects how Kurtz's rise to absolute authority coincides with his **moral and mental downfall**. Through the **Ontological Metaphor** "Kurtz is a Hollow Man" we see his transformation into a character who lost his moral values and now **devotes himself fully to illusions of greatness**. The novella presents "Greed is Madness" as a metaphor to illustrate how Kurtz's excessive craving for **ivory** and **power** leads him toward **lunatic behavior**. Kurtz's demise exposes the fundamental truth about colonial conquest, which **reveals authentic features such as destructive violence and self-annihilation**.

Image Schema Analysis (IST) provides additional explanations about the **spatial and cognitive pathways** through which Kurtz transforms into corruption. Kurtz shuts himself off from the European influences while deep in Africa according to the **Containment Schema** as he deteriorates into a savage monster. Underneath his dictatorial regime over the native population lies the **Force Schema** which demonstrates how unrestricted power inevitably drives toward complete corruption. During his African expedition Marlow's final goal corresponds with the **Locomotion Schema** that brings him to Kurtz who represents imperial corruption combined with insanity. According

to the **Unity Schema** European unity and civilized order emerges as an illusion because colonialism generates disorder and devastation instead of stability. According to the **Image Schema analysis**, uncontrolled power possesses by Kurtz results in both **ethical degradation** and **mental instability**.

The **postcolonial interpretation** transforms Kurtz into a symbolic representation that criticizes the complete colonial system in Heart of Darkness beyond his individual characteristics. **Politically**, he uncovers the failed European governing system, which promotes institutional corruption while dehumanising natives instead of providing any meaningful benefit. The imperial system grants its highest ranks to people who choose to compromise their moral values and make complete power their sole priority. Through his altered behavior, he destroys the traditional belief that Europeans rule the world. The civilized European leaders pretend to spread enlightenment, yet their most enlightened representative Kurtz reveals himself as a barbaric leader who commits ritualistic violence along with going insane. His character demonstrates how the Europeans have maintained false distinctions between “**civilization** and **savagery**” since their true **barbarism** exists within themselves.

Through his **social symbolic act**, Kurtz reveals how greed during colonial times leads to the mental disintegration of people. His affairs with the natives would not have happened without European social limits because unregulated power causes his moral destruction. His famous last words, "The horror! The horror! The horror!" reveals his acknowledgment that his descent into immorality matches the atrocities which colonialism released throughout the world.

Through the **Eclectic Model** Kurtz shows how his role as **colonial leader** results in **corruption**, which ultimately destroys him. The novella presents Kurtz as a metaphor for **imperial conquest failure** because his obsession with dominance leads him to a destructive end caused by his own hubris. Kurtz unveils corruption inherent to the European imperial campaign instead of representing **European enlightenment** during colonial times.

By employing the **Eclectic Model**, one can identify Kurtz as an emblem of colonial corruption, which displays how basic imperial

systems inherently incorporate destructive power dynamics. The character represents more than **individual corruption** as he embodies the general outcomes that result from European conquest. Through the novella, readers see how the "**civilizing mission**" functions at its core by generating **madness** and **violence** that lead to **devastating self-destruction**.

Findings

Research shows how Heart of Darkness utilises symbolic acts when analysing the criticism of colonialism. The study unveils three key symbolic acts that undermine colonial concepts: darkness, the Congo River, and Kurtz.

1. Several levels of symbolic meaning emerge from the study of "**darkness**" which impact both **politics**, **culture** and **social** environment. The political aspect stands for European colonial methods of exploitation and abuse of power. In cultural terms, the stereotype of colonialism remains intact, but this narrative reveals dangerous aspects of European imperialist behaviour. Socially, it represents the psychological destruction as well as moral decline which presents through the internal corruption of colonial agents.
2. Research indicates that the "**Congo River**" functions as an important symbolic act of the dominant European imperial economic practices in Africa. The river functions as the main passage for imperial growth yet maintains an impression of Europe's supreme power. Through semantic interpretation the author demonstrates how the river gives itself free reign to defy colonial control since this points to both the unattainable nature of conquest and the internal disorder that permeates colonial goals.
3. Through "**Kurtz**" the study demonstrates that he represents the final expression of imperial corruption. Unchecked power creates moral degradation that leads a European agent to develop into a heartless dictator. His final words, "The horror! Through these last words the protagonist reveals the dark truth behind colonial expansion which stems from violence as well as self-annihilation and greed.

Through analysis, researchers concluded that the symbolic events in Conrad's works attack traditional colonial writings to expose inconsistent aspects and rule failures of imperialism. The novella uses **cognitive frameworks** alongside its **postcolonial perspective** to dismantle imperial ideology therefore making Heart of Darkness remain relevant regarding power structures and civilization decay throughout history.

Conclusion:

This study illustrates that Joseph Conrad utilises symbolic acts as cognitive strategies to criticize colonialism while uncovering its effects on psychological patterns and moral decay. Through an analysis based on the Eclectic Model that combines **Cognitive Semantics** and **Postcolonial Criticism**, this study shows how Conrad deploys “**darkness**” and the “**Congo River**” alongside “**Kurtz**” to expose colonial contradictions in both representations.

Darkness operates as a political, cultural and social symbolic act, which first promotes colonial dualities before revealing European imperialists' ethical collapse. The **Congo River** demonstrates literal and metaphorical exploitation, which exposes both the collapsed imperial control and the fake objectives of the civilizing mission. Through **Kurtz**, colonialists become corrupt, which shows that imperialism leads all supporters to inevitable extremism and monstrous behaviour. His final words, “The horror! The horror!” encapsulate the fact that colonial expansion produces more destruction than advancement.

This research uses cognitive-semantic analysis within postcolonial theory to deliver an in-depth examination of Conrad's symbolic acts, which show how Heart of Darkness attacks colonial ideas. This work exists for readers to experience how civilizations remain vulnerable under imperial control and what harm imperial rule accomplishes. The symbolic acts in Conrad's work represent colonial exploitation and serve to push readers toward reconsidering both the ethical and cognitive aspects of imperial motivation, thus making the work a foundation of anti-authoritarian critique of power dynamics.

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