



THE ARTISTIC FORMATION AND LINGUOCULTURAL ESSENCE OF THE “STEPMOTHER” IMAGE

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the artistic formation and linguocultural essence of the “stepmother” image in world literature and folklore. The study examines historical, social, and cultural factors that contributed to the emergence of this archetype, as well as its transformation in modern literary discourse. Special attention is given to the linguistic representation of the stepmother figure and its reflection in phraseological units, metaphors, and cultural narratives. The findings demonstrate that the stepmother image functions as both a universal and culturally specific phenomenon, deeply embedded in collective consciousness and language.

Keywords: Stepmother archetype, linguocultural studies, folklore, literary imagery, cultural semantics, narrative symbolism, family discourse.

Introduction

The institution of family has always been central to human society, and literary representations of family members reflect deep cultural values and social dynamics. Among these representations, the image of the stepmother stands out as one of the most complex and controversial figures. Traditionally associated with negativity, this image has been shaped by centuries of storytelling, particularly within folklore traditions.

The relevance of this research lies in the growing interest in linguocultural studies, which seek to understand how language and culture interact in shaping meaning. By examining the stepmother image through both literary and linguistic lenses, this article aims to uncover the deeper cultural codes embedded in this archetype.

The objectives of the study are:



- to analyze the historical and artistic development of the stepmother image,
- to identify its key symbolic features in literature,
- to explore its linguocultural representation in different languages and cultures.

The study of archetypal characters has long been a focus of literary criticism and cultural studies. Researchers have emphasized that recurring figures such as the stepmother are not merely fictional constructs but reflections of collective psychological and social realities.

Folklorists have extensively documented the negative portrayal of stepmothers in fairy tales, where they often function as antagonists. At the same time, linguists have explored how such images are encoded in language through idioms, proverbs, and semantic associations.

Recent studies in linguoculturology highlight the importance of analyzing literary images as cultural signs. These studies argue that language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a repository of cultural knowledge, shaping and preserving stereotypes and values.

This research employs a qualitative approach, combining literary analysis with linguocultural methods. The primary materials include:

- folklore texts (fairy tales, myths, legends),
- classical literary works,
- modern narratives,
- linguistic data such as idioms, proverbs, and metaphorical expressions.

The methods used in the study include:

- comparative analysis,
- semantic analysis,
- contextual interpretation,
- linguocultural analysis.

The emergence of the stepmother image is closely linked to historical family structures. In pre-modern societies, high mortality rates often led to remarriages, resulting in blended families. These family arrangements sometimes created emotional and economic tensions, which were later reflected in oral storytelling traditions.

The stepmother became a symbolic representation of “the outsider within the family,” embodying fears of displacement, inequality, and lack of maternal affection. Over



time, these social anxieties were transformed into narrative motifs, reinforcing the negative stereotype.

In folklore, the stepmother is frequently depicted as cruel, envious, and unjust. She often opposes the protagonist, typically a child or young heroine, creating conflict that drives the narrative forward. This pattern can be observed across different cultures, indicating the universality of the archetype.

From an artistic perspective, the stepmother serves several narrative functions:

- as an antagonist creating conflict,
- as a catalyst for the protagonist's growth,
- as a moral contrast to the idealized "good mother."

In classical literature, this image is further developed through psychological and symbolic depth. Authors use the stepmother figure to explore themes such as power, jealousy, identity, and social hierarchy.

The linguocultural dimension of the stepmother image reveals how deeply it is embedded in language. In many languages, the word "stepmother" carries implicit negative connotations, shaped by centuries of cultural narratives.

Phraseological units often reinforce this perception. For instance:

- proverbs may associate stepmothers with injustice or lack of care,
- metaphors may use the stepmother figure to describe harsh or unfair situations,
- idiomatic expressions may reflect distrust or emotional distance.

These linguistic patterns demonstrate that the stepmother is not only a literary character but also a cultural symbol encoded in everyday language.

Although the negative portrayal of stepmothers is widespread, it is not universal. In some cultures, stepmothers are depicted more positively, emphasizing nurturing and responsibility. This variation suggests that the image is shaped by specific cultural values and social norms.

Comparative analysis shows that:

- Western folklore tends to emphasize conflict and cruelty,
- Eastern traditions may present more balanced or neutral representations,
- modern global literature increasingly challenges traditional stereotypes.

Contemporary literature has begun to reinterpret the stepmother image, moving away from one-dimensional portrayals. Modern authors often depict stepmothers as complex individuals with their own motivations, struggles, and emotional experiences.



This transformation reflects broader social changes, including:

- evolving family structures,
- increased acceptance of blended families,
- shifting gender roles and expectations.

As a result, the stepmother is no longer seen solely as a negative figure but as a multidimensional character capable of empathy and growth.

The enduring presence of the stepmother archetype highlights its significance in both literature and culture. It functions as a narrative device that allows authors to explore conflict, morality, and identity.

From a linguocultural perspective, the persistence of negative connotations demonstrates the power of language in shaping perception. Even as literature evolves, linguistic expressions may continue to reflect older cultural attitudes, creating a dynamic tension between tradition and modernity.

In conclusion, the image of the stepmother represents a rich intersection of literature, culture, and language. Its artistic formation is deeply rooted in historical and social realities, while its linguocultural essence reflects collective attitudes and values.

Although traditionally portrayed negatively, the stepmother image is undergoing significant transformation in contemporary discourse. This evolution highlights the adaptability of cultural symbols and the role of language in both preserving and reshaping meaning.

Future research may focus on empirical linguistic data, corpus analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches to further explore the changing nature of this archetype.

References

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