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DISCOURSE DYNAMICS OF CONCEPTS IN A WAR NARRATIVE: A COGNITIVE-NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DANIEL KRAUS'S *ANGEL DOWN*

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Abstract

This study investigates the discourse dynamics of key concepts in the narrative through a corpus-based analysis of Daniel Kraus's *Angels Down*, an immersive, cinematic novel about five World War I the soldiers who stumble upon a fallen angel that could hold the key to ending the war. Focusing on concepts such as WAR, SOLDIER, DEATH, FEAR, CAMP, and HOME, the research examines how lexical frequency, collocational patterns, and contextual distribution reflect the actualization and interpretation of meaning across the text. The corpus was segmented according to Voyant Tools platform, allowing both absolute and relative frequency measures to be calculated for each segment. Contextual analysis using KWIC, collocates, and other Voyant Tools instruments enabled identification of key concepts and analysis of their discourse dynamics through narrative functions and interpretation. Findings indicate that key concepts are highly dynamic, with their prominence and meaning varying according to narrative position and formal features such as sentence length and paragraph segmentation. The extended, looping sentences maintain the continuous activation of WAR and DEATH concepts, creating cumulative semantic intensity and reflecting psychological and emotional dimensions of the narrative. Paragraph breaks, while visually dividing the text, do not reset conceptual focus, allowing concepts to accumulate and interact with contextual elements, producing nuanced interpretations. These results support the hypothesis that conceptual units in narrative discourse are context-dependent and dynamically modulated by formal textual features. The study demonstrates the value of integrating quantitative corpus methods with qualitative interpretive analysis, providing a model for examining the interplay between narrative form and conceptual meaning. Implications extend to cognitive-narratological research, highlighting how textual structure, plot progression, and changes in narrative focus, can actively shape concept realization, salience, and semantic framing.

Keywords: *cognitive linguistics, cognitive discourse analysis, cognitive narratology, corpus analysis, discourse dynamics of concepts, concept of WAR, narrative structure, Voyant Tools, frequency analysis, interpretation of concepts.*

1. Introduction

This article argues that discourse dynamics of concepts is a fundamental mechanism through which conceptual meaning is actualized, negotiated, and transformed in a narrative. In contemporary linguistic research, increasing attention is given to the study of meaning as a dynamic phenomenon and cognitive process rather than as a fixed semantic structure (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999; Lakoff, 1987; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Herman, 2009; Fludernik, 1996). Concepts are understood as flexible mental models that emerge and transform through interaction with linguistic, contextual, and narrative structures. While previous studies have examined conceptual representation in discourse or narrative individually and primarily within a philosophical or psychological framework (Peacocke, 1992; Prinz, 2006; Murphy, 2002; Laurence & Margolis, 1999), this study builds on them by combining discourse-dynamic analysis with cognitive-narratological methods (Alber & Wenzel, 2021; Herman, 2001; Ryan, 2010; Hühn et al., 2009), tracing how key concepts are realized, altered, and modified across the narrative of Daniel Kraus's *Angel Down*. This approach is relevant for literary texts, and war narratives in particular, as they involve extreme human experience, emotional intensity, and moral reflection, all expressed through evolving conceptual structures.

This study adopts a cognitive linguistic perspective as its methodological foundation, which enables a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of meaning as a linguistic phenomenon situated at the intersection of philosophical and psychological inquiry (Lakoff, 1987; Evans & Green, 2006; Geeraerts, 2010), and shaped by the cognitive schematization of experience as it is structured in narrative (Melnychuk, 2023). In our view, the full realization of this dynamicity, however, becomes most evident in discourse, where meaning unfolds in context and through narrator ↔ reader interaction (Bekhta, 2004; Bekhta & Melnychuk, 2021). In this regard, a cognitive-narratological perspective proves particularly productive, as it captures the multi-layered or polyphonic organization of narrative, including the interplay of narrative levels within which meaning emerges, is reframed, and undergoes continuous transformation (Palmer, 2004; Semino, 1997; Stockwell, 2002). Moreover, the dynamics of conceptualization are closely tied to narrative eventfulness or plot progression and the representation of characters' psychological states (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001, p. 12-13), which function as key triggers for shifts in meaning across the plot. It is through these event-driven and cognitively salient moments that concepts are realized, foregrounded, and converted, revealing their dynamic, context-dependent, and experientially grounded nature.

Focusing on the discourse dynamics of key concepts in a contemporary war narrative, the article examines how such concepts develop, evolve, and transform across the narrative trajectory. In literary representations of war, conceptual entities rarely remain static; rather, they are continually reshaped in relation to unfolding events, shifts in perspective, and the reader's cognitive participation. This dynamic evolution of conceptual meaning constitutes a crucial dimension of the narrative representation of traumatic experiences and human resilience across the narrative of Daniel Kraus's *Angels Down*.

The theoretical framework of the study draws upon several intersecting scholarly traditions, including cognitive linguistics, cognitive discourse analysis, and cognitive narratology. Together, these approaches make it possible to examine conceptual meaning as a dynamic phenomenon that emerges through interaction between linguistic structures, narrative organization, and the cognitive activity of the reader. Thus, the present study approaches the literary text as discourse and examines how concepts are dynamically represented in narrative development. Within cognitive linguistics, language is viewed as reflecting underlying concepts or conceptual structures (Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 2001; Evans & Green, 2006). From a cognitive-discourse perspective, discourse provides access to cognitive models that shape the interpretation of events and experiences (van Dijk, 1980; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Werth, 1999; Palmer, 2004). At the same time, cognitive narratology emphasizes that narratives organize and structure human experience through evolving representations of events, perspectives, and meanings (Herman, 2009; Fludernik, 1996; Hühn et al., 2009). Combining these perspectives makes it possible to trace the discourse dynamics of concepts in

narrative texts, revealing how key concepts (which may be also conceptual domains) are linguistically realized and transformed across different segments of the narrative.

In cognitive linguistics, concepts are understood as mental structures that organize human experience, knowledge, and perception of the world. Rather than treating meaning as a fixed property of linguistic forms, this approach views meaning as emerging from ongoing processes of categorization and conceptualization. According to Lakoff (1987), conceptual systems are structured through cognitive models that guide how individuals interpret experience: “The idea of a category is central to such views. The reason is that most symbols (i.e., words and mental representations) do not designate particular things or individuals in the world. Most of our words and concepts designate categories” (p. xiii). Similarly, Langacker (2001), in the framework of *cognitive grammar*, argues that meaning arises through processes of conceptualization, whereby linguistic forms evoke mental images and cognitive schemas: “Cognitive Grammar claim that constituency is nonessential and variable can now be seen as pertaining to one side of a coin, the other side of which is discourse: how conceptual structures are packaged and presented in a discourse is itself a major factor in determining constituency” (p. 185). Meaning is therefore inherently dynamic, depending on the interaction between linguistic structure, context, and the interpreter’s cognitive perspective.

This dynamic perspective is further elaborated by the theory of mental spaces and conceptual blending developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). In this framework, meaning emerges through the integration of multiple mental spaces constructed during discourse interpretation, which combine background knowledge, imagined scenarios, and contextual information: “Mental spaces are very partial. They contain elements and are typically structured by frames. They are interconnected, and can be modified as thought and discourse unfold. Mental spaces can be used generally to model dynamic mappings in thought and language” (p. 40). Conceptual blending generates new meanings that are not explicitly present in the linguistic input. This mechanism is particularly relevant in literary interpretation, where readers integrate narrative events, symbolic imagery, and emotional experiences into coherent cognitive models of fictional worlds.

Recent research further highlights the context-dependent and usage-based nature of conceptual meaning. Evans and Green (2006) demonstrates that language activates complex networks of interconnected conceptual representations, interacting with contextual knowledge and experiential schemas during interpretation: “However, cognitive semanticists argue that the conventional meaning associated with a particular word is just a ‘prompt’ for the process of meaning construction: the ‘selection’ of an appropriate interpretation against the context of the utterance” (p. 162). Similarly, Geeraerts (2010) emphasizes that conceptual categories are prototype-based and variable across contexts and cultural frameworks, showing that patterns of usage, discourse conventions, and sociocultural experience shape conceptual meaning.

In addition, Dąbrowska (2023) highlights the experiential and usage-based emergence of conceptual structures, which evolve through interaction with language and discourse. Complementing this perspective, research in embodied cognition by Bergen (2012) demonstrates that comprehension involves mental simulation of sensory and emotional experiences. Cowley (2012) argues that language should be understood not merely as a system representing pre-encoded meanings, but as an activity through which meaning emerges in specific social and experiential contexts. From this perspective, utterances dynamically construct meaning through interaction and cognitive activity rather than transmitting fixed content.

When readers process narrative texts, they construct cognitive representations that simulate events, actions, and emotional states described in the narrative, further illustrating the dynamic and situated nature of meaning. Together, these perspectives present concepts as flexible cognitive configurations that continuously develop and adapt in response to linguistic, narrative, and contextual factors. In literary discourse, this dynamic quality becomes particularly evident as narrative structures progressively shape and transform conceptual meanings through the unfolding of events and the interaction between the narrator, characters, and a reader.

While cognitive linguistics highlights the mental representation of meaning, the cognitive-discourse perspective emphasises the role of discourse as a medium through which knowledge and conceptualizations are organized, expressed, and interpreted in interaction with context, socio-cognitive frameworks, and readers' interpretative strategies (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Werth, 1999; Palmer, 2004; Short, 1996). Within this perspective, literary text can be approached as a form of discourse that reflects underlying conceptual and cognitive processes. Cognitive discourse analysis provides a methodological framework for examining how the narrator's thoughts and conceptualizations are encoded in linguistic structures. The approach assumes that linguistic choices systematically relate to cognitive structures and processes; therefore, the analysis of discourse makes it possible to reconstruct patterns of conceptualization and interpretation reflected in language use (Tenbrink, 2020; Semino, 1997; Toolan, 2001). This perspective highlights that meaning emerges from ongoing engagement with context, socio-cognitive frameworks, and interpretative strategies that readers bring to texts (Zunshine, 2006; Culpeper, 2001). Further contributions come from Köhler, Altmann, & Piotrowski (2005), Köhler (1986) and Dancygier (2012), whose works demonstrate how conceptual structures, metaphorical patterns, and narrative schemas guide the interpretation and organization of discourse. Potter (1996) emphasizes the social-cognitive dimension of discourse, showing how meaning is co-constructed and negotiated in interactional contexts. In addition, textual and contextual factors shape interpretative possibilities and narrative meaning, demonstrating that the discourse of the narrator is not a fixed representation but an active, evolving function within the narrative structure (Bekhta, 2004). Similarly, Halliday (1994), in systemic functional linguistics, highlights that the linguistic structures acquire significance only in relation to communicative and social contexts and through the metafunctional organization of language as a resource for meaning-making.

Recent research in cognitive and discourse studies increasingly treats meaning as a dynamic, context-dependent process rather than a static semantic property (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2015; Schleifer, 2018; Hilper, 2025). These contemporary approaches emphasize that conceptual meaning evolves continuously in interaction with contextual, cognitive, and interactive factors.

For the analysis of literary discourse, insights from cognitive narratology are particularly important. According to Herman (2009), narrative structures organize information in ways that enable readers to construct detailed mental models of events, actions, and characters. These models provide the framework through which readers integrate incoming narrative information, track causality, and interpret the intentions and emotions of characters. Similarly, Fludernik (1996) emphasizes that narratives represent human experience through cognitive and perceptual schemas, highlighting the interplay between textual structure and the reader's knowledge, expectations, and interpretative strategies.

Additional insights are provided by Ryan (2006), who explores how cognitive structures guide reader interaction with narrative and Anderson (2013), who focuses on how narrative events and scenes are organized through conceptual schemas. Zunshine (2006) examines how narrative ambiguity and focalization activate a reader's theory-of-mind processes, while Bordwell (1985) demonstrates how attention, perspective, and cognitive expectations shape comprehension. Moreover, Herman and Vervaeck (2001) emphasize the integration of discourse, perspective, and mental models, showing how narrative comprehension relies on the continuous interaction of textual structures and reader cognition: "Ever since reception aesthetics, the reader has been integrated into narratology in many different ways, especially in the context of the cognitive paradigm" (p. 162).

Further contributions come from the phenomenological and reception-oriented traditions. The phenomenological theory of the literary work proposed by Ingarden (1973) and the reception theory of Iser (1978) stress the active role of the reader in constructing meaning. Ingarden (1973) focuses on the stratified structure of the literary text and how readers co-construct its ontological layers: "By virtue of the dual stratum of its language, the work is both inter-subjectively accessible and

reproducible, so that it becomes an inter-subjective intentional object, related to a community of readers” (p. 14). Iser (1978) highlights the role of textual indeterminacy and gaps that require interpretative engagement.

Together, these approaches underline that conceptual meaning in literature emerges progressively during reading, shaped by the interaction between textual cues, narrative organization, and cognitive activity. Integrating these insights allows us to view literary discourse as a *dynamic system*, in which the concepts or conceptual structures are not only encoded in language but also activated, negotiated, and changed through reader interpretative engagement. This theoretical combination provides the foundation for analyzing how key concepts are linguistically realized and dynamically modulated across narrative segments, forming the basis for a cognitive-narratological analysis of the novel.

The aim of this article is to analyze the discourse dynamics of key concepts in a war narrative through a cognitive-narratological perspective. **The objectives** of the study are threefold: (1) to identify the key concepts structuring the narrative world of the novel; (2) to trace the discourse dynamics of key concepts throughout their target lexical markers; (3) to determine how narrative structure shapes the interpretation of key concepts.

The subject-matter of the research is the discourse dynamics of key concepts in literary narrative. **The material** of the study consists of target lexical units (*war, soldier, death, fear, camp, and home*), which serve as indicators of key concepts in the narrative. These lexical items were analyzed in the context of the Daniel Kraus’s war novel *Angel Down* (Kraus, 2025), which functions as a segmented corpus for tracing their frequency, contextual distribution, and discourse dynamics.

The study is grounded in the **hypothesis** that conceptual units in discourse are inherently dynamic and can be empirically examined through variations in their frequency and contextual distribution across a segmented corpus. This hypothesis directly links the theoretical assumption of conceptual dynamism with the operationalized measures employed in the analysis.

2. Method

In accordance with the methodology of cognitive linguistics, meaning is viewed as a dynamic conceptual structure that is actualized in discourse and can be empirically examined through its linguistic manifestations. Within this framework, particular emphasis is placed on the assumption that meaning is operationalizable and, therefore, can be investigated through measurable parameters, such as frequency and contextual variation. This perspective aligns with the model of meaning proposed by Evans and Green (2006), in which meaning is understood as emerging from the interaction between lexical units, cognitive models, and the contexts of their activation. Importantly, in the present study, context is conceptualized as the narrative itself, which structures the plot and gives rise to its corresponding dynamics, thereby shaping the distribution and semantic realization of concepts.

The study was conducted to examine the discourse dynamics of key concepts in the novel *Angel Down*, which was treated as a corpus for the purposes of analysis. The main variables investigated through corpus-based methods were the frequency and contextual distribution of selected lexical items, including *war, soldier, death, fear, camp, and home*. The selection of target lexical items was theoretically motivated, as these lexemes represent key concepts structuring the narrative of war, including conflict, agency, mortality, emotion, spatial experience, and belonging. They were also chosen due to their frequency and contextual variability in the text, which makes them suitable for tracing discourse dynamics and conceptual transformation across the narrative.

Conceptually, frequency was defined both in absolute terms (i.e., the raw number of occurrences of a lexical item within each text segment) and in relative terms (i.e., its normalized proportion in relation to the total number of words in the segment). Contextual distribution was understood as the pattern of co-occurring words and the semantic fields surrounding each target item, providing insight into its discourse functions and conceptual associations.

Operationally, these measures were extracted using the Voyant Tools platform, including the *Cirrus* and *Corpus Terms* panels for frequency analysis, as well as the *Collocates* and *Contexts (KWIC)* tools for examining patterns of co-occurrence and contextual usage.

For the purposes of diachronic analysis, the corpus was segmented into discrete text blocks, enabling the identification of trends in conceptual development across the unfolding of the story. Each occurrence of the target lexemes was systematically identified, and both absolute and relative frequencies were calculated. In parallel, contextual patterns were analyzed to determine the semantic, thematic, and narrative roles of the lexemes as they function within the discourse.

The study adopts a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach, integrating statistical patterns with interpretive analysis in order to capture both the measurable distribution of lexical items and their evolving conceptual significance within the narrative structure.

3. Findings and results

The identification of key concepts was facilitated by analytical tools available in Voyant Tools. The *Cirrus* and *Corpus Terms* panels were employed to detect the most frequent lexical items in the corpus. After excluding function words, the analysis highlighted several semantically significant lexical markers, including *war*, *soldier*, *death*, *fear*, *camp*, and *home*. These lexical units were treated as indicators of broader conceptual domains structuring the narrative world.

Table 1 presents the system of key concepts identified in the corpus, along with their target lexical markers, narrative functions, and the analytical tools used for their examination. The selection of concepts was guided by both their frequency and semantic relevance. Each concept is represented by target lexical markers denoting its presence in the discourse. The table also specifies the Voyant Tools instruments employed for analysis, reflecting an integrated quantitative-qualitative approach that combines frequency-based measures with contextual and collocational insights.

Table 1

Key concepts in the corpus of the novel *Angel Down*

Concept	Target lexical markers (absolute frequency)	Narrative role	Voyant tool used
WAR	war (83), battle (21), army (34), attack (8), time (85), shell (36)	Forms the central thematic framework of the narrative and represents the unfolding of military conflict.	Cirrus, Corpus Terms, Trends
SOLDIER	soldiers (33), man (89), men (77), fellow (20), commander (9)	Represents the collective experience of soldiers and highlights social relations within the military environment.	Corpus Terms, Collocates, Contexts (KWIC)
DEATH	death (43), dead (87), die (34), wounded (4), blood (95), end (49)	Emphasizes the destructive consequences of war and the existential threat faced by the characters.	Corpus Terms, Contexts (KWIC)
FEAR	fear (12), terror (3), lost (40), pain (39), danger (2), shriek (32), shock (29)	Reflects the psychological and emotional responses of characters to traumatic wartime experiences.	Collocates, Contexts (KWIC), Trends
CAMP / SPACE OF WAR	camp (10), road (5), forest (14), night (19), way (75), mud (66)	Structures the spatial organization of the narrative and frames the physical environment of war events.	Cirrus, Collocates
HOME / PEACE	home (24), family (10), life (53), village (11), children (10), return (14), woman (52)	Creates a semantic contrast between the violent war reality and the idea of peaceful life.	Trends, Contexts (KWIC)

We couldn't but mention in this context that a high-frequency lexical item *Bagger* (1238), was initially considered for analysis; however, contextual inspection revealed it is a proper name (Cyril Bagger) rather than a conceptual unit. This highlights the importance of combining quantitative frequency measures with qualitative context verification to ensure that observed patterns reflect conceptual dynamics rather than narrative-specific character mentions.

To trace the discourse dynamics of key concepts through their lexical markers, the corpus was analyzed using a combination of visualization and text-mining tools available in Voyant Tools. The analysis integrated frequency-based methods with contextual examination to capture how conceptual meanings evolve across the narrative. The *Trends* tool was applied to examine changes in the frequency of selected lexical markers across discrete text segments, allowing for the visualization of narrative development for each concept. For example, the target lexical marker *war*, associated with concept of WAR, shows an increase in frequency in sections depicting active military conflict, reflecting its prominence in the unfolding narrative and its role in structuring the discourse around conflict (Fig. 1).

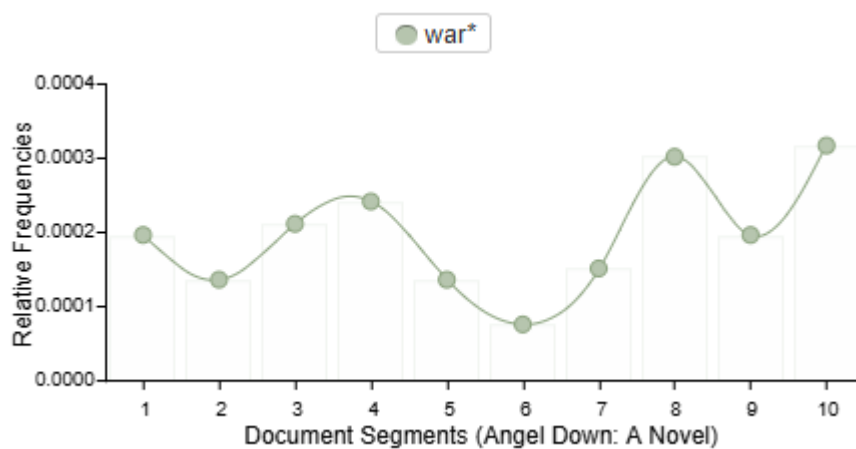


Figure 1. Discourse dynamics of WAR concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

The concept of WAR in the discourse exhibits non-uniform, peak-like dynamics, suggesting that it functions as a narrative trigger rather than a constant thematic background. At the beginning of the text, references to *war* occur infrequently, primarily providing historical or social context and introducing related notions such as *battlefields*, *fighting*, *war souvenirs*, *German slouch hats*, *pickelhaube covers*, *horse gas masks*, *epaulettes weapons*, *brass-topped gas shells*, and *pistols*:

- (1) ...and it's an act, they all know it's an act, Goodspeed combs over **battlefields** like a prospector, harvesting every tradable object so the men who do the actual **fighting** have to visit the Goodspeed General Store for **war souvenirs**, he's got **German slouch hats and pickelhaube covers**, ideal playthings for stateside sons, and **horse gas masks** that look like the heads of nightmare stallions, and **epaulettes** your girl can sew into a quilt, and **weapons**, they say Goodspeed lugs around an arsenal of saw-toothed bayonets, Mauser cartridges, **brass-topped gas shells**, even German officer **pistols**... (Kraus, 2025, p. 41).

In the central sections of the narrative, the frequency of *war* rises sharply, reflecting the active unfolding of conflict through detailed descriptions of battles, strategic decisions, and moral dilemmas. Associated lexical units such as *mad thoughts*, *rain fire*, *poison pollen*, *terrors*, *Great War*, *battlefront*, and *sickness* show that war becomes a structural anchor of the narrative, organizing both events and readers' cognitive understanding. This is further reinforced by passages that foreground the psychological and imaginative dimensions of war experience:

- (2) ...and Bagger thinks **mad thoughts**... do the heavens **rain fire**, do flowers release **poison pollen**, fantastical **terrors** already indigenous to the **Great War**, which makes Bagger wonder if a whole brigade of angels has fallen to Europe's **battlefronts**, loaded with **sicknesses** holy enough to bring down the human hellions... (Kraus, 2025, p. 121).

For instance, Bagger's *mad thoughts* – including apocalyptic visions of heavens raining fire and flowers emitting poisonous pollen – illustrate how the discourse of war extends beyond physical reality into the realm of distorted perception and metaphorical projection. The reference to fantastical *terrors already indigenous to the Great War* suggests that the extremity of wartime experience normalizes the irrational and the surreal, while the image of *a whole brigade of angels... loaded with sicknesses holy enough to bring down the human hellions* metaphorically encodes the fusion of the sacred and the pathological.

The highest peaks correspond to climactic episodes, where WAR functions as a cognitive and emotional frame, shaping perceptions of life and death, victory and defeat, as well as ideological and moral evaluations. Toward the conclusion, frequency declines, indicating post-conflict reflection and a shift from events to human experiences, transitioning the concept toward memory, loss, and trauma. Overall, the corpus demonstrates that WAR operates as a central semantic and narrative organizing concept, with its frequency spikes marking key plot points and emotionally intense or conflict-laden scenes.

The lexical item *soldier* associated with the concept of SOLDIER in the corpus displays uneven frequency dynamics, showing its role as a contextually activated concept rather than a constant background theme (Fig. 2).

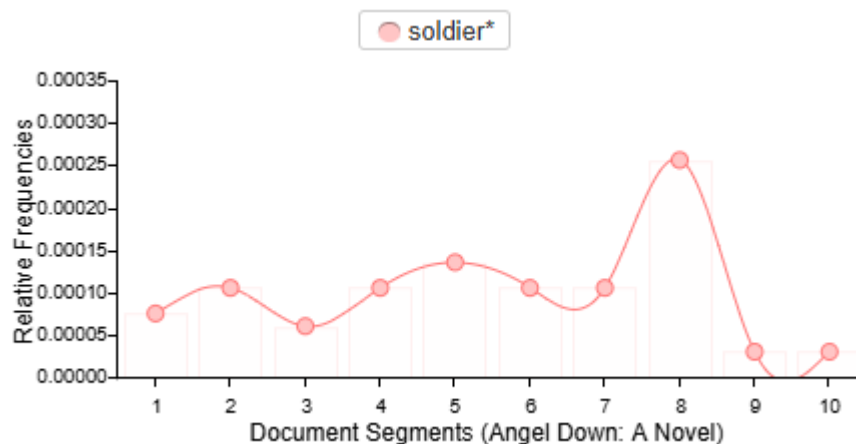


Figure 2. Dynamics of SOLDIER concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

At the beginning of the narrative, references to *soldier* appear sporadically, primarily providing background information about military presence and individual roles within the conflict. In the 8th section, the frequency of *soldier* increases notably, reflecting the unfolding actions and experiences of combatants, their strategies, and interactions with other characters:

- (3) ...and Bagger nearly agrees with Popkin, it'd be easier, and drier, to murder this fool, but instead Bagger wipes his face and says, "Look, Frenchy, what's your name? Comment vous appelez-vous?," to which the **soldier** sirens, "Oui! Frenchy! Frenchy Franchouillard, this is the name for me! So it!" and Bagger has a hunch this **soldier**, an officer according to his sword, has gone AWOL, and in more ways than one... (Kraus, 2025, p.101).

Towards the later sections, mentions of *soldier* decline, often appearing in reflective or evaluative contexts that highlight the aftermath of conflict and the human cost of war. The peaks typically

coincide with descriptions of military engagement or reflections on combatant experience, where *soldier* interacts semantically with lexemes such as *body*, *soldierhood*, and implicitly the notion of *death*:

- (4) ... and it's with apparent great effort that Reis rotates his head a few inches to his right to aim his half-lidded eyes on the unbeckoned **soldier** standing at the base of the stairs, a **body** in his arms, and Reis delivers a blink of slow odium before staring back into the low flame, saying, in the rasp of the browbeaten, "Private Gravedigger," and though Bagger can't salute while holding the angel, he snaps his heels and woofs with a fanatic's brio, "Sir!," in hopes Reis will notice his revitalized **soldierhood** and welcome him into the fold, but Reis only says, "Too little, too late," (Kraus, 2025, p. 173).

Bagger's fanatical response – snapping his heels and vocally affirming his loyalty while holding the angel – illustrates the cognitive and emotional investment tied to the soldier identity, while Reis's restrained judgment (*Too little, too late*) underscores the moral and social contingencies shaping military subjectivity. Thus, the concept of SOLDIER in the later narrative sections functions less as a marker of action and more as a locus for examining interpersonal dynamics, ethical evaluation, and the lingering effects of war on both the psyche and social roles of the characters.

Toward the latter portions of the corpus, the term's frequency tends to decrease, aligning with shifts toward resolution, aftermath, or reflective commentary on the impacts of conflict. Overall, SOLDIER operates as a dynamic, episodically salient concept that highlights shifts between action-oriented and reflective narrative phases.

The lexical item *death* presenting the concept of DEATH in the corpus exhibits fluctuating frequency dynamics, indicating its role as a contextually activated concept rather than a constant background theme. In the early segments of the narrative, *death* appears only sporadically, providing a subtle backdrop that frames the dangers of the war environment without foregrounding mortality (Fig. 3).

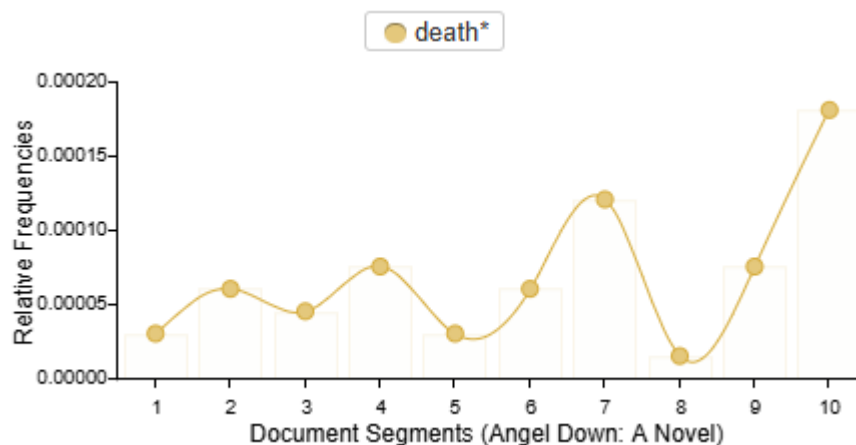


Figure 3. Discourse dynamics of DEATH concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

By the seventh segment, its frequency rises noticeably, reflecting intensified episodes of conflict or direct encounters with the consequences of combat. Following this peak, there is a slight decline, suggesting temporary narrative focus on other elements such as strategy, movement, or interpersonal interactions. In the tenth segment, *death* reaches a climactic peak, emphasizing the culmination of loss, existential threat, and reflective consideration of mortality within the story.

Contextually, *death* frequently co-occurs with lexical markers such as *blast*, *kill*, and *violence*, forming a semantic network that links the physical realities of war with psychological and emotional dimensions. This episodic activation demonstrates that the concept functions as both a narrative signal

of critical events and a locus of affective meaning, drawing readers' attention to the stakes and human costs of war. Throughout the text, the uneven distribution of *death* underscores its dynamic role, highlighting moments of tension, climax, and thematic resolution while allowing other narrative foci to emerge in less intense segments:

- (5) *...and the astonishments mount, that first mortar **blast** back in Bois de Fays, the one that should have **killed** him, maybe it did **kill** him, maybe he dwelt in the razor world of **death** long enough for the angel to notice him before the inadvertent resuscitation of a corpse thrown atop him brought him back to life, and from that moment, he and the angel have been in unbroken contact, everything Bagger has wanted, the angel has tried to deliver, and what he's wanted has been **violence**, just think back to Rochambeau, the symbols he used to win...* (Kraus, 2025, p. 194).

The passage describing *that first mortar blast back in Bois de Fays* exemplifies this dynamic activation. Here, the blast functions simultaneously as a literal event, a near-death experience, and a point of cognitive-emotional resonance, linking Bagger's embodied perception with the supernatural presence of the angel. The oscillation between life and death – *maybe it did kill him, maybe he dwelt in the razor world of death long enough for the angel to notice him* – foregrounds the narrative interplay of danger, intervention, and desire. Moreover, the continued interaction between Bagger and the angel, where his desire for violence is met with the angel's interventions, illustrates how *death* in the text is not merely a physical outcome but a structural and affective node around which both action and ethical reflection pivot.

The lexical item *fear* connected with the concept of FEAR in the corpus demonstrates distinct frequency dynamics. In the initial segments of the narrative, *fear* appears intermittently, setting an emotional tone that situates characters within an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension (Fig. 4). As the narrative progresses, the frequency of *fear* increases, particularly in segments where confrontations, imminent threats, or personal risks are described, signalling that emotional response to danger becomes a salient part of the narrative experience.

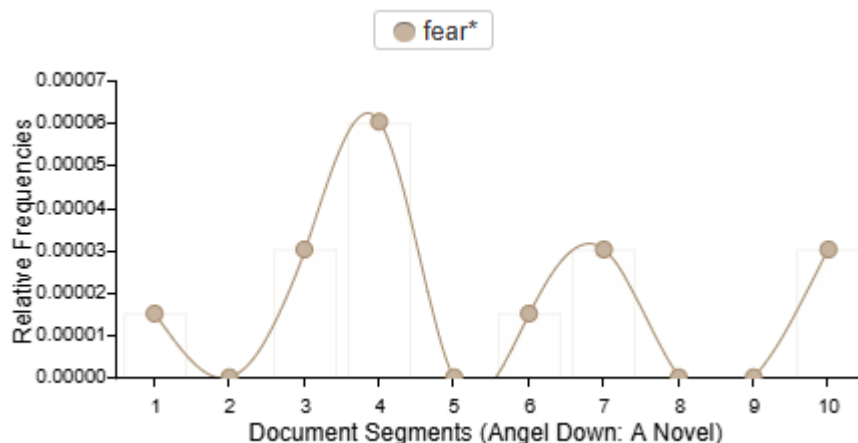


Figure 4. Discourse dynamics of FEAR concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

The frequency of *fear* exhibits noticeable rises in the middle segments of the text, corresponding to episodes that depict direct engagement with hazardous situations or moments of psychological stress. After these peaks, its frequency declines in intermediate segments where narrative attention shifts to other aspects of the war environment or to external action sequences. Toward the later portions of the corpus, especially in segments associated with reflection, aftermath, or rumination on traumatic events, *fear* resurfaces with elevated frequency, highlighting its role in shaping the emotional impact of characters' experiences.

Contextual analysis shows that *fear* frequently co-occurs with lexical markers such as *death*, *kill*, *battle*, *soldiers*, and *danger*, forming a semantic network that binds emotional response to the physical and existential threats of the war narrative. This pattern suggests that *fear* operates not merely as a descriptive term but as a conceptual indicator of psychological engagement, guiding the reader's attention to moments of vulnerability, anxiety, and anticipation:

- (6) ...and he stares at her, and blinks, and races his mind around like a trench rat hungry for dropped crumbs but wary of homemade snares, for in theory, Bagger's got nothing to **fear**, he's not killed anyone since he **killed** his mother being born, he's not the one who cut Goodspeed in half, or stabbed Arno, or made that prison wall fall on Popkin, or consumed Veck in flame... (Kraus, 2025, p. 160).

The passage in which Bagger *races his mind around like a trench rat hungry for dropped crumbs but wary of homemade snares* exemplifies the intricate cognitive activation of *fear*. Although, theoretically, Bagger has nothing immediate to fear – he has not killed anyone recently, nor directly caused the deaths of Goodspeed, Arno, or Veck – the text foregrounds his internalized apprehension, linking past actions and moral culpability to present anxiety. In this way, *fear* operates as both a narrative mechanism and a psychological lens, shaping readers' understanding of Bagger's embodied experience, his anticipation of danger, and the enduring cognitive weight of prior violent acts.

The dynamic fluctuation of *fear* across segments highlights its episodic salience, with peaks aligning with narrative moments that foreground emotional strain and troughs corresponding to transitional or less affective passages.

The word *camp* associated with the concept of CAMP in the corpus exhibits uneven frequency dynamics, indicating its role as a contextually activated spatial concept. In the early segments of the narrative, *camp* appears sporadically, establishing a contextual frame that anchors the setting within the military environment without yet drawing sustained attention (Fig. 5).

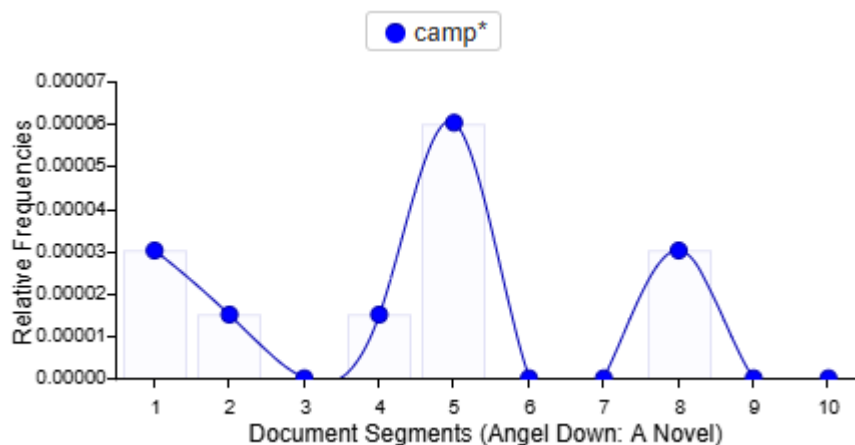


Figure 5. Discourse dynamics of CAMP concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

As the narrative progresses into the middle segment, the frequency of *camp* increases, corresponding to sections where the narrative focus shifts onto the soldiers' routines, temporary settlements, and broader depictions of life within the theatre of war. This rise in frequency typically aligns with passages that describe the physical and social environment of military encampments, where *camp* co-occurs with lexical markers such as *cozy up*, *driest spot*, *heroes*, *writing*, and *heart*. Such collocations suggest that *camp* functions not only as a location marker but also as a conceptual node linking soldiers' interactions, rest phases between battles, and moments of shared experience:

- (7) ... and Bagger's on a roll, "Here's the best part, Popkin. Tonight, as early as tonight, a few hours from now, you're **cozied up** in the **driest spot** of the **camp** because **heroes** don't sleep in mud, and you ask for pencil and paper, and I know **writing**'s not your strong suit, but you get your point across, I bet," and Popkin says, "Figure I do. Who'm I **writing**?" and Bagger pauses long enough for artillery blasts to tenderize the lummoxx's **heart** before he forks it, "Effie" ... (Kraus, 2025, p. 45).

The passage in which Bagger guides Popkin – highlighting *the driest spot of the camp* and the act of writing to Effie – exemplifies the multi-dimensional activation of *camp*. Here, the encampment is both a tangible setting and a cognitive-emotional frame: it situates characters physically while also scaffolding social bonds, affective responses, and small personal victories within the larger wartime context. The co-occurrence with terms like *heroes* and *heart* underscores how *camp* encapsulates the interplay between the routine, the relational, and the psychological dimensions of soldierly life.

The narrative role of *camp* in these segments highlights both the mundane and strategic aspects of war, drawing attention to sites of preparation, recovery, and anticipation. Following its mid-narrative prominence, the frequency of *camp* tends to decline in subsequent segments, indicating a shift away from static environments toward action-oriented sequences or reflective passages removed from immediate spatial detail. In the later segments, *camp* occasionally resurfaces in reflective contexts or in contrastive mentions that juxtapose temporary settlements with other spatial markers such as *field* or *road*, thereby reinforcing its conceptual linkage to movement and transition.

The word *home* presenting the concept of HOME in the corpus demonstrates uneven frequency dynamics, reflecting its role as a contextually activated concept that emerges in specific narrative phases (Fig. 6). In the early segments of the narrative, *home* appears infrequently, suggesting that the initial focus of the text is anchored in the operational and external environment of conflict rather than in the personal or domestic sphere.

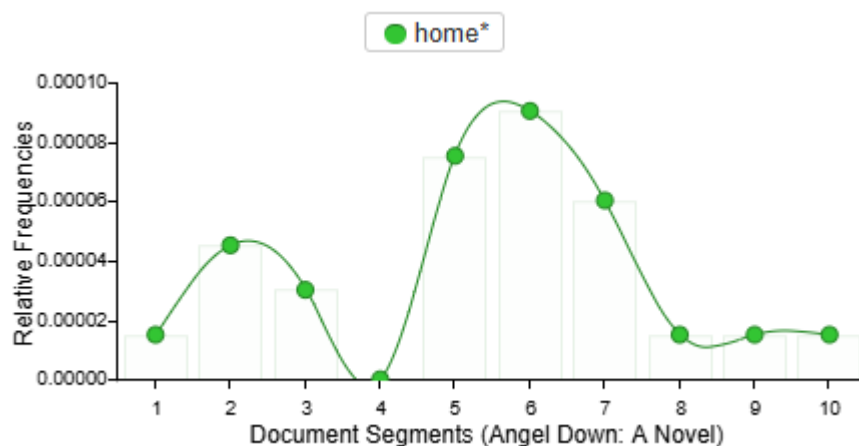


Figure 6. Discourse dynamics of HOME concept: target lexical item trends in frequency.

As the narrative unfolds, the frequency of *home* increases in central segments where the text shifts toward moments of reflection, memory, or longing for peace. These increases signal points in the narrative where the emotional and psychological distance from the immediate war setting invites the reader to engage with the idea of a life beyond conflict. Contextual analysis further reveals that *home* frequently co-occurs with terms such as *win*, *back home*, *love*, *distance*, *Earth*, and *kid* forming a semantic network that links the notions of domesticity, relationships, and future hopes. These collocations enrich the concept by connecting it to emotional and social dimensions of the war experience:

- (8) ...and Arno drops his hand a beat too soon, an error that gives Bagger the split second he needs to choose whatever symbol is required to **win**, which makes him wonder, in that flash, if he has it in him to deliberately lose, but the symbol Arno chooses isn't rock, or paper, or scissors, his hand is curled into a C-shape like he's **back home**, a **home** he never had, hand wrapped around a mug of hot chocolate made by someone who **loves** him. (Kraus, 2025, p. 57).

The passage in which Arno *curls his hand into a C-shape like he's back home* exemplifies this cognitive-emotional activation. Here, *home* is evoked not through direct description but through embodied gesture and imagined affect: the hand wrapped around a mug of hot chocolate symbolizes comfort, care, and belonging that the character has never experienced. In this way, *home* functions as a narrative and cognitive anchor, linking Bagger's perception of action in the game to the longing for nurturing, safety, and emotional connection outside the war context.

The imagery of *Iowa corn stalks that will slash him* and *rich soil that will rebuff him* reinforces this transformation by inverting traditional associations of home as nurturing and life-sustaining. Instead, *home* becomes hostile and exclusionary, reflecting the protagonist's psychological dislocation and inability to reintegrate into a pre-war identity:

- (9) ... and if he can't catch Popkin, he can't catch himself from the **distance** he has fallen, and then there will be no point in surviving long enough to go **home**, there won't be any home, the Iowa corn stalks will slash him and the rich soil will rebuff him, it's only in this wet, windblown instant that he understands the angel as the only buckle that belts him to **Earth**, an Earth that, four years ago, was pleasant but is now unlivable, all due to the loss of one parentless, homeless, worthless, perfect little bastard **kid**. (Kraus, 2025, p. 117).

This suggests that *home* is not a fixed spatial entity but a dynamic conceptual construct shaped by experience, memory, and trauma. Furthermore, the metaphor of the angel as the only *buckle that belts him to Earth* positions *home* within a broader existential framework. Rather than being tied to a geographic location, the character's sense of belonging is now contingent upon a fragile, almost supernatural connection. The reference to the *loss of one parentless, homeless... kid* underscores the emotional and moral rupture at the core of this transformation, linking the collapse of *home* to guilt, responsibility, and irreparable loss.

The distribution of *home* shows a clear pattern: in its mid-to-late narrative peaks, the lexeme's frequency rises in conjunction with segments that foreground characters' reminiscences, personal histories, or aspirations for return and reconstruction. This suggests that *home* functions as a cognitive anchor for thematic contrast, juxtaposing the harsh physical realities of war with the enduring idea of safety, belonging, and normalcy. In three last segments where the narrative regains its action-oriented momentum, the frequency of *home* declines, reflecting a temporary shift away from internal reflection toward external events.

The dynamic activation of HOME contributes to the reader's interpretive mapping of the narrative by marking shifts from war-driven episodes toward those grounded in memory, desire, and affective resonance. The lexeme's recurrent peaks in reflective passages underline its role in structuring emotional contrast within the narrative, while its relative absence in action-dominant segments underscores its function as a symbol of peace, belonging, and personal continuity.

From a cognitive-narratological perspective, the plot structure of a narrative plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of conceptual development, as it determines the distribution of attention, emotional intensity, and interpretive focus across the text. The progression of events, shifts in perspective, and changes in narrative tension directly influence how key concepts are activated, foregrounded, or backgrounded throughout the narrative.

The novel *Angel Down* follows the experience of a soldier, Bagger, during the World War I, whose trajectory unfolds at the intersection of physical survival and psychological disintegration. The

narrative is structured around his movement through the war space – from battlefield encounters and moments of extreme violence to temporary pauses within military camps and episodic reflections on identity, memory, and belonging. A central narrative element is Bagger’s interaction with an angelic figure, which introduces a layer of ambiguity between reality and hallucination, thereby blending external events with internal perception:

- (10) ... *this means Popkin hasn’t imitated Goodspeed by taking the **angel** off to barter, what he’s done is strip the **angel** of her red dress and blue cape inside a truck stinking of coagulated blood, putrid bandages, and the sweat of the doomed, with Popkin’s sweaty drabs next to be stripped, why not, no one was around to intervene but a couple of elderly mice-eaters, and though Bagger has known Popkin as a beast for months, this turn makes Bagger’s hindbrain throb, lusting for the **angel** is sick...and though the **angel** weighs little, rebalancing her in one arm is tricky, she’s rolling shoulders, rolling hips, flopping arms, flopping legs, and in two seconds Bagger has closed to ten feet so Popkin simply drops the **angel**, who hits the ambulance floor like a sack of potatoes...* (Kraus, 2025, p. 120).

The analyzed passage demonstrates that key concepts are frequently actualized through extended syntactic constructions characterized by accumulation and coordination. The sentence is built as a sequence of coordinated clauses and participial structures (“*strip... put... stinking... putrid... sweating... next to be stripped...*”), which creates a continuous, non-terminating flow of narration. This structural pattern reflects a high density of lexical material and the absence of clear syntactic closure.

Within this passage, the concept of WAR is realized indirectly through sensory and material markers such as “*coagulated blood,*” “*putrid bandages,*” and “*the sweat of the doomed.*” The concept of SOLDIER is represented through the actions and interactions of characters, particularly in the contrast between Popkin’s behaviour and Bagger’s reaction. The concept of FEAR is not explicitly named but is suggested through the escalating tension and the lack of external control (“*no one was around to intervene*”). Elements related to DEATH are also present implicitly through the lexical environment associated with injury, decay, and bodily vulnerability.

The passage also shows that conceptual meaning is distributed across multiple lexical and structural elements rather than being confined to single high-frequency markers.

As the plot progresses, the boundaries between the physical and the psychological become increasingly unstable, and the narrative shifts between action-driven sequences and introspective passages. This results in a fragmented yet continuous representation of war experience, where individual episodes accumulate rather than resolve, reinforcing the sense of ongoing conflict and existential uncertainty.

Such a narrative organization creates a dynamic framework within which key concepts are unevenly distributed and contextually activated. The alternation between combat scenes, camp environments, and reflective moments enables different conceptual domains to emerge with varying intensity, thus directly linking narrative structure to the discourse dynamics of concepts.

To determine how narrative structure influences the interpretation of key concepts, the contexts in which lexemes related to each concept occur were systematically examined. The following examples demonstrate the peculiarities of interpretation, highlighting how the narrator’s perspective, stylistic choices, and syntactic patterns shape the meaning of these concepts. This passage illustrates the concept WAR as a pervasive yet episodically foregrounded element. The fragmented, breathless syntax mirrors the relentless escalation of conflict and conveys the psychological weight of the battlefield:

- (11) ... *and Bagger, already weighed down in mud and blood, further heavies in the dreary certainty that the shriek won't ever end, just like the war won't ever end, like the carnage won't ever end, it's a sentence in a book careening without periods, gasping with too many commas, a sentence that, once begun, can't ever be stopped, a sentence doomed to loop back on itself to form a terrible black wheel that, sooner or later, will drag each and every person to their grave* (Kraus, 2025, p. 11).

Here, in passage 12, the concept SOLDIER is activated contextually, emphasizing the experiential and risk-laden roles of combatants. The passage contrasts agency and vulnerability, revealing the relational and situational nature of the concept:

- (12) ...*and the result is **soldiers** who end up so far in arrears they have to pay back Bagger in derring-do, infantry charges mostly, they go over the top in his place and get on a first-name basis with bullets while Bagger steps back, way back, keeping to latrine and burial duties, where flying lead doesn't whistle past one's ears but rather whines like late-summer mosquitoes* (Kraus, 2025, p. 14).

Example 13 illustrates DEATH in both personal and historical dimensions. Lexical and referential links connect individual loss with broader historical events, showing how the concept is realized across multiple narrative layers:

- (13) ...*and the fly's been with Bagger since Camp Winn, where there was a poster tacked to the barracks door, I WANT YOU FOR U.S. ARMY, unsound grammar Bagger would have disparaged if he hadn't been so struck by the man painted on the poster, a top-hatted, red-bow-tied, billy-bearded Uncle Sam who looked uncannily like his father, Bishop Bagger, drowned to **death** two years prior when the RMS Lusitania was sunk by a U-boat torpedo* (Kraus, 2025, p. 23).

Passage 14 illustrates FEAR as both a personal and collective, as well as temporally layered concept. Lexical and referential links connect immediate emotional reactions with past traumatic experiences, showing how fear is not confined to a single moment but extends across different narrative layers:

- (14) ...*and all of them seize in the unexplainable **fear** that this woman might perish, Bagger's never felt the need to save anyone, with the exception of his father the night before the old man left for the Lusitania* (Kraus, 2025, p. 65).

The concept CAMP is realized through spatial and organizational markers, reflecting both physical settings and social hierarchies that shape the narrative experience of soldiers:

- (15) ...*and Veck says, "They set us up to fail. We shoulda known. We were dumb not to. It's just we were treated all right at **Camp** Meade. Frenchies were good to us, too, treated us square. But then they carved us out of the 92nd and strung us between the 77th and the French, no idea who's leading who* (Kraus, 2025, p. 110).

The concept HOME is presented as a socially and emotionally charged domain, activated through personal stakes, cognitive evaluation, and relational comparisons. Its meaning is constructed through both literal and figurative dimensions of belonging and security:

- (16) ...*and Veck continues, normal as can be, "Guy like me, you got to prove everything. Prove you deserve to work the job you work. Prove the pay you get should be as much as the next guy.*

*Prove you deserve a **home**. When men break your windows, prove to the police they should go after them, not you. Prove to the bosses you're better than the other guys that look like you, but don't let those other guys know you said it or you're going to lose some teeth...*" (Kraus, 2025, p. 111).

The examined passages show that conceptual meaning is constructed through extended, accumulative syntactic forms, metaphorical framing, and the interaction of explicit and implicit markers. This results in a distributed mode of conceptualization, where meaning is not confined to individual lexical items but unfolds across larger segments of discourse. At the same time, the alternation between combat episodes, camp settings, and reflective moments creates a shifting interpretive framework in which different concepts gain prominence depending on narrative context.

In sum, the analysis confirms that the dynamics of key concepts in the narrative are intrinsically linked to the plot structure and its cognitive organization. The progression of events, shifts between external action and internal reflection, and variations in narrative tension systematically regulate how concepts are activated and interpreted. As demonstrated, key concepts such as WAR, SOLDIER, DEATH, FEAR, CAMP, and HOME do not function as static semantic units but emerge through context-dependent patterns shaped by syntactic structure, lexical distribution, and narrative perspective.

4. Discussion

The identification of key concepts in the corpus provides insight into how the narrative structure of the novel shapes the interpretation and cognitive salience of conceptual domains. By employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative analytical tools in Voyant Tools, the study captures not only the frequency of lexical markers but also their contextual and semantic significance. Importantly, the results demonstrate that the lexical item directly naming a concept is not necessarily the most frequent marker within its conceptual domain. Instead, concepts are often activated through a network of more frequent, contextually embedded lexemes that extend and specify their meaning according to their narrative role.

The discourse dynamics of key concepts are traced through their target lexical markers, revealing how each concept is realized, agreed, and changed through the reader's interpretation of the narrative. For instance, the concept of WAR, while explicitly marked by *war* (83), is more frequently mediated through lexemes such as *time* (85) and *army* (34), which structure the temporal and institutional dimensions of conflict. A similar pattern is observed in the SOLDIER concept, where *soldiers* (33) is complemented and quantitatively surpassed by the broader human referent *men* (77), thereby shifting the conceptual focus from role-specific identity to generalized human experience.

In the case of DEATH, the nominal marker *death* (43) is reinforced and exceeded by *dead* (87) and *blood* (95), which intensify the embodied and visual dimensions of mortality. Likewise, the concept of FEAR, represented by the relatively low-frequency item *fear* (12), is more prominently actualized through lexemes such as *loss* (40) and *pain* (39), indicating its indirect and affectively mediated representation. The concept of CAMP is similarly constructed not only through *camp* (10), but through spatial and environmental markers such as *way* (75) and *mud* (66), which evoke the lived conditions of military space. Finally, the concept of HOME extends beyond its direct lexical marker *home* (24), being more frequently articulated through *life* (53) and *woman* (52), thereby embedding it within relational and existential dimensions.

DEATH and FEAR function as dynamically activated concepts, appearing episodically in relation to narrative peaks of conflict, threat, or psychological tension. Their uneven distribution reflects both plot progression and the narrator's stylistic strategies, reinforcing the role of narrative in modulating emotional intensity and guiding the reader's cognitive engagement. Spatial and environmental markers, represented by the CAMP / SPACE OF WAR concept, further demonstrate how the narrative constructs experiential settings through indirect lexicalization. The contrastive concept of HOME /

PEACE highlights the oscillation between war-driven action and reflective or memory-based passages, emphasizing the tension between violence and the human need for stability and belonging.

The exclusion of high-frequency proper nouns, such as *Bagger*, demonstrates the necessity of qualitative verification alongside quantitative analysis. Without contextual inspection, frequency-based measures alone could misrepresent narrative salience, conflating character prominence with conceptual significance. By integrating both approaches, the analysis ensures that identified patterns reflect conceptual dynamics rather than artifacts of individual character mentions.

The combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the discourse dynamics of key concepts, based on frequency patterns and contextual interpretation, reveals that the dynamics of the analyzed key concepts in the novel are inherently non-uniform and context-dependent. This variability is driven by their dependence on narrative development, shifts in narrative focus, and the functional load of concepts across different segments of the text. The discourse dynamics of concepts are shaped by the interaction between narrative structure, lexical realization, and cognitive processes of interpretation, whereby conceptual meaning is selectively activated in accordance with plot progression, emotional intensity, and thematic shifts.

For instance, the analyzed concepts may be realized in context through a range of lexical markers that extend beyond high-frequency items. The concept of WAR is also instantiated through *battlefields, fighting, war souvenirs, German slouch hats, pickelhaube covers, horse gas masks, epaulettes, weapons, brass-topped gas shells, and pistols*, as well as through affectively and cognitively charged expressions such as *mad thoughts, rain fire, poison pollen, terrors, Great War, battlefront, and sickness*, which collectively enrich the conceptual domain. The SOLDIER concept is realized via terms such as *body* and *soldierhood*, and implicitly through associations with DEATH, highlighting the intertwining of role, embodiment, and existential risk. DEATH itself emerges through markers like *blast, kill, and violence*, reflecting both the physical and psychological dimensions of mortality. FEAR is similarly grounded in its co-occurrence with *death, kill, battle, soldiers, and danger*, indicating the close coupling of emotional response with situational threat. Spatial and environmental aspects of military life are captured under the CAMP concept, realized by expressions such as *cozy up, driest spot, heroes, writing, and heart*, emphasizing the social, relational, and operational textures of encampment life. Finally, the concept of HOME manifests in terms such as *win, back home, love, distance, Earth, and kid*, linking longing, relational ties, and personal stakes to the broader narrative oscillation between war and domesticity.

This perspective is grounded in cognitive linguistics, cognitive discourse analysis, and cognitive narratology, which conceptualize meaning as a dynamic construct emerging from the interplay between textual structures and the reader's mental models.

The results demonstrate that the interpretation of key concepts is closely conditioned by narrative structure, which organizes the distribution of meaning through syntactic patterns, perspective, and contextual embedding. In this regard, conceptual meaning emerges not as an inherent property of lexical units but as a product of their positioning within the narrative flow.

Thus, the concept of WAR is predominantly realized through extended, syntactically complex constructions characterized by repetition, accumulation, and the absence of clear closure. Such structures create a sense of continuity and inevitability, reinforcing the perception of war as an unending, self-perpetuating process. The use of metaphorical framing further intensifies this effect, presenting war as a closed, cyclical system. The concept of SOLDIER is constructed through contrasting narrative patterns that reveal asymmetry in roles and experiences. Action-oriented lexemes combined with spatial oppositions highlight the unequal distribution of risk and agency, thus fragmenting the conceptualization of the soldier into differentiated positions within the war structure. The concept of DEATH is realized through both explicit references and implicit narrative cues, often embedded in retrospective or intertextual contexts. This leads to the individualization of death, linking it to personal memory and historical events, and transforming it from an abstract phenomenon into a concretized narrative element. The concept of FEAR emerges as a diffuse and collective state, frequently lacking

a clearly defined source. It is conveyed through generalized expressions and group-oriented narration, which emphasize its pervasive and anticipatory character within the narrative. The concept of CAMP functions as a structurally defined space associated with temporary order and organization. However, its representation also incorporates elements of instability and uncertainty, suggesting that institutional environments do not fully neutralize the chaos of war. The concept of HOME is constructed through evaluative and contrastive discourse patterns, particularly in relation to identity and social positioning. It appears as a contested and unstable domain that requires continuous justification, reflecting broader socio-cultural dynamics.

The discourse dynamics of key concepts in Daniel Kraus's *Angel Down* closely mirror the novel's narrative events. Concepts such as WAR, SOLDIER, and DEATH peak during battle scenes, reflecting the Meuse-Argonne offensive and the soldiers' exposure to extreme danger. FEAR intensifies in moments of moral and supernatural tension, particularly when the soldiers encounter the angel, highlighting their cognitive-emotional engagement. In contrast, CAMP and HOME provide a stable contextual background, framing the characters' experiences and offering cognitive anchors. Daniel Kraus's continuous run-on sentence and additive style amplify these dynamics, maintaining narrative tension and allowing shifts between external action and internal reflection. Peaks in WAR and FEAR align with climactic plot points, while the interplay of concepts emphasizes the moral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of the characters' experience, demonstrating how narrative structure directly shapes the activation and interpretation of key concepts.

From a cognitive-narratological perspective, the passages of Daniel Kraus's *Angel Down* illustrate how syntactic form contributes to the construction of conceptual meaning. The accumulation of clauses and the lack of clear closure function as a formal representation of psychological escalation and loss of control, mirroring the characters' cognitive and emotional states. Such structures reinforce the perception of WAR not as a discrete event but as an ongoing, overwhelming process that permeates both external reality and internal experience.

The indirect realization of WAR through sensory details suggests a shift from abstract conceptualization to embodied experience, where meaning is grounded in physical perception. At the same time, the destabilization of the SOLDIER concept – particularly in the transformation of Popkin from a military figure into a morally degraded agent – indicates a fragmentation of role identity under conditions of extreme stress.

The diffuse and implicit representation of FEAR highlights its function as a background cognitive state rather than a discrete emotion, shaping interpretation without explicit lexicalization. Similarly, DEATH operates as an underlying conceptual presence, emerging through atmosphere and narrative tension rather than direct reference.

Overall, the passages demonstrate that the dynamics of conceptual activation depend not only on lexical frequency but also on syntactic organization and narrative context, supporting the view that conceptual meaning in narrative discourse is distributed, context-sensitive, and cognitively mediated.

5. Conclusions

This study confirms that discourse dynamics function as a fundamental mechanism through which key concepts are actualized, interconnected, and transformed within the narrative of a literary text. The analysis identified WAR, SOLDIER, DEATH, FEAR, CAMP, and HOME as the key concepts structuring the narrative of Daniel Kraus's *Angel Down*. Their discourse dynamics reveal non-uniform and context-dependent patterns of activation, showing how each concept is selectively foregrounded, backgrounded, and reconfigured across different segments of the narrative. These shifts are closely tied to plot progression, changes in narrative focus, and fluctuations in emotional intensity, which together guide the reader's cognitive and interpretive engagement.

The findings indicate that conceptual meaning in the novel is not statically encoded in isolated lexical items but emerges through a distributed network of linguistic and structural features. In particular, the study shows that high-frequency lexical markers provide only a partial representation

of conceptual structure, while lower-frequency and contextually embedded elements significantly contribute to the richness and variability of conceptualization. This highlights the importance of integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative contextual interpretation in order to capture the full complexity of meaning construction.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that narrative structure plays a decisive role in shaping conceptual dynamics. The alternation between combat scenes, camp environments, and reflective or introspective passages creates a shifting framework in which different concepts gain prominence at different stages of the narrative. As a result, WAR operates as a central organizing principle, while SOLDIER, DEATH, and FEAR are dynamically activated in relation to conflict intensity and psychological tension, and CAMP and HOME function as spatial and conceptual counterpoints that introduce moments of relative stability, memory, and emotional contrast.

Importantly, the study also shows that conceptual dynamics are realized not only lexically but also syntactically and stylistically. Extended, accumulative sentence structures, metaphorical framing, and patterns of repetition contribute to the perception of continuity, instability, or fragmentation, thereby reinforcing the conceptual meanings associated with war experience. In this way, discourse dynamics reflect the interaction between narrative form and cognitive processing, shaping how readers perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to the text.

Collectively, these findings confirm that discourse dynamics in literary discourse emerge through the interplay of lexical choice, narrative organization, and cognitive engagement. This integrated perspective contributes to cognitive narratology by proving that conceptual meaning is dynamically constructed in context and cannot be fully understood without considering the interaction between linguistic form, narrative structure, and reader interpretation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no competing interest or funding support to declare.

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ДИСКУРСНА ДИНАМІКА КОНЦЕПТІВ У ВОЄННОМУ НАРАТИВІ: КОГНІТИВНО-НАРАТОЛОГІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ РОМАНУ ДАНІЕЛЯ КРАУСА *ANGEL DOWN*

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Анотація

Дослідження присвячене вивченню дискурсної динаміки ключових концептів у наративі на основі корпусного аналізу роману Данієля Крауса *Angels Down* – іммерсивного, кінематографічного твору про п'ятьох солдатів Першої світової війни, які натрапляють на занепаłego ангела, здатного, ймовірно, змінити хід війни. Зокрема, увагу зосереджено на концептах WAR, SOLDIER, DEATH, FEAR, CAMP та HOME,

а також на тому, як лексична частота, колокаційні закономірності та контекстний розподіл відображають актуалізацію та інтерпретацію значення в художньому тексті. Корпус було сегментовано за допомогою платформи Voyant Tools, що дало змогу обчислити і абсолютні, і відносні показники частоти для кожного сегмента. Контекстний аналіз із використанням інструментів Voyant Tools уможливив ідентифікацію ключових концептів та аналіз їхньої дискурсної динаміки через нарративні функції та інтерпретацію. Результати засвідчують, що ключові концепти є динамічними у художньому дискурсі, а їхня значущість та семантика змінюються залежно від позиції у наративі та формальних ознак художнього тексту, таких як довжина речень та поділ на абзаци. Наприклад, довгі, циклічні речення підтримують безперервну активізацію концептів WAR і DEATH, створюючи кумулятивну семантичну напругу та відображаючи психологічні й емоційні виміри наративу. Попри те, що абзаци візуально розділяють текст, вони зберігають фокусування на концептах, даючи змогу їм накопичуватися та взаємодіяти з контекстними елементами, що призводить до особливостей інтерпретації. Отримані результати підтверджують гіпотезу про те, що ключові концепти в художньому дискурсі є залежними від контексту та динамічно змодульованими через формальні ознаки тексту. Дослідження демонструє цінність поєднання кількісних методів корпусного аналізу з якісною інтерпретацією, пропонуючи модель для вивчення взаємодії між формою наративу та концептуальним значенням. Результати мають значення для когнітивно-нاراتивних досліджень, демонструючи, як наративна структура, розвиток сюжету та зміна фокусу оповіді активно впливають на актуалізацію концептів, їхню семантичну значущість та інтерпретацію через дискурсну динаміку.

Ключові слова: *когнітивна лінгвістика, когнітивний дискурс-аналіз, когнітивна наратологія, корпусний аналіз, дискурсна динаміка концептів, концепт WAR, наративна структура, Voyant Tools, частотний аналіз, інтерпретація концептів.*

Декларація про конфлікт інтересів

Автори на мають жодних конфліктів інтересів щодо цієї статті.

Автори заявляють, що під час підготовки цієї статті не використовувалися інструменти штучного інтелекту.