

## SPATIAL MODELS AND SYMBOLISM: EXPLORING CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the symbolic and model-based perceptions of space in human cognition and culture. It examines how people traditionally divide space into two categories: inner (domestic) and outer (foreign), and how these spatial models reflect psychological, cultural, and linguistic worldviews. The study emphasizes the role of symbolic representation in shaping spatial understanding and highlights the interaction between physical space and its conceptual interpretation. Through analyzing linguistic and cultural expressions, the research reveals that spatial symbolism serves as a key element in defining individual and collective identity. The findings contribute to the broader field of cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how spatial models and symbols influence human perception, communication, and cultural categorization.

### **Keywords**

space, model, symbolism, cognitive linguistics, worldview, cultural meaning

In linguistics and cognitive science, the concepts of *model* and *symbolism* play a crucial role in understanding how humans perceive, conceptualize, and represent reality. A **model** serves as a simplified representation or structured framework that reflects certain aspects of the real world. It helps to systematize knowledge and to explain how different components of a concept are interconnected. For instance, spatial and conceptual models enable researchers to analyze how humans structure space, time, or social relations in their mental and linguistic systems.

**Symbolism**, on the other hand, represents the process by which abstract ideas and meanings are expressed through symbols, signs, and metaphors. Symbols are powerful cognitive tools that allow people to encode complex experiences and emotions into communicative forms. In cultural and linguistic contexts, symbols often reflect collective values, traditions, and worldviews. For example, the contrast

between “inner” and “outer” space can symbolize the opposition between safety and danger, familiarity and strangeness, or personal and social identity.

The interaction between model and symbolism is essential in constructing human cognition. Models provide the structural basis for understanding phenomena, while symbols enrich these models with emotional and cultural meanings. Together, they form a dynamic mechanism through which individuals interpret their environment and communicate their understanding to others.

People have symbolically divided space into two parts: their own (internal) space and the foreign (external) space. One’s own space has always been closely connected with human life, values, and worldview. It has been perceived as protected, orderly, warm, bright, and safe. Such a space was often imagined as a home, homeland, village, city, or sacred places (for example, temples or shrines). In contrast, the foreign space was regarded as unknown, dangerous, chaotic, and dark. This included forests, deserts, mountains, or the lands of other peoples. Thus, for ancient people, space was not only a geographical location but also a sphere of spiritual and cultural perception.

This approach to space has remained stable and found reflection in culture, language, and mythology. For instance, the right and left sides symbolized different meanings: the right side represented positivity, light, and divinity, while the left side was associated with negativity, darkness, and evil.

In human consciousness, the concept of space was expressed through two main principles the center and the boundary, the center and the periphery. The center symbolized order, spirituality, life, and security. It was the place where a person felt free and calm. The center was usually understood as a place of worship, a family home, a sacred site, or the central point of an ancient city. The periphery, on the other hand, was viewed as an unknown, dangerous, and chaotic place inhabited by demons, evil forces, and foreign peoples.

Therefore, ancient people believed that before settling in a new place, it was necessary to “order” it to make it safe and spiritually assimilated. For example, when a new house was being built, religious rituals were performed, the ground was declared sacred, and prayers and sacrifices were offered. Through these rituals, the foreign space gradually turned into one’s own space.

In this way, people “ordered” the space, turning it into a safe and spiritually comfortable place. For them, true space was that which was close to the sacred center the place considered the center of human life, where a person felt “at home.”

However, the outer boundary of space was imagined as an unknown, disordered, and dangerous area a place leading to another world, to chaos. Hence,

any journey or departure from one's space was connected with danger. A person could leave it only under special protection or during sacred rituals.

That is why, before mastering any new space, people would "consecrate" it that is, establish order through certain rituals. These rituals served to transform the space into a safe and livable place, integrating it as part of the existing world.

For ancient people, the center was not only a geographical but also a spiritual-religious one. They associated it with divine powers, imagining it as a connecting point between heaven and earth. The center of every city, temple, or house was considered sacred a place where the connection with the universe was most direct.

The construction of cities or temples was viewed as a symbolic repetition of the creation of the world. For instance, the building of a temple often represented a ritual reenactment of the world's creation. Through these rituals, people believed they were bringing divine order into the world.

Thus, every sacred place was a manifestation of divine order. It was not merely a geographical point but a center through which people felt connected to the entire cosmos. Therefore, whenever ancient people occupied new territory, they first "consecrated" it accepting it as part of the universe.

This approach was not limited to temples or cities. Even ordinary dwellings and houses were consecrated through specific rituals. For instance, when a new house was built or when people moved into it, religious ceremonies were often performed to ensure safety and prosperity.

All of this shows that for ancient people, space was not just a physical location it was deeply linked with spiritual and divine order. Through sacred spaces, people brought meaning and harmony into their lives, and the sacred center became the main symbol of that order.

At the same time, among the ancient Slavs, the relationship between inner and outer boundaries of space played an important role. The inner space – the human dwelling – was seen as an ordered and sacred part of the world, while the outer space was associated with chaos, danger, and the unknown. Thus, the Slavic cosmogonic worldview reflected a clear understanding of how space was organized and the importance of sacred places.

Cosmogony, that is, ancient conceptions of the creation of the world, was usually connected with nature and its elements. Water, earth, air, and fire were often considered sources of life and prosperity among the Slavs. At the same time, they were perceived as opposing forces that balanced and interacted with each other.

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