

## A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Mind Style in The Parable of The Wicked Husbandman

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### Abstract

This study employs cognitive stylistic approaches to the parable of the Wicked Husbandman in Luke's Gospel, focusing on how linguistic features construct mental styles and influence interpretation. Using Text World Theory and Schema Theory, the analysis examines two English Bible translations, the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New International Version (NIV), to explore how differences in diction and syntax affect meaning. Findings reveal that the vineyard owner's mental style is encoded through material and mental processes that highlight patience, persistence, and eventual justice, whereas the tenants' worldview is shaped through verbs of violence and rebellion, indicating their rejection of authority. Deictic structures frame the parable within familiar cultural schemas of land ownership, inheritance, and stewardship, guiding readers towards theological interpretations of obedience and judgment. Variations in translation add nuance: the NKJV's elevated diction underscores solemnity and divine authority, while the NIV's straightforward phrasing stresses immediacy and human conflict. The study contributes to stylistics by extending cognitive frameworks into biblical discourse and to biblical interpretation by demonstrating how translation shapes worldview construction. It concludes that parables are linguistically rich sites where language, cognition, and theology intersect to influence moral and spiritual understanding.

**Keywords:** Cognitive stylistics, Mind style, Text World Theory, Schema Theory, Biblical parable, Gospel of Luke

## **Introduction**

Cognitive stylistics has become a vibrant interdisciplinary field, drawing on linguistics, psychology, and literary studies to explain how readers process and interpret texts. At its core, it examines how linguistic patterns trigger mental processes such as perception, memory, and schema activation, thereby shaping literary interpretation (Simpson, 2004; McIntyre, 2008). Stockwell (2002) characterises it as “a new way of thinking about literature,” one that places language within cognitive science, while Gavins and Steen (2003) emphasise its focus on the systematic description of linguistic features. This perspective broadens the scope of stylistics by highlighting cognition's role in textual engagement, showing that interpretation is not solely a linguistic act but also a cognitive one.

A central idea in cognitive stylistics is mind style, defined by Fowler (1977, p.103) as “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self.” Later refined to refer to the worldview of an author, narrator, or character (Fowler, 1996), mind style highlights how lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic choices encode specific perspectives. Leech and Short (2007) describe it as a way of capturing how a fictional world is understood, while Semino (2007) demonstrates how deviations in representation reveal unusual or striking viewpoints. Therefore, mind style provides a framework for analysing how texts linguistically construct mental worlds and influence interpretation.

Although mind style has been widely studied in modern fiction, poetry, and drama (Freeman, 2000; Semino & Culpeper, 2002; Hoover, 2004), its use in biblical texts remains limited. However, parables, as concise narratives with layered metaphorical and cultural meanings, are particularly well suited for such analysis. The parable of the Wicked Husbandman (Luke 20:9–19) demonstrates this richness: it uses familiar agricultural imagery, culturally embedded schemas of authority and inheritance, and stark contrasts in character behaviour to communicate theological truths. A cognitive stylistic approach helps us examine how these elements shape the mind styles

of the vineyard owner, his servants, and the husbandmen, and how readers interpret meaning through linguistic cues.

This study applies Text World Theory (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007) and Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980; Stockwell, 2002) to the parable in two English Bible translations: the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New International Version (NIV). Text World Theory describes how readers construct mental representations of narrative worlds through world-building elements and function-advancing propositions, while Schema Theory explains how prior cultural knowledge influences interpretation. Together, these frameworks enable analysis of how translation choices in diction and syntax affect the construction of mind styles.

This study aims to demonstrate how cognitive stylistic features in the NKJV and NIV influence the characters' perspectives and worldviews within the parable, and how translation mediates interpretation. In doing so, the research advances stylistics by applying cognitive frameworks to biblical discourse, and enhances biblical studies by offering new tools for analysing the linguistic and cognitive construction of meaning.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to apply cognitive stylistic methods to the construction and interpretation of meaning in the parable of the Wicked Husbandman from the Gospel of Luke.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Analyse the cognitive stylistic features in the NKJV and NIV translations that build the mind styles of the vineyard owner, his servants, and the husbandmen.
- ii. Describe the different types of mind styles depicted in the parable and explain how these linguistic structures influence contrasting perspectives on authority, obedience, and rebellion.

### **Literature Review**

The idea of mind style has been a key concept in stylistics since Fowler (1977, p.103) described it as “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self.” Later, Fowler (1996, p.21) refined the term to reflect the worldview of an author, narrator, or character as expressed in

a text's ideational structure. This shows how lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level choices indicate unique perspectives. Leech and Short (2007) emphasise that these stylistic patterns reveal how fictional minds perceive reality, demonstrating how narrative voices are linguistically formed.

Mind style has been widely employed in contemporary literature. Semino (2007), for example, illustrates how deviations in narrative perspective highlight unusual or distinctive worldviews, while McIntyre (2005) and Hoover (2004) demonstrate how stylistic features influence characterisation in prose fiction. Collectively, this research underscores the significance of mind style for analysing the connection between language and cognition. However, despite its potential, relatively limited work has been conducted on religious texts, where stylistic and cognitive aspects are equally significant.

Cognitive stylistics offers the broader framework within which 'mind style' operates. Stockwell (2002) describes it as combining linguistic analysis with insights from cognitive linguistics and psychology, aiming to understand how readers process and interpret texts. Gavins (2007) additionally highlights that cognitive stylistics explains the mental representations that readers construct during engagement with discourse. It focuses not only on textual features but also on how these features activate cognitive mechanisms such as schema activation, inference, and memory. This makes cognitive stylistics particularly useful for parables, which rely on simple linguistic forms but prompt complex interpretive activity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Text World Theory (TWT), developed by Werth (1999) and Gavins (2007), provides a powerful tool for analysing how readers construct mental models of narrative worlds. TWT distinguishes between world-building elements (participants, time, and location) and function-advancing propositions (events, actions, and processes). These create layered text worlds that can shift through modality, perspective, or reported speech. In the parable of the Wicked Husbandman, such shifts highlight the contrasting perspectives of the vineyard owner, his servants, and the husbandmen, making TWT essential to analysing how mind styles are linguistically constructed (Aluya & Iangba, 2025).

Schema Theory, introduced by Rumelhart (1980) and applied to literature by Stockwell (2002), explains how background knowledge influences understanding. Schemas are structured mental frameworks that guide meaning-making by enabling readers to interpret new information based on familiar cultural or experiential contexts. In biblical parables, schemas are essential: images of vineyards, servants, and inheritance resonate strongly with the socio-cultural world of first-century Palestine. Recognising these schemas helps clarify how mental styles are formed and how translation choices in the NKJV and NIV affect interpretation.

### **Empirical Review**

Several studies have applied cognitive stylistics to contemporary literary works, emphasising the importance of linguistic features in shaping unique mental worlds. For example, Krishnamurthy (2010) analysed the novel *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, examining how the narrators' distinct voices, influenced by colonial and feminist discourses, reflect different perspectives. This work highlights the usefulness of mind style in uncovering character viewpoints, aligning with the current study's aim to explore the unique mind styles in the biblical narrative of the Wicked Husbandman (Aluya, 2016). However, while Krishnamurthy's research focused on prose fiction, the present study broadens these insights into biblical parables, which are culturally intricate and conceptually layered narratives.

Similarly, Areef (2016) applied cognitive stylistics to Simon's lyric "The Sound of Silence", demonstrating how figures of speech generate new metaphors and imagery. This work, like the present study, illustrates the usefulness of cognitive stylistics in revealing layers of meaning within literary texts. However, Areef's focus was on musical lyrics, whereas this study concentrates on a religious narrative, reflecting a significant difference in both genre and theoretical approach. The present study combines TWT and Schema Theory, contrasting with Areef's reliance on conceptual metaphor and schema theories.

Aluya and Uduma (2024) employed cognitive stylistics on short stories, examining how mind style is linguistically constructed using TWT and Schema Theory. While their research shares the same theoretical basis, it focuses on short stories, whereas the current study examines biblical parables, highlighting the distinct contribution of this research to cognitive stylistics in religious texts.

Kuczok (2018) examined the metaphor of sin in the English Bible, demonstrating how cultural experiences and image schemas support the conceptualisation of sin. Although both studies focus on biblical texts, this research emphasises metaphor, whereas the present study employs TWT and Schema Theory to investigate how linguistic features shape mental worlds and inform theological interpretation. Kuczok's findings highlight the importance of schema theory in understanding biblical language, aligning with the current study's theoretical framework, though with a different focus on metaphor.

Fozilovna (2020) and Suleiman et al. (2023) examined the mind styles of suffering protagonists in short stories and novels, using cognitive stylistics to analyse how language reveals internal states such as fear, endurance, and frustration. Their studies emphasise the usefulness of cognitive stylistics in analysing psychological states but differ in genre and narrative scope. Fozilovna's analysis of Chekhov's *Sleepy* and Mansfield's *The Child Who Was Tired* demonstrates how mind style can deepen literary interpretation. Similarly, Suleiman et al. (2023) employed cognitive stylistics to explore Kambili's mental state in *Purple Hibiscus*, illustrating how stylistic features like syntactic patterns and figurative language shape a protagonist's psychological perspective. Both studies contribute to the wider field of cognitive stylistics, but their focus on modern literary works contrasts with the present study's investigation of biblical parables.

Jaafar's (2020) study on schema and text world theories in literary texts demonstrated how these cognitive frameworks can help readers connect textual elements with background knowledge, enhancing the interpretive process. This study is highly relevant to the current research, as it shares the same theoretical frameworks and focus on how readers construct mental models. However, while Jaafar's study examines a variety of literary texts, the present study narrows its focus to the parable of the Wicked Husbandman, providing a more specific investigation into how cognitive stylistic features shape mind styles in religious texts.

Sirinarang and Wijitsopon (2021) applied TWT and Schema Theory to analyse Viktor Frankl's memoir *Man's Search for Meaning*, concentrating on how linguistic features construct the narrator's mind style. Their study highlights the potential of cognitive stylistics to reveal the psychological and philosophical layers of texts. This work resonates with the current study's use

of TWT and Schema Theory to explore mind style, especially in how these theories can expose the psychological and theological viewpoints embedded in the parable of the Wicked Husbandman.

Other studies, such as those by El-Wahsh (2023), Mueller (2023), and Neary (2023), have examined metaphor and religious discourse, focusing on how metaphor functions within religious texts. While these studies enhance the understanding of religious language, they primarily concentrate on metaphorical structures rather than mind style, which is a key distinction highlighted by the present study. By applying TWT and Schema Theory to the parable of the Wicked Husbandman, this study investigates how linguistic features beyond metaphor—such as deixis, transitivity processes, and relational structures—construct character perspectives and moral worldviews.

In summary, although many studies have applied cognitive stylistics to modern literary works and some have examined religious texts from a cognitive perspective, there remains a gap in applying these theories to mind style in biblical parables (Edem & Aluya, 2023). This research addresses that gap by analysing the parable of the Wicked Husbandman in Luke 20:9-19, illustrating how linguistic features in two Bible translations (NKJV and NIV) create contrasting mind styles and theological interpretations. By utilising TWT and Schema Theory, the current study offers a new contribution to cognitive stylistics and biblical interpretation, emphasising how translation choices shape worldview and moral understanding in religious texts.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach, suitable for exploring the cognitive and linguistic features of biblical texts. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on frequency, qualitative analysis allows for close reading to reveal how stylistic choices shape character perspectives and worldviews (Titscher et al., 2000).

The data for this study include the parable of the Wicked Husbandman (Luke 20:9–19) as presented in two English Bible translations: the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New International Version (NIV). The NKJV maintains formal diction and syntactic structures typical of traditional translations, while the NIV uses modern vocabulary and idiom to enhance accessibility. A



comparative analysis of these two methods allows the study to evaluate how translation choices influence the cognitive stylistic construction of mind style.

The analysis employs Text World Theory (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007) to identify world-building elements (participants, time, and place) and function-advancing propositions (events and actions), and Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980; Stockwell, 2002) to explain how cultural knowledge of vineyards, inheritance, and authority influences interpretation. Attention is given to how the vineyard owner, his servants, and the husbandmen are linguistically depicted, and how translation differences between NKJV and NIV shape these portrayals. By focusing on this single parable, the study demonstrates how cognitive stylistics reveal the linguistic encoding of worldview in sacred texts, and how translation mediates theological and interpretive meaning.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The discourse world in the parable of the wicked Husbandmen in both the NKJV and NIV refers to the societal and religious context in which the parable was presented and interpreted. The parable is set within the temple in Jerusalem during the final week of Jesus's life. The discourse world of this parable in both versions includes the discourse participants involving Jesus, his disciples, and some Pharisees. The parable was spoken by Jesus during the final week of his ministry, shortly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and is a rebuke to the Jewish religious leaders who rejected God's prophets and, ultimately, Jesus himself. The parable was delivered in the temple courts, where Jesus taught the people. It adopts a shared discourse world.

The text world of the parable refers to the fictional setting and narrative within the story itself. This world includes the vineyard owner, the wicked husbandmen (tenants), their actions, the land they cultivate, and the subsequent events that unfold within the framework of the parable. It symbolically represents a spiritual truth that Jesus uses to illustrate an important point. Using the text world theory, both versions' text worlds are shaped by world-building elements and function-advancing propositions. The world-building elements include time (past), location (vineyard), objects (vineyard), and characters (the vineyard owner, the servants, the son of the vineyard owner, and the wicked husbandmen). The function-advancing proposition describes a landowner who plants a vineyard and entrusts it to tenants, sending his servants and son to collect his share of the



harvest. But the husbandmen mistreat and murder them, aiming to inherit the vineyard. When the vineyard owner returns, he kills the husbandmen and grants the vineyard to others.

The parable employs three types of deixis: temporal, spatial, and social. The temporal deixis refers to the past, with words like ‘planted’, ‘leased’, ‘went’, ‘sent’, ‘beat’, and ‘killed’ in Luke chapter 16, verse 9. These verbs establish a timeline of events, helping the reader understand the sequence of the owner’s actions, the husbandmen’s disobedience, and the eventual consequences. Spatial terms such as “vineyard”, “the owner’s house”, and “into the vineyard” define the setting and movement of characters, clarifying the spatial relationships between them and their environment. Lexical items like “lord” and “owner” indicate social hierarchy and power dynamics between the vineyard owner and the husbandmen. The actions of the husbandmen, such as killing the messengers and the owner’s son, also reflect their social roles as servants. The parable uses social deixis to highlight characters’ social status and actions based on their position.

The narrator alludes to events in the text world through material, mental, verbal, and relational processes. For instance, the reader is introduced to the following material verbs: ‘planted’, ‘leased (rented)’, and ‘went’ (Luke 16: 19); ‘sent’, ‘give’, ‘beat’, and ‘sent’ (Luke 16:10); ‘sent’, ‘beat’, ‘treated’, and ‘sent’ (Luke 16:11); ‘sent’, ‘wounded’, and ‘cast’ (Luke 16: 12); ‘do’ (Luke 16: 15); ‘come’, ‘destroy (kill)’, and ‘give’ (Luke 16: 16). These material verbs are attributed to the vineyard owner and the husbandmen. Verbs like ‘beat’, ‘treated’, ‘wounded’, ‘cast’, and ‘kill’ depict the actions of the wicked husbandmen. They illustrate their violent and rebellious behaviour towards the vineyard owner and his messengers. The narrator’s choice of these verbs highlights the husbandmen’s rejection of the vineyard owner’s authority and their disregard for his property and possessions. The repeated use of the verb ‘sent’, as shown in the vineyard owner’s relentless efforts to send his messengers to the husbandmen despite their brutal treatment of them, demonstrates his patience and tolerance. Additionally, the verbs ‘come’ and ‘destroy’ attributed to the vineyard owner portray his judgment over the wicked husbandmen.

Besides the material verbs, mental verbs like ‘respect’ and ‘see’ (Luke 16: 13), along with ‘saw’ and ‘reasoned’ (Luke 16: 14), are featured in the parable and are used to describe the thoughts and intentions of the characters. The verb ‘respect’ exemplifies a mental verb of cognition and is employed to highlight the inner thoughts of the vineyard owner. Similarly, ‘reasoned’ is a mental

cognition verb attributed to the wicked husbandmen and is used to reveal their mental state as they work together to plot the assassination of the vineyard owner's son. The only verb of perception in the text is 'see', which is attributed to the wicked husbandmen and refers to their recognition of the vineyard owner's son. The parable employs the relational process as exemplified in the expression 'this is the heir' (Luke 16: 14). This relational verb establishes relationships and connections between entities within the discourse. These ties are formed by linking the discourse participant (son) through attributes, values, or phenomena. For example, the relational phrase 'this is' in verse 14 connects the vineyard owner's son to the discourse via attributes and phenomena. Attributes describe the qualities of the son being referred to, while phenomena relate the son to a fact or situation that is observed to exist. Importantly, the characters' speech within the textual world is grounded in factuality, as evidenced by verbal processes such as 'said' (Luke 16:13), 'saying' (Luke 16: 14), and 'said' (Luke 16: 16). These verbal processes serve as vital resources in establishing a dialogic narrative within the text.

The parable of the wicked Husbandmen in the NKJV and NIV does not depict a subworld. A critical assessment of the text world theory applied to this parable in both versions reveals that the authors employ world-building elements and function-advancing propositions to create the text world. Both versions use transitivity processes such as material, mental, verbal, and relational processes to depict events within the textual world. Notably, the choice of verbs representing these transitivity processes varies in some instances. Both versions provide the reader with temporal, spatial, and social deictic information, aiding in understanding the characters' experiences. They also highlight the consequences of the husbandmen's actions, underlining the landowner's just judgment and establishing a new rule. Although both translations convey the same core message, differences in word choices and sentence structures illustrate varied focus and emphasis in each version. In summary, the NKJV and NIV translations of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen stress the repercussions of disobedience and the importance of obedience to God's authority. However, the NKJV adopts a more formal and direct tone, while the NIV employs modern, accessible language and offers additional context for the parable's message.

## Discussion

The analysis of the parable of the Wicked Husbandman demonstrates how cognitive stylistic features create contrasting mind styles that convey themes of patience, rebellion, and divine justice. Set within the discourse world of Jerusalem's temple courts during the final week of Jesus' ministry, the parable serves as an allegorical rebuke to the Jewish religious leaders who repeatedly rejected divine authority. This practical context aligns with Fowler's (1977, 1996) fundamental concept of mind style as the linguistic expression of a worldview, emphasising how textual features project different mental perspectives.

The world of the parable further demonstrates how language encodes different perspectives. The vineyard owner's repeated sending of servants exemplifies persistence and patience, while his final actions (come and destroy) convey justice and authority. Conversely, the tenants' violent actions (beat, cast out, kill) shape a worldview of rebellion and usurpation. These findings echo Krishnamurthy's (2010) study of *The Poisonwood Bible* and Jaafar's (2019) analysis of Melvin Udall, both of which show how material and lexical choices reveal character perspectives. The present study expands this understanding to biblical discourse, illustrating that similar stylistic markers shape mind styles in sacred texts.

Deictic structures reinforce these mental frameworks. Temporal deixis places the parable in a past context, spatial deixis anchors it in the vineyard schema familiar to first-century audiences, and social deixis (lord, owner) highlights hierarchies of power. This supports Jaafar's (2020) and Sirinarang and Wijitsopon's (2021) findings that Text World Theory and Schema Theory show how cultural and experiential frames guide interpretation. In the parable, schemas of land ownership, inheritance, and authority influence how readers perceive the tenants' rebellion as both socially and theologically transgressive.

Translation choices between NKJV and NIV show how language differences affect interpretation. The NKJV's formal diction emphasises divine authority and serious judgment, while the NIV's simple language stresses immediacy and relational tension. This contrast aligns with the work of Suleiman et al. (2023) and Fozilovna (2020), who demonstrated how stylistic features of suffering protagonists reflect different worldviews. Here, the translations reveal that even minor lexical and syntactic variations influence how readers view the vineyard owner's patience and the tenants' disobedience.

Finally, although previous cognitive stylistic research on religious texts has often concentrated on metaphor (Kuczok, 2018; El-Wahsh, 2023; Mueller, 2023), the current study bridges a gap by analysing mind style in a biblical parable. Using Text World Theory and Schema Theory, it shows that parables are linguistically rich environments where worldview formation arises from transitivity patterns, deixis, and translation decisions. In summary, this discussion confirms that mind style analysis, previously used on modern fiction and autobiography, can be effectively extended to biblical texts. The parable of the Wicked Husbandman demonstrates how linguistic features convey patience, rebellion, and justice, and how translation influences theological meaning. This contribution not only expands the scope of cognitive stylistics but also provides new tools for biblical interpretation.

## **Conclusion**

This study used cognitive stylistic frameworks, specifically Text World Theory and Schema Theory, to analyse the parable of the Wicked Husbandman in Luke's Gospel. It examined how linguistic choices shape mental models and influence interpretation. The analysis revealed that the vineyard owner's persistence, patience, and eventual justice are expressed through repeated material processes such as send, give, and destroy, while the tenants' rebellion and violence are shown through actions like beat, cast out, and kill. These contrasting mental models dramatise the theological themes of authority, disobedience, and divine judgment. The study also emphasised the role of deixis in shaping reader engagement. Temporal deixis positions the parable as a sequence of escalating events, spatial deixis grounds the narrative in the familiar schema of the vineyard, and social deixis highlights hierarchies of power. Collectively, these elements provide cognitive cues that frame the parable as an allegory of Israel's rejection of God's messengers and Son.

Comparison of the NKJV and NIV translations reveals how differences in diction and syntax shape interpretation. The formality of the NKJV emphasises solemnity and divine authority, whereas the NIV's accessibility highlights immediacy and human conflict. These findings confirm that translation is not merely a linguistic task but a mediator of theological worldview. Building on existing scholarship, this study broadens insights from empirical research on mind style in modern fiction (Krishnamurthy, 2010; Jaafar, 2019), schema-based interpretation (Jaafar, 2020; Sirinarang

& Wijitsopon, 2021), and characterisation in suffering narratives (Fozilovna, 2020; Suleiman et al., 2023) into the field of biblical texts. While prior research on sacred discourse has often emphasised metaphor (Kuczok, 2018; El-Wahsh, 2023; Mueller, 2023), this study demonstrates that mind style offers an equally valuable perspective for understanding how parables linguistically encode worldview.

In conclusion, the parable of the Wicked Husbandman illustrates how biblical stories are linguistically rich platforms for constructing worldviews. By combining cognitive stylistics with biblical interpretation, the study shows that language is key in shaping spiritual and moral understanding. Future research could extend this analysis to other parables or to non-narrative biblical texts, investigating how translation and stylistic features influence theological meanings across various contexts.

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