



# SEMANTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT “LEADERSHIP” IN THE NOVEL “CALL OF THE WILD” BY J. LONDON

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the interpretation of the concept of “leadership” in the novel “Call of the wild” by J.London. The article highlights that leadership involves attributes such as superiority, exclusivity, power, control, cooperation, and emotional intelligence. Therefore, the article will focus on research in different fields that explore these characteristics of the leadership concept.

**KEYWORDS:** leadership, semantic representations, lexical nomination, physical prowess, physical resilience, mental fortitude, mental adaptability.

The semantic realization of the concept “Leadership” in the English culture has deep roots throughout history. Interesting linguistic data were obtained by Y.S.Vashtalova, who analyzed ideas about “Leadership” based on data from the FrameNet project by Ch.Fillmore and her own association experiment with American respondents. She came to the conclusion that in American linguistic culture “leadership implies dominance” and is primarily associated with the figure of the president [1]. This researcher examines the use of this value to frame the

situation in the speeches of US politicians. However, in this work we are interested in how this concept is expressed in the novel “Call of the wild”. Our research was carried out using the method of conceptual analysis, discourse analysis, definitional analysis, linguocultural analysis, quantitative method and elements of content analysis. Based on these methods we analyzed the concept and as a result, determined 10 dominant semantic representation of the leadership (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Dominant semantic representation of the leadership in the novel “Call of the Wild” by J.London

N	Semantic representation of the concept leadership	Number
1	Power/strength	5
2	Primary/leading position	5
3	Supremacy/superiority	3
4	Characteristics/personality	3
5	Pride	3
6	Authority/dominance	2
7	Control	1
8	Exclusivity	1
9	Responsibility	1
10	Physical features	1

As the table shows, the main semantic representations of the concept leadership belong to the categories “power/strength” and “primary, leading position”. The features of “supremacy/superiority”, “characteristics/personality” and “pride” showed relatively lower results, while the categories “control”, “exclusivity”, “responsibility” and “physical features” are proved to be the lowest features of the leadership.

### POWER/STRENGTH

First of all, it should be noted that the first most important conceptual components of the leadership in the novel is the idea of power and strength. This is supported by a fairly high

frequency of use of units representing the paradigm of the lexical nomination strength – strengthen – strong – strongly. Let’s analyze the examples.

*He alone endured and prospered, matching the husky in strength, savagery, and cunning.*

Strength here is described in terms of physical prowess and resilience. The character is portrayed as enduring and prospering despite challenges, matching the husky in “strength, savagery, and cunning”. This suggests strength not only in terms of physical power but also in terms of mental fortitude and adaptability.



*With the last remnant of his strength he managed to stagger along behind till the train made another stop, when he floundered past the sleds to his own, where he stood alongside Solleks.*

The use of “last remnant of his strength” suggests depletion or near exhaustion of physical energy. Despite this, the character manages to continue forward, showcasing determination and resilience in the face of adversity.

*And often, such was the communion in which they lived, the strength of Buck’s gaze would draw John Thornton’s head around, and he would return the gaze, without speech, his heart shining out of his eyes as Buck’s heart shone out.*

Here, strength is depicted in a more metaphorical sense, as the power of a gaze to convey emotion and connection. The strength of Buck’s gaze is potent enough to draw the attention of John Thornton and elicit a non-verbal exchange of emotion, indicating a strong bond between them.

*When he felt him grasp his tail, Buck headed for the bank, swimming with all his splendid strength*

Buck’s “splendid strength” is portrayed through physical action, specifically in swimming with vigor towards the bank. This example emphasizes strength as a measure of physical capability and stamina.

*He had great faith in Buck’s strength and had often thought him capable of starting such a load; but never, as now, had he faced the possibility of it, the eyes of a dozen men fixed upon him, silent and waiting.*

In this example, strength is associated with capability and potential. John Thornton has “great faith in Buck’s strength, “viewing him as capable of handling challenging tasks. This demonstrates strength not only in physical terms but also in terms of trust and belief in one’s abilities.

Semantic analysis of the concept leadership in terms of its component “power/strength” showed that leader’s strength is represented as a physical endurance, resilience and adaptability, determination and persistence, emotional connection and bond, physical capability and vigor, trust and belief in one’s capability.

### PRIMARY, LEADING POSITION

This component of the concept leadership in the novel is revealed, when characterizing the leading position of the dogs in the pack. This specific feature is represented by the key terms, such as “lead-dog”, “leading”, and “leader”.

*From then on it was war between them. Spitz, as lead-dog and acknowledged master of the team, felt his supremacy threatened by this strange Southland dog.*

In this passage, the concept of strength is intertwined with dominance and leadership within a pack of dogs. Spitz, as the lead dog, feels his supremacy threatened by Buck, a newcomer. This triggers a power struggle, where both dogs assert their pride and desire for dominance. Buck’s actions of openly challenging Spitz’s leadership and deliberately interfering with

his duties demonstrate his own strength and ambition to assert dominance within the pack.

*Likewise it was this pride that made him fear Buck as a possible lead-dog. And this was Buck’s pride, too. He openly threatened the other’s leadership. He came between him and the shirks he should have punished. And he did it deliberately.*

The passage highlights how pride can be a source of strength but also vulnerability. Spitz fears Buck as a potential threat to his leadership, driven by his own pride and desire to maintain dominance within the pack. Similarly, Buck’s pride fuels his ambition to assert himself as a leader, instilling fear in Spitz and challenging the existing hierarchy.

*This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war mad on a stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight.*

This passage illustrates strength as instinctual and primal, particularly in the context of pursuit. Buck’s ecstasy and forgetfulness of living are likened to that of an artist absorbed in creation or a soldier consumed by the frenzy of battle. As Buck leads the pack in pursuit of prey through the moonlit wilderness, his strength manifests in his relentless drive and determination to secure food for himself and the pack.

*Buck trotted up to the place Spitz would have occupied as leader; but Francois, not noticing him, brought Solleks to the coveted position. In his judgment, Solleks was the best lead-dog left. Buck sprang upon Solleks in a fury, driving him back and standing in his place.*

Here, strength is depicted as the ability to assert dominance and challenge established hierarchies. Buck, recognizing his own capability and desiring the leadership position, confronts Solleks, who is favored by Francois for the coveted lead-dog role. Buck’s actions of driving Solleks back and claiming the leadership position demonstrate his strength and determination to rise in rank within the pack.

*Buck led the pack, sixty strong, around bend after bend, but he could not gain. He lay down low to the race, whining eagerly, his splendid body flashing forward, leap by leap, in the wan white moonlight. And leap by leap, like some pale frost wraith, the snowshoe rabbit flashed on ahead.*

In this passage, strength is portrayed through physical prowess and endurance. Buck leads the pack in a relentless pursuit of a snowshoe rabbit, demonstrating his strength and agility as he races through the snowy terrain. Despite his efforts, Buck struggles to gain ground on the elusive prey, highlighting the challenges and persistence required to achieve one’s goals.

The semantic analysis of the second main component of the concept leadership reveals that the sub-concept “primary and leading position in a group” is closely linked to dominance and leadership, pursuit and instinct, pride, strength and persistence and physical prowess within the context of a pack of dogs



navigating the wilderness. It encompasses not only physical strength but also mental fortitude, determination, and the drive to assert dominance and achieve one's objectives.

### SUPREMACY/SUPERIORITY

The idea of dominance prevails, as it stems from all the others and is inextricably linked with them, especially with comparing the qualities of the main hero Buck. As in the examples:

*From then on it was war between them. Spitz, as lead-dog and acknowledged master of the team, felt his supremacy threatened by this strange Southland dog.*

The statement "From then on it was war between them" sets the tone for a power struggle between Buck and Spitz. This conflict arises from Spitz feeling his dominance threatened by Buck's arrival, indicating that strength is closely tied to the ability to assert dominance and maintain control within the pack.

*At a bound Buck took up the duties of leadership; and where judgment was required, and quick thinking and quick acting, he showed himself the superior even of Spitz, of whom Francois had never seen an equal.*

Buck quickly assumes the role of leadership, showcasing his strength in decision-making, quick thinking, and action. Despite Spitz's reputation as the lead-dog, Buck demonstrates his superiority in judgment and agility, positioning himself as a formidable contender for leadership within the pack.

*Buck simply smothered him by virtue of superior weight, and cut him up till he ceased snapping and began to whine for mercy.*

Buck's physical strength becomes evident in his ability to overpower Spitz. Despite Spitz's experience and status as the acknowledged master of the team, Buck asserts his dominance through sheer force and superior weight. This highlights how physical strength can play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining leadership within a hierarchical structure. Buck's method of subduing Spitz by "smothering him by virtue of superior weight" illustrates his strategic approach to conflict resolution. By using his physical strength to assert dominance, Buck effectively gains control over Spitz, forcing him to submit and cease resistance. This demonstrates how strength can be utilized not only for aggression but also for strategic maneuvering and control in power struggles.

All in all, the superiority and supremacy of the heroes in terms of leadership is demonstrated in both physical and personal characteristics of the heroes, encompassing qualities such as decision-making, physical dominance, and strategic maneuvering within the context of interpersonal conflict and power dynamics.

### CHARACTERISTICS/PERSONALITY

This passage provides insight into the personality and leadership style of Spitz, the established leader of the pack:

*Spitz was the leader, likewise experienced, and while he could not always get at Buck, he growled sharp reproof now and again, or cunningly threw his weight in the traces to jerk Buck into the way he should go.*

Spitz is portrayed as an experienced leader who commands authority within the pack. His leadership is characterized by confidence and assertiveness, reflecting his years of experience in navigating the challenges of the wilderness and leading the team of sled dogs. Spitz communicates his leadership through various means, including growling sharp reproofs and using cunning tactics to assert control. This suggests that he employs both verbal and non-verbal cues to enforce discipline and maintain order within the pack. Spitz's occasional growling of sharp reproofs indicates his willingness to correct and discipline members of the pack when necessary. This suggests that he maintains discipline through a combination of assertive communication and physical coercion, reinforcing his position of leadership and control.

*At a bound Buck took up the duties of leadership; and where judgment was required, and quick thinking and quick acting, he showed himself the superior even of Spitz, of whom Francois had never seen an equal.*

This passage provides insight into Buck's assumption of leadership within the pack and contrasts his leadership style with that of Spitz. Buck's swift transition into a leadership role demonstrates his natural aptitude for assuming responsibility and authority. He wastes no time in taking up the duties of leadership, indicating a strong sense of initiative and confidence in his abilities. Buck's leadership is characterized by his superior judgment, quick thinking, and swift action. In situations where split-second decisions are required, Buck consistently demonstrates his ability to assess the circumstances and respond effectively, showcasing his mental acuity and agility. The passage explicitly states that Buck proves himself superior even to Spitz, who is established as a highly capable leader. This comparison underscores Buck's exceptional leadership qualities and suggests that he surpasses Spitz in terms of strategic thinking, decision-making, and overall effectiveness as a leader.

*So long as that were not interfered with, they did not care what happened. Billee, the good-natured, could lead for all they cared, so long as he kept order.*

The dogs' primary concern is maintaining order within the pack and ensuring that the established hierarchy remains intact. As long as order is maintained, they are indifferent to who assumes the leadership role or takes charge of leading the team.

### PRIDE

*It was inevitable that the clash for leadership should come. Buck wanted it. He wanted it because it was his nature, because he had been gripped tight by that nameless, incomprehensible pride of the trail and trace that pride which holds dogs in the toil to the last gasp, which lures them to die joyfully in the harness, and breaks their hearts if they are cut out of the harness.*

In this passage, pride emerges as a significant sub-concept of leadership, influencing Buck's desire for leadership and shaping his behavior within the context of the sled dog team. Buck's desire for leadership is driven by a sense of pride deeply



ingrained in his nature. This pride is described as “nameless” and “incomprehensible”, suggesting that it is an instinctual and intrinsic aspect of his identity as a sled dog. The passage highlights a specific manifestation of pride associated with the “trail and trace”, referring to the hardships and challenges of sled dog work. Buck takes pride in his endurance and dedication to the task, symbolized by his willingness to work until his last gasp and even to die joyfully in the harness. This pride in endurance reflects a key aspect of leadership, as leaders often set an example through their resilience and commitment to the group’s goals.

*Like, who had been trembling abjectly, took heart at this open mutiny, and sprang upon his overthrown leader. Buck, to whom fairplay was a forgotten code, likewise sprang upon Spitz.*

In this passage, the dynamics of leadership and pride are evident through the actions of the dogs, particularly in response to a perceived challenge to authority. The dogs’ responses, particularly Buck’s and “like’s” (Spitz’s), highlight their own pride and desire for dominance. Despite fair play being described as a forgotten code for Buck, suggesting a departure from traditional notions of fairness and equity, his instinctual response to the mutiny is to assert himself and challenge Spitz’s leadership. This underscores the role of pride in driving individuals to assert their dominance and strive for leadership positions within the pack hierarchy. The passage illustrates the interplay between pride, leadership, and survival instincts within the pack of dogs. It highlights how challenges to authority can embolden individuals to assert themselves and vie for dominance, even if it means abandoning principles of fairness and equity. In this harsh and competitive environment, pride becomes a driving force behind the struggle for leadership and survival.

*But Buck was in open revolt. He wanted, not to escape a clubbing, but to have the leadership. It was his by right. He had earned it, and he would not be content with less.*

In this passage, Buck’s revolt against the existing leadership and his desire to claim leadership for himself are emblematic of the intertwining of pride and leadership within the pack dynamics. Buck’s decision to openly revolt against the established leadership, represented by Spitz, shows his ambition and determination to ascend to the position of leader. His revolt signifies a rejection of the current power structure and a bold assertion of his own capabilities and worthiness for leadership. Buck’s belief that leadership is his “by right” reflects a strong sense of entitlement and pride in his own abilities. He perceives leadership not merely as a position of authority but as something he has earned through his actions and contributions to the pack. This sense of entitlement further fuels his determination to claim leadership and assert his dominance.

In conclusion, based on the methods of the conceptual analysis, discourse analysis, definitional analysis, linguocultural analysis, quantitative method and elements of content analysis, 10 dominant semantic representation of the leadership “power/strength”, “primary, leading position”,

“supremacy/superiority”, “characteristics/personality”, “pride”, “control”, “exclusivity”, “responsibility”, “physical features” were determined.

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