

## "Symbolism of color terms in the tales of Altaians and Tuvinians"

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**Abstract:** The functioning of color terminology in texts of the Altai and Tuva peoples reveals ethno-linguistic patterns: the most stable linguistic expressions and archaic representations of color are documented in the epic oral traditions of these peoples and serve as an integral background for the complete representation of the linguistic worldview. If a specific color designation can denote one lexicosemantic group with one meaning, for example, the color blue with words meaning 'sky' and 'sea', and an animal having a celestial or marine origin, lexemes with the meaning 'light', 'dark', 'red' demonstrate rather wide **valency properties and semantic potential**: *ak örgöö* 'white palace', *ak ai as* 'white light', *ak koböng* 'white cotton', *ak kiyis* 'white felt', *ak mal* 'white cow', *altyn kol* 'golden hands', *kara suu* 'black water\*' → 'mountain spring'<sup>1</sup>, *kara buka* 'black bull', *kara kulak* 'black lion', *кызыл кан* 'red blood'.

In oral folklore, highly recurrent and symbolically charged color terms are black, white, gold, and red. The "older" or more archaic a color is, the more multifaceted it manifests in its symbolic functions. Secondary colors (e.g., green and mixed pair colors) are more "realistic" in meaning, symbolically less charged, and restricted to fewer lexical items. Written monuments from the ancient Turkic era reflect rare occurrences of color terminology, with a limited set; these generally correspond to the basic colors: white, black, red, and less frequently – blue-green. The analysis of color terminology was conducted based on the Altai heroic epic "Maadai-Kara" and Tuvan tales "Boktu-Kirish," "The Fearless Khan-Khuluk," "Haimer-ool and the Bull-sized Wolf," considered masterpieces of the golden foundation of the epic heritage. These are a rich linguistic source for new research and directions.

**Methodological Basis.** The methodological basis of this work comprises the ways and principles for studying the symbolism of color, realized using a linguocultural approach. The foundation for this direction in modern linguistics is based on the works of D.S. Likhachev and received further development from the works of A.A. Potemkin, A. Vezhbeevsky, A.N. Afanasyev, A.P. Vasil'evich, L.L. Gabysheva, N.L. Zhukovskaya, and other scientists researching language, thought, and culture as interconnected phenomena forming the core of any concept within the linguistic worldview.

**Research Methods.** The work employs the following research methods: descriptive, comparative-associative (comparative-associative?), structural-semantic, and the approach of cultural phone interpretation.

**Keywords:** symbolism, color terms, color naming, linguistic worldview, epic, ethnolinguistics.

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## Introduction

The topic of national-cultural specificity is one of the modern problems in linguistics, yet many questions related to it have not been sufficiently and thoroughly addressed in the scientific literature. "The national specificity of the semantics of any lexicological unit in the broadest sense refers to its difference in meaning compared to related units in the comparison language." This direction of linguistic research is based on the concept of the *anthropocentric nature of language* (or *language centered on man, anthropocentricity*) and is realized through the integration of language and culture. Unfortunately, the specificity of the Altai language regarding this issue remains insufficiently studied. Meanwhile, the relationship between language and culture represents a fundamental linguistic problem. The relevance of this research topic stems from the current interest in linguistics concerning the reflection in language of conceptual, value-based, and associative components of the objective world.

The lexical-semantic representation of objects from the real world within a specific culture embodies the national-cultural specificity of a language. A crucial element of the conceptual system of human thought are the concepts of signs and symbols. In this sense, the lexicosemantic study of signs and symbols in the Altai and Mongolian languages is significant for determining the characteristic features of their worldview and word formation. Furthermore, signs and symbols represent one of the constants of world culture; their investigation in each national language and ethnic culture will allow for identifying its conceptual features and the particular dynamics of the relationship between language and culture. Role of Signs and Symbols and Cultural Universals/Specifics. The role of signs and symbols in explaining the present and foretelling the future, through the projection of their semantic interpretations and subsequently their practical implementation, is unquestionable when discussing contemporary culture. Every people's culture contains both universal and specific elements. According to D.S. Likhachev, universal elements are reflected in the language of an ethnicity, stating that "the language of a nation serves as a concise and algebraic expression of its entire culture" [1]. Indeed, ethnic specificity is what ultimately causes the "language mismatch" in world conceptualization. Distinguishing Features of Chromatic Symbolism (Color Symbolism) in the Linguistic Worldview of the Altai and Tuvan Peoples. The following characteristic features of chromatic symbolism are identified within the linguistic worldview of the Altai and Tuvan peoples: Cultural traditions, mythology, folklore, and historical facts (commonalities and differences). Linkage with dialectology, etymology, and the history of the language. Research into lexicon occupies a special place within the cultural worldview. Lexicon accumulates background knowledge that carries semantics and meaning, aiding in the reconstruction of lifestyle and the ancient worldview, and helping to define the national character through the prism of linguistic features. While tracing the stages of myth formation, A.A. Potebnya notes that objects and phenomena of the everyday world were perceived by primitive humans as symbols of the mythical, "celestial" world: «Earthly fire and earthly cattle provided answers to the questions: 'What is the celestial fire?' and 'What is the cloud?' Only then did a new question arise: 'But what, then, is the earthly fire, the earthly cow?' The answer was simple: 'Earthly fire is the very celestial fire that descended to the earth; earthly cattle is a mysterious embodiment of the celestial, and thus, through their known actions, they can

point to the deeds of the primordial creators» [2]. Anna Vezhbytskaya, examining the denotative correspondence in color terms, concludes that color concepts (concepts) are connected to certain "universal elements of human experience." She identifies these universal elements as follows: day and night, the sun, fire, vegetation, the sky, and the earth. Color perception cannot be expressed in words. However, we can discuss it because we are able to link our visual classifications to specific universal examples, she notes. [3]. As a result of his psycholinguistic research, A.P. Vasilevich concluded that "the perception of color space apparently depends not so much on an individual's language as on cultural-historical specifics" [4]. The analysis of folklore texts helps to understand why certain symbolic meanings have become attached to color terms in the linguistic consciousness of a people. Being a specific form of myth evolution and a unique form of a people's collective creativity, the folktale, as one of the most widespread genres of folk prose, becomes an invaluable source for studying the national-cultural connotations of linguistic units. The texts of legends, epics, and folktales are capable of objectively demonstrating the features of the semantics and symbolism of various kinds of lexemes in a particular national language, in particular, the semantics and symbolism of color terms.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of the functioning of color terms in Altai and Tuvan texts and legends has revealed a number of ethnolinguistic patterns in the linguistic worldview. The most stable linguistic expressions and archaic concepts of color are recorded in the epic tales of the peoples, used as the background of the work for a complete aesthetic and emotional perception.

First of all, it is noteworthy that the texts use a very specific and quantitatively limited set of color terms. Using the principle of constructing color paradigms (where a paradigm is understood as a stable semantic invariant realized at the surface level in a number of semantically similar terms), it is possible to speak of a stable realization of the following groups of color terms in the worldview: light, dark, red, green, blue. It is necessary to note that in Turkic tales, one color can act as a distinctive feature, belonging to a certain world or substance, while colors grouped in the text can express its intensity, perform the function of introducing and preparing the reader, focusing their attention on a certain passage, deepening perception and imagination, intensifying the colors of an event or description, and expressing the peculiarity of a moment. Therefore, it makes sense to consider achromatic colors not separately, but in micro-groups. Performing several functions, colors, as research shows, ultimately express the following general color terms: light, dark, and red, representing the upper world, lower world, and middle world, respectively. They predominate not only qualitatively (diversity of connotations, evaluative meanings) but also quantitatively, differing from other color terms (green, blue) in their diverse combinatory possibilities. While a specific color term may denote one lexico-semantic group with a single meaning (for example, the color term *blue* with the words *sky* and *sea*, an animal of celestial or marine origin), lexemes meaning *light*, *dark*, and *red* exhibit rather broad valency properties and semantic potential: *örgöö* 'white palace', *ak-aias* 'white light', *ak köböñ* 'white cotton', *ak kiis* 'white felt', *ak mal* 'white cattle', *altyn kol* 'golden hands', *kara suu* 'spring (water source)', *kara buka* 'black bull', *kara-kula* 'black lion', *kyzyl kan* 'red blood'. In folklore, the high-frequency and symbolically loaded colors are the color terms *black*, *white*, *golden*,

and *red*. The more “archaic” a color, the earlier it was assimilated by the culture of an ethnic group, the more multifaceted it manifests in its symbolic functions. Secondary colors (e.g., green, mixed paired colors) are more “realistic” in meaning, less symbolically loaded, and tied to limited lexemes. Ancient Turkic written monuments reflect color terms that are rare, their set is limited, generally to the basic colors: white, black, red, and less frequently blue-green. I.M. Chebochakova believes that classifying words as color terms suggests that, based on them, the formation of adjectives with the meaning of partiality and intensity of a color feature is possible (expected) [5]. Besides denoting objects and descriptions with color, A.N. Kononov notes that among Asian nomads, the color designation of the cardinal directions was widespread: red – south, black – north, blue – east, white – west, yellow – zenith. Color geosymbolism among the Turks, it seems, long ago fell out of active use and was replaced by linear-spatial orientation. And yet, as often happens in such cases, the old, long and firmly forgotten, is preserved in individual manifestations of human practical activity but receives a new interpretation and explanation, far removed from the true meaning of the word. For example, *kara* (Azerb., Turkm. *gara*) in Turkic languages is known primarily in the following meanings: 1) ‘black’, ‘dark’, ‘gloomy’, ‘stern’, ‘sad’, ‘unfortunate’; 2) ‘cattle’, ‘crowd’, ‘people’, ‘army’; 3) ‘dry land’, ‘earth’; 4) ‘hill’, ‘mountain ridge’, ‘high hillock’ [6]. The functions of color are exceptionally great where it is coupled with a symbol, but here metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses also seem semantically equivalent: the latter qualification of a metaphor will undoubtedly be the most favorable for revealing the essence of a color metaphor from the perspective of the role played by the color element in the textual situation. In any case, the choice of color, as will be shown below, is dictated predominantly by purely aesthetic motives—to make the created image most attractive. It is necessary to note that colors, when describing a person’s appearance and character, form a certain group, for example, black, blue, golden, red, where the black color in this group can reflect its positive connotation. This group can also show health, strength, beauty, integrity, lineage, and social status [7]. The analysis of color terms was carried out based on the Altai heroic epic “Maadai-Kara” and the Tuvan tales “Boktu-Kirish”, “Fearless Khan-Khuluk”, and “Kheimer-Ool and the Wolf the Size of a Bull”, as masterpieces of the golden fund of epic heritage, which are rich linguistic sources for new research and directions.

### The main color KARA ‘BLACK’.

The choice of color, as will be shown below, is dictated predominantly by purely aesthetic motives—to make the created image most attractive. It is necessary to note that colors, when describing a person’s appearance and character, form a certain group, for example, *kara* ‘black’, *kök* ‘blue’, *altyn* ‘golden’, *kyzyl* ‘red’, where the black color in this group can reflect its positive connotation. This group can show health, strength, beauty, integrity, lineage, and social status:

Although he lamented his fate,

He had a heroic appearance:

Eyebrows — like black velvet, A thick black beard, 355 A nose, like a straight mountain ridge, Eyelashes, resembling a northern forest, Keen eyes, like blue stars, he himself, my dear, is like pure gold.

His cheeks — half a cliff, 360 His head — a whole cliff, His face — like a red deer bush — Such was my hero. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

To clarify the meaning of *kara* in the epic “Maadai-Kara”, a selection was made from the text, revealing that this lexeme occurs 217 times with different semantics: opposite meaning (clean - dirty, sacred - lowly, white-black, good-bad, many-one, rich-poor, noble-poor, of low estate, simple), duality, pairing (two black golden eagles, two identical black dogs Azar and Kazar), beauty (my head black, like a crow’s wing 145, two identical black eyes, eyebrows like black velvet), the color of sorrow, grief, rage (put on iron black boots with iron soles in ninety rows, my cattle licks the black earth, his face turned black with grief, attached a sharp black pike to his back, from the top of the black mountain, [huge] black puddles remain), evil forces (the black path of Erlik-Biya, Erlik-Biya’s black favorite, Abram-Moos Kara-Taadi – his daughter) [8, p.145].

### Group of colors KARA ‘BLACK-COPPER-DARK’ (treacherous):

The birchbark saddle [under her] creaks, The birchbark shoes rustle, [This] was the beloved black Daughter of Erlik biy Abram Moos Kara Taadi. A hat of owl feathers on her, Her clothing of canvas ribbons Flutters [in different directions], A birchbark drum behind her back. Her copper earrings – like copper cauldrons, Her copper nose – like a copper teapot. The face illuminated by moonlight, Blackens like smooth coal, The face illuminated by sunlight, Blackens like a dark night. Treacherous thoughts she had, The young woman Kara Taadi. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

The black color also denotes the hero’s ancestral mountain, the name of the mountain:

935 Our precious only son now Has the black mountain for a father, Has four birches for a mother. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

The group of color terms BROWN-BRONZE-GOLDEN speaks of hopelessness, a difficult situation, illness. The use of the terms brown and golden in the text is intended to create a color background.

“War is approaching our Altai,” he said,— “Ruin is nearing our land,” he said. 940 Altyn-Targa, his spouse, Turned away — Suppressed her grief, Taking a bronze bowl, Placed it on the fire, 945 Brought a bronze *tazhuur*, Resembling a brown mountain that does not fade from the sun, Handed a golden *tazhuur*,

Resembling a piebald mountain that does not fade from the moon. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

### Group BLACK-GOLD-BRONZE-SILVER.

In contrast to the white felt, the white, brown saddlebag, here all things-objects are black, signifying readiness for war, battle, possible losses. The spyglass, the black book of divination, the black saddlecloth, the black bowl – a non-specific color for things acts as an emotion, a suppressed feeling, to reflect a state, preparing the reader for the climax of a fight or struggle, the highest point of tension. The golden, bronze, and silver colors in the text, appearing in one color group, speak of solidity, durability, eternity, and state.

20 He had a black spyglass with nine joints, Had a Toidu - a glass mirror 24 Had a black book of divination-sudur, 23 Lying in a gilded sogule - casket 22 With nine clasps." 25 And the horse

Ozen-Kula, When he was young, [Had] a bridle, halter Of bronze and silver, Had a wide, lake-like black saddlecloth, Had a saddle with a curve like a mountain pass.

Had a triple breastplate and crupper, Had sixteen girths. Had a wide black saddlebag made from the hides of sixty elks. In it — equipment 35 For one who sets out on a journey: 57 A shallow black bowl From which, it seems, seventy men would not be sated; 38 [And] a light coat from the hides of ninety mountain goats. In the wide black saddlebag also 43 There was, it turns out, 40 Food for the journey-trip 42 Ready to eat. (“BOKTU-KIRISH”)

**The group of colors BLACK-RED** reflects the intensity of emotions, anger, aggression:

The breath of his horse, 645 Like black mist, spreads, The face of the hero himself, Like red flame, burns. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

**The group of colors BLACK-GREY** acts as a tool of defense, a talisman against black, dark forces, and a weapon for attack:

755 In his left hand at birth A nine-faceted black stone [217] was clenched, In his right hand, when he was born,

A seven-faceted grey stone was clenched. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

The use of a black stone in a spell against dark forces is one of the interesting parts of the epic; a fragment of the stone, under a spell, turns into a weapon:

When he was born, Clenched in his hand was 2070 A nine-layered black stone. Separating one layer from it with a flick, A small fragment of the stone.

The boy-hero began to enchant:

“The stone thrown by my left hand 2075 Let it cause astonishment, The stone thrown by my right hand Let it fly far, Let it pierce to the brain the heads Of nine black crows,”— 2080 Such a spell he uttered. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

In the meaning of a weapon for struggle, things also acquire a black, dark color – BLACK-DARK-BLOOD:

They found a deep dark cave. Entered the cave A wide black chest stands.

They rummaged — A wide black quiver lies. 230 They rummaged — A full set of heroic equipment was found. In the other half of the chest A full set of equipment for the heroic horse was found. On the other side of the cave lay A tight strong bow [and] an arrow with a tip, [that spills] blood, The brother and sister rejoiced-exulted (“BOKTU-KIRISH”)

The black color is endowed upon the bull and the maral deer, as guides between heaven and earth, possessing immense (black with positive connotation) strength and enormous size (horns stuck into the blue sky). The group of colors BLACK-BLUE is presented, which is quite frequent in the texts; the blue color, in this case, carries a positive connotation, neutralizing the concept of ‘dark’. And since the animals are connected with the blue sky, they are sent to be the hero’s helpers, predicting his path.

Amidst the black cattle, Among the densely living people A nine-year-old black bull Wanders back and forth, 3335 His ninety-fathom horns Stuck into the blue sky, From the sunny side from above A black shaggy maral With seventy-branched antlers, 4355 Bellowing, descended. “You will achieve your goal,—

Said the black maral calf,— Whatever you pursue — you will get it all,— 4445 So my Andalbaa answered. (“MAADAI-KARA”)

In the Tuvan tale “Fearless Khan-Khuluk”, the blue color is the color of otherworldly forces, guides between worlds; this tale also encodes a religious worldview in the form of the white and yellow colors of the *khadak*.

— “Where are you from and where are you going, son?” asked the old woman. — “My only younger sister has fallen ill with the blue sickness. And I am going for the heart of the blue bull, the master of the Blue Lake.” — “The master of the Blue Lake, the blue bull — is a mighty being,” said the old woman. — “He kills everyone. One of his horns is so hot that if you grab it, you will boil. The other horn is so cold that if you grab it, you will freeze and your hand will fall off. Here is a white *khadak* — with it, you will grab the cold horn. Here is a yellow *khadak* — with it, you will grab the hot horn.” (FEARLESS KHAN-KHULUK)

Transformations, sorcery in any culture are associated with otherworldly dark forces; usually, the black color carries the meaning of ‘bad’, ‘other’.

**The group of colors BLACK-RED** carries a more negative connotation.

5060 Gathered her black livestock, like acacias, Turning it into black sand, Put it in her pocket. Gathered her black people, Turning them into black coals, 5065 Took them in her palm. With a flash of her red neck, She jumped into the underworld. (“Maadai-Kara”)

Among all color names, achromatic ones are distinguished by the highest frequency in Altai and Tuvan folklore texts. Based on their frequency and high degree of metaphoricity, these words can be considered key to understanding the folklore text; it is the “simple” colors that form the symbolic core of culture. A high degree of tension in the very semiotic nature of color is created not only by the frequency of color names in the descriptions of worlds but also by the presence of a clear opposition based on the features ‘white’/‘black’, as a result of which color is perceived as a kind of symbolism of one or the other world. The language of color, formed by tradition, invested special meaning in the colors of bodies, garments, and attributes. Colors associated with sharp contrast, as well as their names forming antonymic pairs, have served humanity since ancient times as a simple, visual, and comprehensive expression of the opposition of evil and good, darkness and light, death and life.

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