

## Symbolism of white and black colours in Kazakh culture

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**Abstract.** Article is devoted to the colour symbols of Kazakh culture. Symbol is one of the phenomenon which can show the different features of the nation, its culture, tradition and stereotypes. And the main purpose of the paper is to show this features through the language, especially context and to try to identify the formation of the symbol, what kind of role the images, myths, religion and environment play in order to create a symbol. Article describes the main two colours: white and black, their role and influence in life of Kazakh people. Also we use different dictionaries of symbols, where we can find out the definition and interpretation of white and black colours as symbols in consciousness of people in the world.

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### Introduction

Requirement to create a symbol is the main feature which define people from other inhabitants of the world. "The developmental transformation from animal to human existence entails a radical change in the nature of the transaction between the organism and its milieu: human beings are not merely, nor mainly, organisms reacting to stimuli or responding to things-of-action. Man forms his Umwelt by relating to his environments in a new manner: he is directed toward knowing. The orientation toward, and the capacity for, knowing are essential and irreducible characteristics of man, characteristics that come clearly into relief when one compares the nature of the adaptiveness of animals and men to their respective environments." [1; 12]

George Ferguson admits that: "There is a language for these experiences. It is a very simple and beautiful language which man has known and used since the beginning of time. It is called the language of the sign and the symbol, the outward and visible from through which is revealed the inward and invisible reality that moves and directs the soul of a man." [2; 7]

According to Karasik V.I. symbol can be described as following: "... the polysemy of a symbol represents not only possibility of its variable interpretation, but also consecutive plurality of interpretations. Generalizing the various characteristics of an art symbol manufactured in various works, devoted to its judgment, it is possible to give to it the following definition: it is a perceptual image, characterized in the semantic depth, designating idea which possesses the high value, generating the new meanings, allowing the multiple interpretation, sending to supersensual experience" [3, 260].

Rubtsov N.N. while comparing symbol and sign concludes that: "Symbol is predisposed to create associations. The sign has no such quality, its main objective - to call concrete things" [4, 37].

From the early beginning when man started to live in this world he tried to overcome difficulties, chaos, disorientation and other things with the help of knowing. "...Now it is our contention that in order to build up a truly human universe, that is, a world that is known rather than merely reacted to, man requires a new tool – an instrumentality that is suited for, and enables the realization of, those operations constituting the activity of knowing. This instrumentality is the *symbol*" [1;13]. Also Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan see as the main function or feature of the symbol the representative mark. If sign or signal are elicitors of an action, symbol represents. And also they are against Cf. B. Russel's opinion that can be one of species of a "sign". According to them symbol is rather cognitive oriented than pragmatically. Edwyn Bevan claims: "So far as something seems to represent or stand for some reality other than itself, it may be counted as a symbol" [5, 275].

James D.G. gives example of the flower daffodils as a presentation of Shakespeare's imagination, which he explains can be characterized both as a scientific and emotionally:

"before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty.

Now this lines contain sober truth; the daffodil indeed comes before the swallow, and its structure enables it to withstand the winds of early spring without damage to itself: this is scientific enough truth... But the heart of Shakespeare's lines is in the metaphor by which the flower is given the attributes of will and courage..." [6; 99]. James D.G. describes metaphor in a following way: "Now

metaphor, of which I have given an example typical of thousands in Shakespeare, is one of the forms of symbol: it is the imagination of one thing in the form of another; it is the mode in which the nature, the *being*, the imagined extra-sensual essence of a thing, is represented by the identification with the apparently different; and it is procedure for which science can give no warrant; the scientific use of language must abhor metaphor. But metaphor is the nerve or heart of all poetic creation. But still, metaphor is only the way in which the imagination works; it never adds up to a statement or doctrine" [6; 100].

Cirlot J.E. in his "Dictionary of symbolism" admits that symbol cannot be everywhere and marks out the limits of it: "If there is or if there may be a symbolic function in everything, 'a communicating tension', nevertheless this fleeting possession of the being or the object by the symbolic does not wholly transform it into a symbol. The error of symbolist artists and writers has always been precisely this: that they sought to turn the entire sphere of reality into a vehicle for impalpable 'correspondences', into an obsessive conjunction of analogies, without being aware that the symbolic is opposed to the existential and instrumental and without realizing that the laws of symbolism hold good only within its own particular sphere" [7, xii].

Due the research we stopped in the interesting term "symbolic vehicle" made by Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan. According to them terms symbol and symbolic vehicle can be differentiated: "Note that, in our view, symbolizing enters directly into the construction of the "cognitive objects," determining how events are organized and what they mean. Our thesis is thus opposed to the widespread view which treat symbolic vehicles and referents as two fully formed entities that are externally linked to each other through contiguous pairing (and reinforcement). If one accepts this latter view, one implicitly denies to symbolization (including language) any creative role in the cognitive organization of experience and thought: symbolic vehicles then become reduced to a complex system of markers, useful merely for routine indication of referents and for communication about preformed judgments and concepts" [1; 15].

In this article we would like to analyze color symbols of Kazakh language and their role in speech, in society and imagination. It is not the new view that symbol is closely connected with other spheres of our life, with philosophy, psychology, linguistic, archeology, anthropology, folklore and history of religion, mythology and rituals of a nation, which all together organize wealth of symbolic tradition and becomes part of speech with very interesting content

and history, which can be varieties of ways of people thinking.

In novel "Akibilek" we can also find out the way how images of Kazakh culture have been experienced and how their meanings have been extended. "Many traditional symbols are ambiguous: they cannot be explained as having a single, constant meaning. Not every dragon in every culture is an evil enemy; the heart does not always stand for love. Indeed, real symbols, at different stages, are sources of very different, but always relevant, "information" [1; vii].

We can see the description of symbol from Edwyn Bevan's "Symbolism and belief": "The other kind of symbols purport to give information about the things they symbolize, to convey knowledge of their nature, which those who see or hear the symbols have not had before or have not otherwise. There is the old story of someone born blind having explained to him what the colour scarlet was by his being told that it was like the sound of a trumpet. Whether that was a happy analogy or not, it is plain that the only possible way in which a person born blind could be given any information regarding colour is by the use of some things within his own experience, as symbols working by analogy" [5, 12].

Colours can also be used as a non-verbal and communicative tool in speech. There is not so many research works done in Kazakh language to define the features of meaning of it. We can admit works of Kaidarov A., Kononov A., Zharkynbekova Sh. done in this sphere. It is very difficult process to feel and accept colour physically and psychologically. Colours influence to emotions and psychology of people differently and it's not surprise that colours are used as a sign and informational tool.

Colors in the nature aren't limited and aren't intended to designate one subject, the phenomenon, external data, color. Besides the name of colors can not have any relation to color at all or today it can be absolutely far from first meaning and concept. This phenomenon is inherent in the symbolical.

Obviously that the role of colors has huge symbolical value in life of society, its tradition and in consciousness not only of whole ethnos, but also in life of one person. Studying of the nature of colors is a quite topical issue in separately taken languages.

The color symbolism in language can be divided into national, psychological, physiological, linguistic, social, national, international, traditional, geosymbolics, etc. Each color influences not only to person, but also to animals individually.

Each people, ethnic group tries to give definition and value to each color. It is possible to assume that it was done in order to be different from any group of people, society, nation, country. Even if

to consider the Turkic people during the different periods of their development and existence, it is possible to define that during centuries certain colors played an important role in this or that tribe or in people's life. In ancient times each Turkic people, a tribe had customs, signs, anthems, a flag and the press, outerwear, the tool, emblems and the coat of arms, and even marks to gave the cattle. And each attribute had the color designation and divided them from each other and these colors were given bigger value in social relation.

In Kazakh culture different codes for various colors are used. According to M. Auezov, for Kazakhs there are two primary colors: white and black. "Antithesis of white, black is its equal in terms of absolute colour. Like it can be set at either end of the chromatic scale as a boundary to both warm and cold colours. Depending on its mattness or its glossiness, black can become the absence or the sum, the negation or the synthesis, of colour.

"Symbolically, black is most often seen in its cold and negative aspect. As the antithesis of all colour it is associated with primeval darkness and primal, formless matter. In this sense it is reminiscent of the significance of neutral, empty white and balances it in such analogous symbolic images at the horses of Death, which are sometimes black and sometimes white. However, neutral, chthonian white is associated in pictures of the world with the east-west axis, the axis of departure and change, while black is connected with the north-south axis, the axis of absolute transcendence and of the poles. North or south is considered as black, depending upon the direction in which peoples locate their Underworld. Thus the north is black to the Aztecs, Algonquin Indians and the Chinese, the south to the Maya, is the Nadir, that is the base upon which the World Axis stands, to the Pueblo Indians" [8, 92].

**Black** ("kara") color – color of the earth, night, sometimes a grief. For Kazakh people black color is perceived as power, force and fear of something. As well as for other nationalities, black color in Kazakh culture is a symbol of death. This color always brings with it difficulties, a grief and the evil. For Kazakhs «karaly kun» (rainy/black day) shows the way in a hell. The **black** color is also symbol of night: «Karauyt Khan, **kara** zhamilyghan auyliding ity ulyp tur» [9, 19] (*Dogs of the darkened, black aul (village) are howling*). Or "Sabalak **kara** bulttar-au! Akbilekting zhanyntunshykyrghan **kara** tuman az boldy dedingder me, ustine munsha tongenshe, anau askar taularding basyna tunesengdershi" [9, 52] (*Oh, black clouds! You think there wasn't more black fog tormenting soul of Akbilek, leave to tops of those mountains, than to hang over her*). Here black color can be explained not

only as a symbol of night, but also as a symbol of darkness, fear, danger and evil spirit ((khara bult, khara tuman) *black cloud, black fog*).

"Black, as the colour of melancholy, pessimism, sorrow and misfortune, is applied in everyday language in such terms as black magic, black books, blackmail, black market, black mass and so on. The Romans distinguished unlucky days with a black stone and different disasters have stigmatized Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays as 'Black'" [8, 95].

Colors are used for defining the age of the person. During ancient times when in a family someone died, on a *yurta* (kyiz ui) sewed a flag with a certain color which designated age of the dead. Red color designated that died young, black was used for people of middle age and white – a symbol of death of mature aged person. In many areas of Kazakhstan there was not tradition to lay red and black colored tissue to the top of *yurta*. Because according to tradition black and red colored clothes of dead were laid outside of house where it was shown in order to inform that in *yurta* there is a dead person. We can scoop information about any nation and their culture from colors. For example Turkic nation, including Kazakh people used to sew black string to white flag, it means that someone died in this family. In some regions of Kazakhstan people used to hang **black** flag in a spear.

**Black** color also can be a symbol of a Kazakh woman, her beauty and magical power: "Kazakhtyng kara kozderining sikyrlu kushi Europa ayelderinen kem emes" [9, 25] (*The magic power of beauty of black eyes of the Kazakh woman isn't worse than the European woman*). There are also phrase as **kara shash** (*black hair*), which also a symbol of Kazakh woman and beauty. Nowadays a lot of Kazakh girls named **Karashash** and **Karakoz**, fact of transformation of the phrases to personal names.

For a long time among the Kazakh people seven primary colors were used as symbols: blue, dark blue, red, white, yellow, black and green.

Blue and dark blue colors designate infinity and depth as represent an image of the sky and the sea. In turn, blue is a symbol of wisdom, intellect and belief, and dark blue – stability, justice and freedom. In political symbolic dark blue color connected with moral and religious aspects, because it symbolizes protection, silence and the peace.

**Red color** – color of life, love, force, heroism and health. In Kazakh culture in carrying out wedding rituals red color is still used as a symbol of a good luck for the bride going to the other house (the house of the husband).

**White color** ("ak") is a purity, wisdom, hope and peace. As confirmation can serve the literature written by Kazakh authors, where sense of

high human morals and beauty is connected with value of white color.

«**Ak** khaghazdai taza korip zhuretin Akbilek endi kuye zhakkandai kagaz...» (Akbilek who was innocent and pure, now was slung mud) [10, 258]. This fragment testifies that using white color «**ak** (ak kagaz)» (*white paper*), the author more strongly wanted to show beauty of soul of the heroine, her innocence and purity. The same symbol of purity, innocence and virginity we can see in following example of white color «**ak** (ak tos)» (*white breast*): “Shynymen, **ak tosine** aram deneni oinaktatip, ashylmagan kauynyn aram pyshakka zhargyzygany ma?” [9, 35] (Really, whether it means that her innocent body will be seized by the impious man).

White color can also symbolize death in Kazakh culture. “Absolute in itself, with only the variation of mattness or gloss, it can signify either the absence of colour or the sum of all colours. Thus it is set sometimes at the start and sometimes at the finish of the daily round and of the manifested world, which endows it with ideal and asymptotic properties. However, the finish of life – the instant of death – is also the moment in which we cross the bridge between the visible and the invisible and is therefore another starting-point.” [8, 1105]. We can see it in clothes attributes on a funeral. Kazakh woman don't put black kerchief on a head. **White** kerchief is a symbol of **black** death. And men bind belt from white fabric.

“In all symbolic thought, death precedes life and all birth is rebirth. For this reason white was originally the colour of mourning, as is still the case in the Far East and as was for long the practice in Europe, especially at the court of the Kings of France” [8, 1106].

In ancient times when **batyr** (*heroes*) gathered for battle, they spoke: «*olsem kazam ak bolsyn* (if I die, let my death be white (literally)) which means that death overtaken the person in battle, in fight is white (*pure, heroic*), as though blessed from height, innocent death, courageous, heroic withdrawal from life. Besides, Kazakhs

wished happy journey, telling «*ak zhol bolsyn*» (let the journey be pure) that symbolizes good luck, a good trip.

Each ethnos has the features inherent only in itself and it distinguishes it from other ethnic collectives. They can include various images, characters, stereotypes, material and spiritual values. All these values are reflection of cultural development of the people. Symbols can be transferred by many ways, in particular by means of language which people speak; they fix all phenomena and events in memory of ethnical lingua-cultural community.

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