

**The Symbolic Function of Colors and its Applications in the
Poetry of Children and Adolescents with a Focus on the Poems
from 1980 to 2010**

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Introduction

This study seeks to shed light on the symbolic function of colors, their applications in the poetry of children and adolescents, and their role in the semantic elaboration of poems. Unlike the poetry of adults, children's poems lack numerous semantic layers. This is due to the limited vocabulary of children as well as their little knowledge of how to analyze or interpret symbols. On the other hand, children are endowed with good imagination and the capability of imagery and self-identification. This enables them to understand many images and form meaning links and take artistic joys, which expands the scope of their communications.

Symbols can, thus, be used in a limited way. It is to be noted that children of different ages understand an image differently. For example,

due to their lack of cognitive power for semantic interpretation, pre-school children can rarely make a sense of symbols. Symbols not only give a depth to literary texts, but also help to enhance one's sense of aestheticism and creativity. As Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2000) state, symbols certainly play a significant role in shaping the minds of both adults and children. They are spontaneous expressions, create consistent relationships and serve as tools for creative imagination and invisible realization.

Methodology

The data of the study were collected through library research. First of all, 134 collections of children's poetry were reviewed. They belonged to nine poets including M. Rahmandoost, A. Sha'bannejad, J. Ebrahimi (Shahed), Q. Aminpour, M. K. Mazinani, N. Keshavarz, B. Maleki, A. Sha'bani, and A. Salehi. Then, 32 collections were found to contain symbolic colors, 21 collections of which were assigned to the adolescent age group. After the extraction of the poems with symbolic contents, a descriptive-analytical method was used to classify, describe and explain the likely meanings of the symbolic colors. Finally, old and modern poems were compared in terms of the symbolic meanings encoded in these colors. The frequency of such symbols was also measured in different age groups.

Literature review

In his book *Figures of speech*, Shafie Kadkani (1971) dedicates a whole chapter to the critical analysis of colors used in the Persian poetry. Nikoobakht and Qhasemzadeh (2005) discuss the symbolic application

of colors in the works of three poets. Hassanli and Ahmadian (2007) analyze *Shahnameh* for the mythical and psychological features of black and white colors. So far, the poems of Sanai, Sa'di, Nezami, Nima, Sapehri, Sereshk and Monzavi have been investigated from the viewpoint of colors, too. In her book '*From This Eastern Garden*', Salajeqheh (2006) has a brief discussion of the old patterns of colors used in children and adolescents' poetry. Despite such studies, no research has ever been conducted on the symbolic functions of colors and their application in the poetry of children and adolescents.

Discussion

Black

In Iranian myths, black symbolizes demon and demonic forces. Some ancient Persian poems such as *Shahnameh* use black as a concept not only to describe night, hair, multitude of warriors, devils and witches, but also to depict royal majesty, mourning atmosphere and enmity (Hassanli and Ahmadian, 2007). As the analysis of the poems showed, black as a symbol is the most frequent color. It is applied in children's and adolescents' poetry to criticize poverty, deprivation, hostility, bereavement, ignorance, sin, and despotism. The following example sentence is suggestive of the function of this color: "The alleys of the city, like homeless children, are asleep under the black umbrella of the sky which looks in patches. No one except the black shadow of the clouds moves in those alleys" (Maleki, 1992: 14).

White

In *Shahnameh*, the color white symbolizes beauty. For instance,

Keykhosrou attains immortality in a white atmosphere (Hassanli and Ahmadian, 2007). Similarly, it is the symbol of chastity or avoidance of sins in *Haft Peykar* (Varedi and Mokhtarnameh, 2007). In modern poetry, as in Sepehri's works, it also connotes purity and honesty (Nikoobakht and Qhasemzadeh, 2005). This is also the case in the poems written for children and adolescents. Color white suggests beauty, purity, innocence, hope, waking time and rebirth. For example: "Black clouds have screened the moon, but snow has whitened the hair of this dark night" (Maleki, 2003: 78)

Green

In the contemporary poetry, the color green is suggestive of hope, growth, life, habit, God, revelation and spirituality (Hassanli and Seddiqhi, 2003; Nikoobakht and Qhasemzadeh, 2005). In children's and adolescents' poetry, green sometimes imparts hope and satisfaction. As Itten (1963) states, "happiness, hope, and a combination of faith and knowledge are among the concepts that green represents" (p. 95). Also, as Ebrahimi (2003) writes: "*One can see green blossoms in the tired face of the leaves / Face of God shines on the tree when in fall it quietly bereaves.*"

Green as a representative concept is also frequently used in poems about the promised savior. In this regard, Beaucorps (1994) believes that, in religious ceremonies, green indicates hope and expectation for salvation as well as the second coming or resurrection. For instance: "*When swallows begin to fly and dive, / A rider in green is seen to arrive. / He smells like a rose that in April springs, Butterflies on the tippet that he slings*" (Maleki, 2003).

Red

In *Shahnameh*, this color symbolizes death and sometimes exciting life with love (Hassanli and Ahmadian, 2008). In contemporary poetry, however, red is used with a religious flavor to represent martyrdom (Nikoobakht and Qhasemzadeh, 2005). This is true about the children;s and adolescents' poetry as well: "*His blood lies in the heavens, / The rainbow is what it reddens. / When it falls through the heavens' rips, / It can be found down there upon tulips.*"

The color red also connotes shame and love, as it is the case nearly everywhere around the world (Sattari, 1997). Note the following verse: "*Our eyes greet as they meet, / Turning us red in shame and heat; / Then into hearts love gets its feet.*" (Rahmandoost, 2004)

Blue

In children's poetry, religious or spiritual concepts are often associated with blue. This color is usually considered very positive, as a reminder of truth, religious feelings, security and spiritual purity (Guerin et al., 1997). As Rahmandoost (2000) writes: "*Wondering if you know about the sky, / Blue is the news of those that there lie. / All is heard sounds sweet and good, / No better news elsewhere you hear could.*"

Yellow

In children's poetry, apart from the gold of the sun, yellow is associated with the fall and the death of leaves. It also sometimes implies decrepitude and disease. Here is a representative lyric by Sha'bani (1994): "*Canaries can tweet but sometimes not, / Yellow of their feathers make their moods rot.*"

Gray

Gray has been favored by contemporary poets (Moradi, 2016), but it is often avoided in children's and adolescents' poetry. Indeed, symbolization is done so much less with gray than with other colors. What it imparts is sorrow, depression and despair: "*A gray silence has seized the village, / Lack of breeze and roses caused it a ravage.*" (Rahmandoost, 2000)

Conclusion

According to the reported statistics, color symbols have a frequency of 119 in the adolescents' poetry, which is higher than that in the children's poetry. The most frequent colors used as symbols in the children's and adolescents' poetry are black, white, green, red, blue, yellow and gray.

In the studied poems, black suggests bereavement, sorrow, sin, being astray, poverty and injustice. It also refers to oppressors in poems about war. From this perspective, the children's and adolescents' poetry is not without sadness. The color white, however, compensates this by injecting hope and light into the poems. It symbolizes purity, innocence, vigilance, riddance from darkness and rebirth. As another color in positive symbolism, green connotes luxuriance, livelihood, dynamism, security and the expectation of the promised savior. In the poems written for children, the color red often relates to revolution, war or Ashura event. In the same context, blue is suggestive of tranquility, beauty, love and spirituality but its frequency is low as a symbol, which is due to the dynamic nature of those points. Yellow is applied dubiously since it refers both to depression and sadness as negative

concepts and to charm and happiness as positive ones. As for gray, it imparts grief and gloom. The analysis of the color instances has shown that each color has the same symbolic meaning in such poems as it commonly does in the society.

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