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SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF BASIC COLOR TERMS IN UZBEK: DENOTATIVE, CONNOTATIVE AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS

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Abstract. The article examines the semantic structure of six basic Uzbek color terms – oq, qora, qizil, sariq, yashil and ko‘k – as a three-layer structure of denotative, connotative and symbolic meanings. The material was drawn from explanatory and phraseological dictionaries of Uzbek, folklore and literary texts. Componential analysis, contextual analysis and linguoculturological interpretation were used. The results show that the denotative layer is stable and is defined through natural prototypes such as snow, soot, blood, gold, grass and the sky. The connotative layer develops from potential semes such as ‘light’, ‘clean’, ‘dark’, ‘hidden’ and ‘fresh’, and differs in evaluative sign: oq and yashil are mainly positive, qora is mainly negative, and qizil and sariq are ambivalent. The symbolic layer has been shaped by Turkic mythology, Islamic culture and modern international conventions. A cultural symbol becomes a linguistic connotation when it is fixed in set expressions. The findings can be applied in lexicography and in teaching Uzbek lexicology.

Keywords: basic color terms, semantic structure, denotation, connotation, symbol, potential seme, evaluation, linguoculturology, Uzbek language.

INTRODUCTION

The meaning of a word is not a single unit but a structured whole. Semantic theory distinguishes the conceptual, or denotative, meaning of a word from its connotative and other associative meanings [3; 11]. Color terms are especially suitable for studying this structure. Their denotation is based on the visual perception of hue and lightness, while their connotations and symbolic values depend on the history and culture of the speech community [2; 12].

In Uzbek linguistics, the meanings of color terms have been described in explanatory and phraseological dictionaries [6; 7], and the notion of connotation has been defined in Uzbek terminological literature [5]. The historical development of color vocabulary has also been studied on the material of written monuments [10]. However, the relationship between the three layers of meaning – denotative, connotative and symbolic – has not yet been described for the basic color terms as a whole system.

The aim of this article is to describe the semantic structure of the six basic Uzbek color terms as a three-layer system. The tasks of the study are: 1) to define the denotative core of each term; 2) to identify the potential semes that give rise to connotations; 3) to determine the evaluative sign of the connotations; 4) to describe the symbolic meanings and their cultural sources; 5) to show how the layers interact.

The working hypothesis is that the three layers are not independent. Connotations grow out of potential semes of the denotative meaning, and symbolic meanings become part of the language system when they are fixed in set expressions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study covers the six basic color terms of Uzbek: oq (white), qora (black), qizil (red), sariq (yellow), yashil (green) and ko‘k (blue). Their meanings and set expressions were collected from the

Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language [6] and the Explanatory Phraseological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language [7]. Classical usage was checked against the Explanatory Dictionary of the Language of Navoi's Works [8]. Proverbs, folk tales and modern literary texts were used to observe the meanings in context.

Three layers of meaning were distinguished. The denotative meaning is the direct naming of a color, as given in the first definition in the dictionary. The connotative meaning is the evaluative, emotional or stylistic component that the term acquires in figurative use [3; 5]. The symbolic meaning is a culturally fixed value of a color, such as purity, mourning or holiness, which exists in rituals, beliefs and art and may or may not be reflected in the language system [12].

The following methods were used: componential analysis, to separate the archiseme 'color', the differential semes of hue and lightness, and the potential semes that motivate figurative use [4]; contextual analysis, to identify connotations in actual use; linguoculturological interpretation, to explain symbolic meanings through cultural sources; and evaluative analysis, in which each connotation was marked as positive (+), negative (–) or ambivalent (±).

RESULTS

The analysis showed that each basic color term has a three-layer semantic structure. The main components of each layer are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Three-layer semantic structure of basic color terms in Uzbek

Term	**Denotative core (prototype)**	**Potential semes**	**Connotations (examples)**	**Symbolic meanings**	**Eval.**
oq	color of snow, milk	'light', 'clean', 'unmarked'	ko'ngli oq 'sincere'; oq yo'l 'safe journey'; oq fotiha 'blessing'	purity, blessing, peace, a new beginning	+
qora	color of soot, night	'dark', 'invisible', 'heavy'	qora niyat 'evil intention'; yuzi qora 'disgraced'; qora kun 'hard times'	evil, sorrow, misfortune	–
qizil	color of blood, fire	'hot', 'bright', 'alive'	qizil yuzli 'ruddy, healthy'; yuzi qizardi 'blushed with shame'	life, energy, beauty; danger, prohibition	±
sariq	color of gold, saffron	'pale', 'faded', 'golden'	sarg'aymoq 'to grow pale with longing'; sariq chaqa 'worthless coin'	separation, longing, illness; wealth	±
yashil	color of fresh grass, leaves	'fresh', 'young', 'living'	yashil chiroq yoqmoq 'to give the green light'	spring, life, renewal; paradise, Islam	+
ko'k	color of the clear sky	'high', 'boundless'; relic 'fresh vegetation'	ko'kka ko'tarmoq 'to praise to the skies'; ko'kat 'greens'	heaven, eternity; in tradition, mourning dress	+ / ±

The denotative layer. In all six terms the denotative meaning is stable and is defined through a natural prototype: snow and milk for oq, soot and night for qora, blood and fire for qizil, gold and saffron for sariq, fresh grass for yashil and the clear sky for ko‘k. The differential semes of hue and lightness separate the terms from one another. The oq – qora pair is based mainly on lightness, while the other terms are distinguished mainly by hue.

The connotative layer. Connotations do not arise from the color as such but from its potential semes. The seme ‘clean’ in oq motivates ko‘ngli oq ‘sincere’. The seme ‘invisible, hidden’ in qora motivates qora niyat ‘evil intention’. The seme ‘pale, faded’ in sariq motivates sarg‘aymoq ‘to grow pale with longing or illness’, and the seme ‘living’ in qizil motivates qizil yuzli ‘healthy’. The evaluative sign is clearly polarized for oq (+) and qora (–), and ambivalent for qizil and sariq.

The symbolic layer. The symbolic meanings of Uzbek color terms have three main sources. The first is the Turkic heritage: the sky color kök was associated with the supreme deity Tengri in Old Turkic culture, and ko‘k still evokes height and eternity. The second is Islamic culture, which strengthened the positive symbolism of yashil (paradise, holiness) and of oq (purity). In classical poetry the yellow face of the lover became a stable image of suffering from separation [8]. The third source is modern international conventions, such as red for danger and green for permission.

Interaction of the layers. The layers are connected in two directions. On the one hand, connotations develop from potential semes of the denotative meaning. On the other hand, a cultural symbol becomes a linguistic connotation only when it is fixed in set expressions. For example, the symbolism of oq as blessing is fixed in oq fotiha and oq yo‘l, and has therefore entered the language system. In contrast, the traditional association of ko‘k with mourning dress (ko‘k kiymoq) remains mostly within ethnographic usage and does not produce a general negative connotation of the word.

DISCUSSION

The results support the view of A. Wierzbicka that the meanings of color terms are anchored in universal prototypes of human experience, such as fire, the sun, the sky and vegetation [2]. The definitions of Uzbek color terms in explanatory dictionaries follow the same principle: a color is defined as “the color of” a familiar natural object [6]. This explains why the denotative layer is so stable across languages.

The connotative layer, however, shows both universal and national features. The positive evaluation of light and the negative evaluation of darkness are found in many languages and are linked to basic experience [2; 9]. National specificity appears in the concrete content of the connotations. Expressions such as oq fotiha, oq suyak or sariq chaqa reflect Uzbek rituals, social history and economic life, and have no direct equivalents in English.

The ambivalence of qizil and sariq deserves special attention. Both terms combine a positive potential seme (‘living’, ‘golden’) and a negative one (‘hot, dangerous’, ‘pale, faded’). Which of them is realized depends on the context and on the domain of use. This confirms that connotation is not a fixed property of a word but a result of its use in context [3].

The study also shows that the symbolic layer is the most open to historical change. As earlier research on Uzbek written monuments has shown, the adoption of Islam strengthened the positive connotations of oq and yashil, while later ideological changes gave qizil a political meaning [10]. The pedagogical value of the three-layer model should also be noted. It can help pupils in primary school and students in pedagogical higher education to distinguish the direct and figurative meanings of words and to understand their cultural background.

CONCLUSION

The study leads to the following conclusions. First, each basic color term in Uzbek has a three-layer semantic structure consisting of denotative, connotative and symbolic meanings. Second, the denotative layer is stable and is defined through natural prototypes. Third, connotations develop from potential

semes of the denotative meaning; oq and yashil are mainly positive, qora is mainly negative, and qizil and sariq are ambivalent. Fourth, the symbolic layer has three main sources: Turkic heritage, Islamic culture and modern international conventions. Fifth, a cultural symbol becomes part of the language system when it is fixed in set expressions.

The results can be used in compiling explanatory and linguoculturological dictionaries, in comparative studies of color semantics and in teaching Uzbek lexicology and stylistics.

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