



Connotations of five basic colours in the structure of Persian metaphorical expressions

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13 July 2013;

Received in revised form:

20 August 2013;

Accepted: 5 September 2013;

Keywords

Metaphorical expressions,
Conceptual Metaphor Theory,
Metaphorical mapping,
Colour connotations.

ABSTRACT

Metaphors are ubiquitous in language. When researching metaphor in everyday language, metaphor researchers firstly need to identify metaphor in everyday language. One way is that metaphor researchers turn to naturally-occurring language. The metaphoric language used in everyday language reveals the ideology of the specific historical period of society. In this respect, colour plays an important role in convention metaphorical expressions in people's lives and daily communication. As a sub-category of metaphors, colour terms are widely used literally and metaphorically in different languages and may also reflect cultural identities of language users. Taking cognitive linguistics into account (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), the present study aimed to investigate the metaphorical link which accounts for connotative meanings that is ascribed to colour terms. To do so, we collected Persian instances from some Persian dictionaries. The findings of this endeavor show that cultural orientations play a significant role in colour connotations in Persian, and subsequently filtering the relevant connotations of a particular metaphor.

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Introduction

Colour has its own language and plays a vital role in the world in which we live. Besides their denotative meanings, colour terms could be used with different connotative meanings in the structure of metaphorical expressions under the influence of cultural and social factors. In the same vein, colour-based metaphors such as 'gâve pišâni sefid (white forehead cow; used for a person who is well known by others), 'muhâjæš râ dær âsijâb sefid nækærde' (He has not whitened his hair in a mill; used for a person who is old and experienced), and 'džâje šomâ sæbz bud' (Your place was green; used when someone was absent in a joyful party) have their own functions as a sub-class of metaphors. The main feature that characterizes in these expressions is that colour terms are used metaphorically.

Broadly speaking, the connotative values of colours emerged from metaphoric expressions that are constructed around folk beliefs about colour meanings, and it is necessary to examine social and cultural backgrounds in order to understand the motivation for Persian metaphoric expressions involving colours.

Despite several researches on metaphorical relations in different languages including Persian (Hashemian & Talenbinezhad, 2006; Parvaresh, 2008; Vahid & Sadeghi, 2010) it seems that studies which have addressed colour word connotations and their relationships to metaphoric expressions of colours have been left aside.

Connotations of Five Basic Colors in Persian

As long as language is used and interpreted in accordance with the social and cultural contexts, changes in socio-cultural structure make languages undergo certain changes. In the same vein, the connotation of colors in every language can magnify cultural paradoxes and reveals the cultural orientations towards each colour term. In this vein, the following section is a brief

discussion about five basic colour terms in Persian including sefid (white), sijâh (black), sorx/qermez (red), sæbz (green), and zærd (yellow).

Sefid (white)

White is the reflection of light and connotes positive values associated with daylight including hope (e.g. pâjâne šæbe sijâh sepid æst; means the end of the dark night is white; used when there is hope in hopeless situations) and goodness (e.g. del sefid; means white hearted) in Persian. In the same vein, in Persian mythology colour white is the symbol of superiority (e.g. riš sefid or gis sefid, means white bread or white hair; used for an old man or lady who are experienced and knowledgeable), spirituality and virtue. In addition, knowledge and wisdom of elderly people is referred to the colour 'white', because old people are experienced in different field of life due to their age. Metaphorically, muhâšo tu æsijâb sefid nækærdeh (his hair has not turned white in a mile; used for an old and experienced person) connotes wisdom and experience.

However, sometimes even the same word in two different expressions could have different connotations (Phillip, 2006) likewise, white is associated with a range of negative connotations such as shock, fear (mesle gæč sefid šod, i.e., he turns as white as plaster) and impudence (češm sefid; i.e., white-eyed) in Persian too.

sijâh (black)

Black is the colour of sin, devil, pain and misfortune. In ancient Persian it is the symbol of Ahrimæn (evil). For instance the connection between wearing black clothes and mourning refers to Ahrimæn (evil) in ancient Persian (Hassanli, 2007). Arguably, there are more than sixty metaphoric expressions for colour black in Shaahnameh1, most of which connote black negatively (Hassanli, 2007).

Generally speaking, dark colours automatically elicit negative evaluations, but the way Persian construct metaphors around associative meanings of color black, namely, *sijâh bâzi kârdæn* (to make black play; used when someone deceives someone else), *sijâh nâmâje kârdæn* (to do black; used when a person does wicked jobs) *sijâh bæxt* (bad fortune; used for a person who has bad fortune), etc., is culture-bound.

Sorx or Qermez (red)

Red is the colour of anger, shame, danger, health and martyrdom. Typical expressions including *æz æsæbâniæt sorx šod* (he goes red because of anger (due to anger), used for a person who is in angry mood), *tâ bânâgoš sorxšod* (he went red to his ears, used for a person who is ashamed), *væzijæt qermeze* (red condition), *sorxo sefid mesle hulu* (red and white like a peach), and *mæрге sorx behtær æz zendegije sijâh* (red death is better than black life, used for a person who fights bravely to the last breath and gets killed as a martyrdom) are the examples, respectively.

Sæbz (green)

Green is an important colour in nature. It is the colour of grass and the leaves on trees and the colour of most growing plants, so it can be associated with youth, growing and environmental protection.

Metaphorically speaking, there are some Persian expressions that are developed from the concept of greenness in nature. 'džâje šomâ sæbz bud' (Your place was green, used for a person who did not attend a joyful meeting or party) and *pošte læbet sæbz šode* (it turns green behind your upper lip, used for a person who has undergone puberty) are specific expressions that are constructing around, connotatively.

Zærd (Yellow)

Yellow has associative meanings to illness, coward, stagnation and death. It is the colour of autumn which reminds us of falling leaves and stagnate vision. Specifically, Persian expressions like *'rængo rut zærd šode* (you have gone yellow in complexion, used for a person who looks ill), *'çerâ zærd shodi?* (Why did you go yellow?), *'zærdænbu* (yellow-faced, used for a weak person who is pale in face and in dying mood) are worth to mention (to be mentioned/ of mentioning).

Mutual relation between Metaphor and culture

Metaphor in language reflects the cognitive process of explaining or understanding a certain experience in one area with that in another via the similarity or relativity in between. Metaphors play an important role in defining the way we perceive the world, and as a part of language reflect the society and have strong cultural characteristics. In this vein, Fiumara (1995) once noted that metaphors are more appropriate for conveying cultural concepts (cf., Ming, 2011). Likewise, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) insisted that cultural differences manifest in metaphoric expressions. That is, culture and metaphor fall into mutual promotion, depending on how this relation is interpreted.

Having different social customs, religious beliefs and historical allusions, metaphorical expressions of colours loaded with cultural connotations characterized by certain sources.

To avoid possible vagueness in this given study, culture is defined as a set of shared assumptions, meanings and understanding existing in a given speech community.

Lakoff and Johnson's Model

Metaphor is defined as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system" (Lakoff, 1993: 203). Thus, "metaphorical expression" is used to refer to an individual linguistic expression or "a surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping" (203).

The metaphor involves two domains, namely, a source domain and a target domain. The latter is understood in terms of the former, so the convention is to call each mapping as "TARGET-DOMAIN IS SOURCE-DOMAIN" or "TARGET-DOMAIN AS SOURCE-DOMAIN." Commonly, categories in the source domain are more specific. Meanwhile, those in the target domain are more abstract. This means that we base metaphorical expressions on our experiences about human beings, things and specific daily events to conceptualize abstract categories. Obviously, this will be a premise theory foundation for us to make this article.

Methodology and data

Agreeing to the postulate Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and based on Kovecses' classification model (2002), the current study is a qualitative endeavor in that data have been examined in the light of Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Model.

In order to collect a substantial body of data, the following Persian dictionaries were examined: *Loghatnamey-e-Dehkhoda*; *Amsal-o-Hekam-e-Dehkhoda* (Dehkhoda, 1999); *Farhang-e-Estehat-e-Adabi* (Hoseini, 2008); and *Zarb-al-Masalhaay-e-Mashur-e-Farsi* (Azarli, 1989).

During the study, the metaphorical expressions of colors (hereafter MECs) in the afore-mentioned dictionaries and research studies were picked out manually. Native speaker intuition was sought in Persian to increase the validity of interpretations and the data was, in turn, categorized based on six basic sources for everyday metaphors proposed by Kovecses (2002) thus:

- a) HUMAN BODY
- b) LIVING THINGS (e.g. animals and plants)
- c) PEOPLE MADE THINGS
- d) HUMAN MADE ACTIVITIES
- e) THE ENVIRONMENT
- f) PHYSICS

Simultaneously, the MECs were examined in the light of Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Model.

Examining the data according to Lakoff and Johnson's Model Human Body As Source Domain

The human body provides a universal analogical model for the production of metaphors. The human metaphorization includes three types in nature, i.e. the structured mapping from the body-part domain to the non-body domain, the mapping from the non-body domain to the body-part domain, and the mapping between two organs in the human-part domain (Lu, 2005, cf. Song, 2009). But the universality of body parts, substances and experiences should not lead us to think that the metaphorical use made of them will be the same in different cultures. The following table tentatively shows how Lakoff and Johnson's Model may be employed to explain Persian MECs which mapping body-part domain to the non-body domain, and between two organs in the human-part domain:

White and black are the two colours which have the longest history among all colour terms as used in the construction of metaphorical expressions in all languages in the world and this is also true in the Persian.

Living things as source domain (e.g., animals and plants)

In human communication, plenty of animal and plant words (Afshar, 2007) are widely used to enrich language and culture. In this vein, ethno-biological classification, namely, habit, size, appearance and behavior, are believed to consistently reflect how speakers conceptualize living things, especially animals and plants across cultures. These MECs are shown in Tables 2 and 3 below:

Table 1: Human Body as Source Domain

| HUMAN BODY AS SOURCE DOMAIN (SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|---|--|
| pošte læb sæbz šodæn (To turn green behind someone's upper lip) | START OF MATURATION; PREPARATION FOR GROWTH |
| tâ bænâ guš sorx šodæn (To go red in his ears) | EMBARRASMENT/SHAME/ANGER |
| zærd kærðæn (To turn yellow) | FRIGHT |
| češm sefid (white-eyed) | IMPUNDENCE |
| ræng væ ru zærd šodæn (To go yellow in complexion) | ILLNESS |
| del sefid (white-hearted) | MORALY GOOD |
| riš sefid budæn (white beard) | EXPERIENCED/WISDOM (for male ones) |
| gis sefid budæn (To be white-haired) | EXPERIENCED/WISDOM (for female ones) |
| sæq sijâh dâštæn (To have a black palate) | EVIL SPEECH |
| sijâh del budæn (To be black-hearted) | MALEVOLENCE |
| muhâjæš râ dær âsijâh sefid nækærde (He has not whitened his hair in a mill) | EXPERIENCE/KNOWLEDGE |

Animals as source domain

Animals are concrete, ordinary things we encounter in our daily life or in folk tales, whose images are conventionalized in our own culture. Clear images of animals improve the expressive extent of language by attributing their features from outside appearance, gâve pišâni sefid (white forehead cow/ black sheep), and their behavior, sæge zærd bærdære šoqâl æst (yellow dog is jackal's brother/ they are of the same bunch in their natures). When people are equated with animals, they are being degraded and, therefore, the animal-related metaphor is likely to become a source to express undesirable human characteristics (Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005). Table 2 features such MECs:

Table 2: Animals as Source Domain

| ANIMAL AS SOURCE DOMAIN (SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| gâve pišâni sefid budæn (To be a white forehead cow) | FAME |
| sæge zærd bærdære šoqâl æst (yellow dog is jackal's brother) | AS GUILTYAS /AS BAD AS THE OTHER ONE |

Plants as source domain

Plants can play as engine and source for a vast range of metaphoric expressions that permeates our everyday life (e.g. PEOPLE ARE PLANTS, Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Most notably, some of them are byproduct of specific cultural background of the speech community and Persian is not an exception, of course. To wit 'donbâle noxod sijâh ferestâdæn' (to send someone to find black peas) is based on a cultural fact. There are different kinds of peas that farmers cultivate in Iran.

There is a special one which is called black pea and is cultivated to make læpe (split peas). All kinds of peas are used without splitting, but this kind rarely carries for selling without splitting. In harvest time, farmers pour them in water to peel off their black shells and make split peas. Then they exposed them to sunrays. Finally, dried split peas are carried to sell in markets (Partovi Amoli, 1999, p.529). There are many such cultural metaphors in Persian; however, due to the lack of space, researchers present only typically representative examples.

Table 3: Plants as Source Domain

| PLANTS AS SOURCE DOMAIN (SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|--|--------------------------------|
| džâje šomâ sæbz bud (Your place was green) | ABSENCE |
| donbâle noxod sijâh ferestâdæn (to send someone to find black peas) | INACCESSIBILITY |

Human Activities

People make conventionalized expressions by use of activities they have done in their daily lives. In this vein, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed that the mapping is partial, that is, not all structure of source domain is mapped onto target.

Table 4: Human Activities as Source Domain

| HUMAN ACTIVITIES AS SOURCE DOMAIN (SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|---|--------------------------------|
| bâzâr sijâh dorost kærðæn (To make black market) | ILLEGALITY |
| sijâh kâri kærðæn (To do black) | EVIL DOING |
| sijâh nemâji kærðæn (To show something black) | PESSIMISTIC OUTLOOK |
| sijâh bâzi râh ændâxtæn (To play black) | DECIVING/EVIL DOING |

Man- Made Things

Human experiences about whatever they make as tools, machines, buildings, etc., can activate conventionalized expressions. Table 5 presents some of these expressions with reference to Lakoff and Johnson's model:

Table 5: Man-Made Things as Source Domain

| MAN-MADE THINGS AS SOURCE DOMAIN(SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|--|------------------------------------|
| čerâqe sæbz nešân dâdæn (green light) | PERMISSION |
| Kârte zærd (yellow card) | CAUTION;WARNING |
| cærte qermez nešân dâdæn (red card) | EXPLUSION; DISMISSAL |
| pærçæme sefid (white flag) | SURRENDER |
| kæmærbænde sæbz (green belt) | COUNTRYSIDE surrounding urban area |

The Environment

In addition to human experiences about themselves, metaphorical expressions embodied in their environment too (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003).

Table 6: The Environment as Source Domain

| THE ENVIRONMENT AS SOURCE DOMAIN(SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Be xâke sijâh nešândæn (To make someone to seat on black soil [ash]) | DISASTER/ AFFLICTION |
| dær nôomidi bæsi omid æst pâjâne šæbe sijâh sepid æst (there is hope in hopelessness; the end of black night is white day) | HOPLESSNESS/HOPE |

Physics

Finally, forces (e.g. ominous forces); movements; directions; etc., can be used to map the experiential target domains.

Table 7: Physics as Source Domain

| PHYSICS AS SOURCE DOMAIN(SD) | EXPERIENTIAL TARGET DOMAIN(TD) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| sefid bæxt white fortune | GOOD FORTUNE |
| sijâh bæxt black fortune | BAD FORTUNE |

Conclusion

Colours are endowed with different cultural assumptions. As our data shows, the analysis led the researchers to conclude that metaphorical expressions of colour are associated with specific traditions, customs, beliefs and events. Accordingly, culture creates a great effect on connotations of color words and metaphorically motivated as attributed in the construction of Persian metaphorical expressions. Although metaphor and culture have commonness, cultural background, custom, habit, psychology and observation angles, metaphor words are obviously different because of the differences in living environment.

To recap the above-mentioned, socio-cultural metaphor involves the mapping of relationships, so the study of this kind requires the understanding of social and cultural backgrounds to discover various relationships and social codes that motivate the metaphors. Persian has some unique and distinct concepts which people cannot explain clearly such concepts. The reasons for such a failure may be cultural and historical issues. It is necessary to examine our social and cultural backgrounds in order to understand the motivation for Persian metaphoric expressions involving colours. Thus, certain metaphors require that the social and cultural contexts be examined.

In spite of its limitation, our study made evident that metaphors are not independent of socio-cultural settings, but metaphor, and thus cognition, are deeply related to our understanding of society and culture. Hence, there is a close relationship among language-culture- thought trio.

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