



COLOR SYMBOLISM AND COGNITIVE INTERPRETATION IN "THE KITE
RUNNER" BY KHALED HOSSEINI

Usmonova Zarina Habibovna

Senior teacher of English Linguistics Department Email: z.h.usmonova@buxdu.uz

Farxodova Dilnoza O'ktam qizi

1st year student of master's degree

Abstract: *This research analyzes the application of color symbolism in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner via a linguo-cognitive framework. The objective is to ascertain the roles of color terms within the narrative (symbolic, emotional, cultural), their connections to foundational conceptual metaphors, and their contributions to the formation of memory, guilt, emotional conflict, and identity. The findings suggest that color imagery in the novel operates not merely as descriptive detail but as a cognitive mechanism through which readers access the psychological and cultural layers of the characters' experiences. The study concludes that color terms in The Kite Runner capture both culturally specific Afghan associations and universal cognitive metaphors, giving the book a multifaceted interpretive depth.*

Keywords: *symbolic use of color, color contrast, visual symbolism, emotional cognition, symbolic cognition.*

INTRODUCTION

For a very long time, color symbolism has been an important part of literary texts. It gives authors a subtle yet effective way to create conceptual metaphors, cultural meanings, and emotional landscapes. Colors are acknowledged in contemporary cognitive linguistics as cognitive categories with deep symbolic and experiential meanings in addition to being sensory descriptors. Linguistic expressions derived from perceptual domains frequently map onto abstract conceptual structures, claim Lakoff and Johnson (1980)⁴. As a result, color terms serve as a link between cognitive interpretation and sensory experience.

Color symbolism is a crucial narrative device in Khaled Hosseini's 2003 book "The Kite Runner"⁵, influencing the reader's understanding of trauma, memory, innocence, guilt, and redemption. A systematic linguo-cognitive analysis of color imagery has received less attention than themes of identity, ethnicity, and trauma in Hosseini's writing. However, the novel's striking use of color—especially the recurrent themes of blue, red, black, and white—creates a rich symbolic system that directs the reader's interpretation of moral and emotional conflicts.

Main Body. According to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), metaphors are essential components of human cognition rather than just literary devices. As tangible perceptual experiences, colors serve as source domains that correspond to abstract target domains like fear, hope, guilt, or purity. Cognitive semanticists such as Kövecses⁶ contend that color metaphors, which are both universally shared and culturally

⁴ Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁵ Hosseini K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

⁶ Kövecses Z. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

grounded, are often used to encode emotional concepts. For example, in many cultures, white is associated with purity, while red frequently represents, active life, blood of ancestors, anger or danger. Qualitative textual analysis is used in the study. The Kite Runner's explicit color terms were all found, classified, and analyzed in relation to their cultural and narrative contexts. Because of their frequency, symbolic meaning, and connection to cognitive framing functions, four dominant colors—blue, red, black, and white—were chosen for further examination. Supporting theoretical stances were incorporated from well-known academic publications in color semiotics and cognitive linguistics.

The kite, one of the most recognizable symbols in the book, is the main reference for the color blue. Hassan's "blue kite" serves as a cognitive anchor for Amir's early recollections. Blue has historically been associated with serenity, liberation, and emotional clarity. Blue, which is frequently seen in traditional talismans and mosques, also symbolizes protection and spiritual purity in the Afghan context. Amir is repeatedly taken back to his early years by the blue kite, which serves as a mnemonic device. It makes me feel both regret and nostalgia, especially after the horrific alley scene.

Blue is both calm and melancholy, reflecting the duality of Amir's emotional state. It stands for lost purity. It represents Hassan's allegiance. The blue kite's recurrent appearance throughout the story illustrates how color imagery contributes to narrative structure by using cognitive association to connect the past and present.

The serenity of blue contrasts sharply with the color red. When there is violence, harm, or a moral dilemma, red appears. Red is universally connected to blood, danger, and strong emotion, as noted by Berlin and Kay ⁷. Important moral and emotional turning points in the narrative are indicated by red. Even in the absence of explicit description, the brutality of Hassan's assault is suggested through emotionally charged imagery that carries red connotations. Red is also evoked as a symbol of cruelty and oppression in later scenes involving violence during Taliban rule. It represents the fallout from Amir's cowardice. Also, it draws attention to Afghan society's psychological and physical scars. From a cognitive standpoint, red triggers embodied feelings of guilt, fear, and shock.

Black has long been linked to evil, secrecy, and the unknown. In *The Kite Runner*, scenes with darkness show how Amir is feeling inside and how he is morally confused. The attack on Hassan occurs in a "dark, empty alley," symbolizing Amir's inability to confront the shadow within himself. Darkness in the novel is not merely physical; it represents the metaphorical "darkness" in Amir's conscience.

Colors in Afghan culture often carry layers of symbolic meaning derived from Islamic aesthetics, traditional folklore, and regional customs. Sharifian ⁸ argues that cultural conceptualizations shape linguistic expression. Hosseini's color choices, therefore, reflect an interplay between universal metaphors and culturally specific Afghan meanings. This dual resonance makes the novel's color symbolism accessible to global readers while retaining cultural authenticity.

⁷Berlin B., Kay P. *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

⁸ Sharifian F. *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.



Conclusion. The current study has shown that rather than being merely a decorative stylistic element, color symbolism in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* serves as a cognitively grounded and culturally embedded narrative mechanism.

By mapping perceptual experience onto abstract psychological domains, color terms actively structure readers' interpretations of memory, guilt, emotional conflict, and identity, according to the study's linguo-cognitive framework. Colors function as source domains that facilitate the conceptualization of intricate moral and emotional states, according to conceptual metaphor theory.

LIST OF USED LITERATURE:

1. Berlin B., Kay P. *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
2. Hosseini K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.
3. Kövecses Z. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
4. Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
5. Sharifian F. *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.
6. Rakhmatova, M. M., & Inoyatova, D. I. (2022). Conceptual and Figurative Structure of the Concept of "Ugliness". *Open Access Repository*, 8(04), 58-61.
7. Habibovna, U. Z., & Shukhratovna, K. N. (2023). Analysis of Feelings and Impressions of the Protagonist in the Work "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics*, 2(4), 130-135.
8. Usmonova, Z. (2022). СТИВЕН КИНГНИНГ "ЎЛИК МИНТАҚА" ("DEAD ZONE") АСАРИДА «THE LAUGHING TIGER» ("СМЕЮЩИЙСЯ ТИГР") ОБРАЗ ТАЛҚИНИ. *ЦЕНТР НАУЧНЫХ ПУБЛИКАЦИЙ* (buxdu.uz), 12, 12.
9. Habibovna, U. Z. (2022). Truth And Fairness In "The Dead Zone" By Steven King's. *JournalNX*, 8(1), 77-80.
10. Naimova, A. M., & Yuldoshova, M. U. (2025). METAFICTIONAL MAGIC: WHEN NARNIA SPEAKS TO ITS READERS. *THE THEORY OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF PEDAGOGY*, 3(31), 51-56.
11. Djalilova, Z. B. (2020). Flora in Edmund Spenser's poetry. *ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science*, 04 (84), 371-375.
12. Bakhodirovna, D. Z. (2021). Description of Human Features and Feelings through Flora in English Poetry. *Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture*, 2(10), 6-9. <https://doi.org/10.47494/cajlp.v2i10.209>