

Color Designation in V.V. Mayakovsky's Poetics: "Red" and "Yellow" (mythological implication)

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Abstract. The article deals with semantics of "red" and "yellow" color in V.V. Mayakovsky's poetics. A lot has been written about "red" color; this color is associated with the revolutionary ideas and symbols, and it is often used in Mayakovsky's early works. However, "yellow" color is used along with "red" one and, in our opinion, it has more complicated semantics. This color is important for the poet himself and his creative life (Mayakovsky's yellow blouse), and for his early poems where we see the clothing elements of this color. According to folkloric ideas, it is the very color which is ambivalent; it correlates with the sun and a new life, and is attributed to mourning ritual symbolism. Folklore commentary to some details in the poems "A Cloud in Trousers", "A Man" and "Fifth International" allows us better understanding the poet's figurative and metaphorical system.

1 Introduction

Intercultural communication is a special stage of cultural communication and adequate mutual understanding between representatives of different cultures. Disparities of *national* invariants of perception of intercultural communications can become a source of communicative failures and intercultural conflicts. Perception of the same cultural component by the representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities is influenced by specific features of cultural and historical development of each such community, and imageries lying behind the same cultural component differ to various extents among the representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities.

The category "color" is one of the fundamental categories of cultures. Each society develops its system of social codes in intercultural communication. Semantics of color is largely associated with the national image of the world, ethno-constants, and with the reality surrounding the author, "that's why in the literary context *a word to designate color* reflects everything that makes an impression on a person at a certain moment" [3, p. 8]. However, color designation depends on *emotional associations*. These associations are in the words surrounding it in the context. A color can be considered one of the components of the word "aura" and is connected even with feelings not directly correlated with the text.

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L.L. Sabaneyev, a music expert, wrote about this in terms of theory back in the 1920s: “Music has an “aura” in the field of words, in the field of lights, smells, shapes and images <...>, and in general, every art has it in the spheres of sensations not touched by this particular art <...>, is the union of all arts. And the more genius it is, the more spacious is its “aura” <...> most of the works lie in its “aura” and not in them themselves” [14, p. 22-23]. “Each work *is able to cause* a complex of aesthetic associations; it has a special “aura” that is *beyond* this art, its material side and, in our case, the text” [7, p. 31]. The purpose of this article is to identify color constants and their functions in V.V. Mayakovsky’s poetics. The researchers have paid attention to a bright contrast in terms of colors long ago. [15; 16].

2 Materials and Methods

Mayakovsky uses a variety of colors in his works. It is worth to note that the structural component of lexical meanings of color semantics reflects structural links of the word in this or that particular meaning of other words of lexical semantic groups that fill a certain logical and conceptual space: a lexical semantic group or a lexical semantic space. Mayakovsky used a lexical semantic group of words in their direct nominative meanings expressing a color feature in modern Russian language: white – to become white – whiteness; to become blue – blue – blueness; light blue – light bluish – light blueness – to appear light blue.

In the poet’s poetic speech color semantics has the following functions: a) designation of a concept; b) designation of an object through a concept; c) interpretation thereof. With that, increments appear among which there are two main directions: 1) increment of semantic content only; 2) strengthening of emotionally expressive content. This correlation forms *a constant* semantic context on the basis of which there appear changes of the word semantic structure in the poet’s poetic speech. As a result, *a variable* semantic context arises.

The color palette of the poet’s works is bright and diverse. Mayakovsky is considered to be a poet of revolution and construction of a new life. It is not surprising that **red** color with all its shades are widely used in his works, and many literary critics and linguists have paid attention to it long ago. [17]. Its expressiveness, brightness, vivacity, associative complex and traditions of poetic use made it possible to apply the word “red” to many idiomatic and symbolic meanings possessing expressive gamut.

The color semantics of the word “red” is actively used in the meaning of “revolutionary”, and with the words symbolizing revolutionary events: “He thought of the battles and the Red October” [11, vol. 8, p. 22]; “From here, the third one must be born – the Red Berlin” [11, vol. 6, p. 45]. At the same time, the poet uses color semantics in the sense of “pseudo-revolutionary” - with the words or phenomena which are alien to revolutionary spirit: “Now I will put on red ribbons, - it’s necessary to create a revolutionary fashion” [11, vol.2, p. 840]; “But Nevsky prospect in a red ribbon, having got itself a little spiffed up, was already overrun with generals” [11, vol.6, p. 275]. The poet used the metaphor “red cap” in the same sense.

Once upon a time there was a cadet.
And this cadet wore a red cap.
But there was nothing red in this cadet
Except for this red cap.

[11, v.1, p. 142].

Certainly, here we feel a general folklore tone of the poem and the beginning but in this case folklorism has a stylizing, i.e. an external feature and gives us quite little to understand

the color semantics. The folklore tradition will manifest itself in a different way when we'll talk about the color "yellow".

A lexical semantic variant of the color "red" is also used with the words associated with construction of the socialist state: "red people's teacher"; "red sports games"; "red officer"; "We glorify a red village, a red city and the iron alloy of Red Army men" [11, vol. 6, p. 24]. The poet uses the word "red" metaphorically in the sense of "honorable, pure, chaste" – "But there is no place for a brushstroke of anger, do not paint red souls"; "We'll raise, like a flag, Voikov's red name and thousand names of others" [11, v. 8, p. 133]. Besides, the poet uses the word "red" in the sense of "festive" – "the calendar but on this red day the years of legends are resurrected" [11, v. 7, p. 234].

At this time, we meet lexical semantic variant of "red" used by the poet in neutral meanings: 1) description of household items: "There are circles and lines on the plan which are red ..." [11, vol. 4, p. 23]; "The tickets are different, take any of them: green, red and blue ones" [11, v.10, p. 272]; 2) description of appearance: "Red beards"; "The family of red-cheeked and cheerful members is singing" [11, vol.1, p. 263].

3 Results and Discussion

In the poet's early works there is certainly not only "red" color about which the literary scholars have already written a lot. It is worth paying attention to the color "yellow" which is not so frequent and has complicated diversified semantics. First, let's pay attention to one biographical fact of the poet's creative life: Mayakovsky sewed himself a yellow blouse. He needed such a thing not only for his performances but also as a distinctive sign; this blouse was a kind of epatage emblem: "I am a cool card for whom the highest pleasure is to pull on the yellow blouse and rush into the house full of people nobly keeping modesty and decency under proper frockcoats, dress suits and jackets" [11, vol.1, p. 344]. However, not all contemporaries of the poet accepted his yellow blouse with enthusiasm: "A yellow blouse has become a symbol of indecency" [v. 2, p. 68].

Secondly, the poet's special relation to yellow color which expressed in various details in his works as a whole is hidden behind this "flirtation" with the public. For instance, we meet that very "yellow blouse" in the poem "A Cloud in Trousers":

*It's so good when the soul
is wrapped up in the yellow blouse
in order to hide from the alien eyes!
It's so good to shout
being thrown to the scaffold:
"Drink Van Houten's cocoa!"* [11, v.1, p. 186]

It is interesting that, given the real comment, there is a contradiction in this passage: the yellow blouse is used to draw attention but here the hero of the poem is hidden from the people's eyes and his "soul is wrapped up in order to hide from the alien eyes" in such clothes. The following self-determination helps to understand *ambivalence* of this situation:

You,
who are worrying about one thing -
"Am I gracefully dancing," -
look how I am amusing myself
I - a coarse
pimp and card sharp!
.....

*Being incredibly dressed up,
I will walk on the earth to be liked by the all
leading Napoleon on the chain
like a pug.*

[11, v.1, p. 187]

Here, a question about the travesty motive is arisen: there is an act of dressing as if the girding of the hero by heavenly bodies - the central image of “a cloud in trousers”, *the sun with a monocle in the eye*, pentaclinal hands [8, p. 85-86]. What aesthetics and pragmatics are these images determined? Probably, the unusual nature of these images is determined by their folklore origin.

The ritual situation of zoomorphism during Russian rite of 'Kolyadovanie' (caroling); the buffoons (skomorokhs) “lead a goat about” or a bear (this differed them other participants in the holiday is typologically close to the ritual picture of the poem [5, p. 415], and Mayakovsky’s hero “leads Napoleon on the chain like a pug”, while he himself being “incredibly dressed up”. Besides, the study of the Northern Russian lamentations shows that the root *ryad which “plays a significant role in ritual words <...> meant an action of organizing the world by creation of certain links, introduction of a certain order and establishment of regular sequence which is, in particular, controlled by a number and a score” [9, p. 18] (here we are talking about the words “ryad” (a row) and “ryadit” (to dress up)).

“The hero's *anti-behavior* is associated with an exit into anti-world in which change of values takes place” [6, p. 147]. In this case, the yellow blouse can be equated with *a red cap* of Petrushka (Punch) who is an organizer of the ritual Chaos. Both the challenge to public and distraction of its attention from his own thin and vulnerable alter ego is hidden in the yellow blouse.



Действующие лица в обряде «вождение козы» на Украине: 1. Соломенный дед (Поводырь); 2. Коза; 3. Судья; 4. Шуроқ; 5. Козақ; 6. Леқарь; 7. Цыган; 8. Баба с ребёнком.

Fig. 1. Buffoons (skomorokhs) “lead a goat”, a ritual action.

The buffoons overturned “the Celestial beauty”, mocked at it, “but it was only a form of its existing with a “reverse” sign emphasizing its true meaning and real greatness” [9, p. 98]. The “other side of the world” is characterized by a whole complex of phenomena “accompanied by various kinds of “reversing” which make a habitual and natural things to be “vice versa”, i.e. being built based on anti-behavior” [18, p. 42].

In the tragedy “Vladimir Mayakovsky”, as noted earlier, *the travesty principle* is associated with change of sex; so here we can talk about *the idea of transition to another image* characteristic for that of buffoons.

The buffoons wore masks; they could represent different animals: “The etymology of the word “buffoon” corresponds to the oldest tradition of dressing up and wearing animal and monstrous masks and costumes which was used both in Europe and in Russia during folk festivals” [18, p. 43]. Certainly, all these comic characters and street performances may have only comic nature but initially, as Z. I. Vlasov notes, the buffoons were related to the *ritual complex*.

It is worth to recall that the buffoons are also associated with farcical funeral lamentations and, therefore, with deliberate “mortification” of a body which can be related both to a third person and, it seems, to a buffoon himself: as if renunciation of oneself takes place. In the last part of the poem “A Man” the poet foresees his burial service:

What is sky now?
What is star?
By thousand churches
under me
the world raised
and raises:
“May he repose with all good souls!” [11, v.1, p. 272]

In this context, it is important once again to pay attention to the fact that the hero speaks of himself as about the “blind”:

The eyes are blind,
the voice is dumb. [11, v.1, p. 257]

The importance of this characteristic is the fact that in the folklore funeral tradition the deceased is described as a blind creature: “... at the moment of death the obvious changes takes place with his vision; there is so to say the change of “vision” - he loses ability to see as a living being” [12, p. 16]. Besides, the archetype of a window is in direct connection with the process of separating a soul from a body, i.e. the traveling in another world (cf.: the poem “A Black Man”). In the part of the poem titled as “Mayakovsky to Centuries” the hero appears to fly passing by the windows:

The eyes fly passing by the window cells,
and it's hard,
and it's alien,
and it's cold for them in July.

The city
turns off the light in shop-fronts and windows [11, v.1, p. 267]

Why is it suddenly “cold for them in July”? Given the ritual context of the poem, we can suppose that it deals with *a journey through the country of the dead* the main feature of which is the state of cold.

So, the funeral complex, transition of the hero to “other world” is indicated both by a window and a metaphysical state of the cold and finally by the state of delirium, fever and heat that overtakes the hero:

With light-hearted
“Aha!”

I am making my way through rave of fever. [11, v.1, p. 251]

The folklorists note: “Death as transition to “the other” world could begin with a search for a path: agony is often perceived as the wandering and they say about the agonizing man that he “is wandering” (Polesia) <...>” [12, p. 15]. Moreover, Mayakovsky emphasizes the bodiless state of the hero in the part “Ascension of Mayakovsky”:

The vague and stupid guess has wandered.
Onlookers are in windows.
The hair stood on end.

*And suddenly I'm
smoothly swimming around the counter.
The ceiling is opening itself.*

Screams.

Noise.

“He’s hanging above the house!”

I am hanging above the house. [11, v.1, p. 258]

The hero is “hanging over the house”, having made a way from the counter (“I am swimming around the counter”) paying attention to the window («onlookers are in windows»), to the ceiling which “is opening itself”: here it may safely be said about the intended “mortification of flesh” and funeral rites. However, at first glance, here some antinomy is observed - the hero claims his immortality:

He's holding out a skull.

“Poison”.

One bone crosses another one.

To whom you give?

I am immortal,

your miraculous guest. [11, v.1, p. 257]

Here a farcical mortification is expressed which the hero deals with himself asking for poison and then points at his immortality. Mayakovsky has caught a subtle and archaic link of buffoonery and witches' training, circumambulate and arrival of *ancestral spirits*.

In another early poem “A Man”, the yellow shoes appear:

Now everywhere!

I can be everywhere.

Awaken, the mud of the poet's ballads.

Sing now

about the new - sing to the Demon

in American jacket

and shine of the *yellow shoes*. [11, v.1, p. 258]

Here, “yellow” is given in the context of the image of *new Demon*, i.e. a new Man according to Mayakovsky's concept, to whom everything is permitted (“I can be everywhere”) that's why the color of “yellow” has an infernal undertone. Besides, here the

topos of America is introduced here, to which the poet was not very friendly even before his trip there [1].

Finally, the color “yellow” is filled with the highest semiotic character and ritual marking in the later poem “Fifth International” where we meet the following:

I went through Sahara
along yellow gore
and threw effulgence
to the South Pole. [11, v.4, p. 131]

Here, the ritual archetypal semantics coming from folkloric epithets lies behind a straightforward and seemingly common color combination (the yellow gore of Sahara, i.e. the color of sand). While studying folklore lexicography, the linguists indicate a close semantic link of colors “black”, “dark” with “white”, “yellow” and “golden” [4, p. 5] (for example, mourning sand and “red and yellow sand” in the epic poems [13, p. 201]).

So, we can pose a question of creating a transitional ritual and a funeral ritual complex in the poem taking into account the general cosmogonic implied sense of the work. The poem is dedicated to a New Man, a man of the future about whom the poet himself wrote a lot. This “man is not a man; he is just a man-goose” [11, vol. 4, p. 110].

4 Conclusion

As the analysis showed, not all the poet’s color semantics is equally significant because both the nature of lexemes and the author’s perception of environment are different. As we see, the poet's world reflects not only features of the current historical epoch but also a special poetic inner world which is subjected to other laws related to metaphysics of creative works (especially in the case of the color “yellow”). The problem of individual style is closely connected with the questions of language personality which are important for studying the poet’s language as an integral system.

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