

Functional Semantic Field of Words Expressing Color and Image in English

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Abstract:

The present article is focused on the latter forms of complex expressions of colors that can either take the form of fully fledged similes (brown as a gipsy) or synthetic similes (gem-green). Even though, unlike fully-fledged similes, synthetic ones are not built around a comparison marker, writers equally use both to communicate subtly with their readers by soliciting their imagination as well as their own perception of the colors of elements of the world.

Key words: functional semantic field, words expressing color, distinction between color and shape, color specification, color words, pictorial precision, basic color terms.

A color term (or color name) is a word or phrase that refers to a specific color. The color term may refer to human perception of that color (which is affected by visual context) which is usually defined according to the Munsell color system, or to an underlying physical property (such as a specific wavelength of visible light). There are also numerical systems of color specification, referred to as color spaces.

An important distinction must be established between color and shape, as these two attributes usually are used in conjunction with one another when describing in language. For example, they are labeled as alternative parts of speech terms color term and shape term.

Psychological conditions for recognition of colors exist, such as those who cannot discern colors in general or those who see colors as sound (synesthesia).

Color words in a language can also be divided into abstract color words and descriptive color words, though the distinction is blurry in many cases. Abstract color words are words that only refer to a color. In English white, black, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, and grey are abstract color words. These words also happen to be 'basic color terms' in English as described above, but colors like maroon and magenta are also abstract though they may not be considered 'basic color terms', either because they are considered by native speakers to be too rare, too specific, or subordinate hues of more basic colors (red in the case of maroon, or purple/pink in the case of magenta).

Descriptive color words are words that are secondarily used to describe a color but primarily used to refer to an object or phenomenon. 'Salmon', 'rose', 'saffron', and 'lilac' are descriptive color words in English because their use as color words is derived in reference to natural colors of salmon flesh, rose flowers, infusions of saffron pistils, and lilacs blossoms respectively. Often a descriptive color word will be used to specify a particular hue of basic color term (salmon and rose [descriptive] are both hues of pink).

The status of some color words as abstract or descriptive is debatable. The color pink was originally a descriptive color word derived from the name of a flower called a 'pink'; however, because the word 'pink' (flower) has become very rare whereas 'pink' (color) has become very common, many

native speakers of English use 'pink' as an abstract color word alone and furthermore consider it to be one of the basic color terms of English. The name 'purple' is another example of this shift, as it was originally a word that referred to a dye.

In Italian there is the adjective *arancione* derived from the fruit name *arancio*. In Portuguese, sometimes a distinction is made between *rosa* (rose) and *cor-de-rosa* (pink, literally "color of rose").

One of the main reasons that fictional texts succeed in resonating with their readers is their use of strong visual images which enable one to re-create a scene or to picture a character as if he or she were physically there. Colors, in particular, play a crucial role in shaping those visual images, not only because they make descriptions more vivid but also because a wide range of connotative meanings is culturally associated with specific color terms. For example, whereas in the Western world, the color 'black' is generally associated with death and mourning, in the Eastern world, this role is devoted to the color 'white'. In addition, if the color 'white' is generally linked to purity and goodness, its opposite 'black' evokes evil as well darkness and the color 'red' can, depending on the circumstances, refer to fury, flame or even embarrassment (Philip, 2006).

As with word arrangement, writers have notably been known for how they manipulate colors either by giving them new connotative meanings or by exemplifying idiosyncratic color usage worthy of a painter's palette. If we refer to what has been said earlier about the color 'white' in the Western culture, the title of Webster's play, *The White Devil* sounds at first like an oxymoron. However, it takes all its meaning in the whole color imagery of the play in which 'whiteness' is depicted as being the color of hypocrisy and as such, far more deceptive than 'blackness' (Connolly & Hopkins, 2015).

Moreover, the semantic field of both concepts in that play shows that the idea of 'blackness' is conveyed not only through the color adjective 'black' but also through its synonym 'dusky' and several compound nouns containing the word 'black' (blackbird, blacklist, blackthorn), whereas the adjective 'pale' is used as a synonym of 'white'. In fact, expressions of colors can take various forms in literary texts, from single nouns (the green of her eyes), verbs (embrown) and adjectives (sulphurous light) to compound adjectives (fiery-red complexion), noun phrases (the color of tallow) and fully fledged similes (brown as a gipsy), depending on the impact and hue the author seeks to achieve.

In terms of pictorial precision, it can be hypothesized that complex expressions of colors offer more creative liberties to writers as they make it possible to blend different colors (large eyes violet-blue-blackish), to circumscribe the colored area (red-faced) and even to pinpoint the intended shade of a particular color by mentioning a prototypical object or phenomenon, which possesses it (gem-green).

Reference

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