

Artículo de investigación

## Semantics of colours in O.E. Mandelstam's poetry

Semántica de colores en O.E. La poesía de Mandelstam

Semântica de cores em O.E. Poesia de Mandelstam

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### Abstract

This article is devoted to the colour picture of the world of O.E. Mandelstam representing the individual poet's idea of the colour through the system of colour meanings. The analysis of the language expression of the poet's colour attitude is carried out on the example of the colouratives of black tone which are dominant in his lyric poetry.

The analysed ways of the verbalization of author's meanings at the level of contact and distant connections allow revealing cognitive, mental and emotional spheres of the consciousness of the poet as well as allow interpreting the phenomenon of Mandelstam's Universum as a difficult phenomenon defining his unique character and originality in the Russian literature. It is noted that the text realization of words in the conditions of the poetic discourse leads to the integration of various aspects of reality and reproduces the author's perception of the world based on the indissoluble, interpenetrating unity of the objective and the subjective, the logical and the sensual, the rational and the emotional.

The research is done on the synthesis of traditional and modern methods of the analysis of the realization of a poetic word: component, discourse and text analysis of names as well as the cognitive and hermeneutical analysis of the text that allowed to reveal the correspondence between text units, the information coded by them and mental structures or their elements presenting by this information by means of studying of the nature of connections between them.

**Keywords:** colour lexis, poetic worldview, individual style, connotative component, associative resemblance.

### Resumen

Este artículo está dedicado a la imagen en color del mundo de O.E. Mandelstam representa la idea individual del poeta sobre el color a través del sistema de significados de color. El análisis de la expresión del lenguaje de la actitud del color del poeta se lleva a cabo sobre el ejemplo de los colourativos del tono negro que son dominantes en su poesía lírica.

Las formas analizadas de la verbalización de los significados del autor a nivel de contacto y conexiones distantes permiten revelar las esferas cognitivas, mentales y emocionales de la conciencia del poeta, así como permiten interpretar el fenómeno de Universum de Mandelstam como un fenómeno difícil que define su carácter único y originalidad en la literatura rusa. Se observa que la realización textual de las palabras en las condiciones del discurso poético conduce a la integración de diversos aspectos de la realidad y reproduce la percepción del mundo del autor basada en la unidad indisoluble e interpenetrante de lo objetivo y lo subjetivo, lo lógico y lo lo sensual, lo racional y lo emocional.

La investigación se realiza sobre la síntesis de métodos tradicionales y modernos del análisis de la realización de una palabra poética: componente, discurso y análisis textual de nombres, así como el análisis cognitivo y hermenéutico del texto que permitió revelar la correspondencia entre texto unidades, la información codificada por ellos y las estructuras mentales o sus elementos que se presentan por esta información mediante el estudio de la naturaleza de las conexiones entre ellos

**Palabras clave:** léxico del color, visión del mundo poética, estilo individual, componente connotativo, semejanza asociativa.

## Resumo

Este artigo é dedicado à imagem colorida do mundo O.E. Mandelstam representa a idéia individual de cor do poeta através do sistema de significados de cores. A análise da expressão da linguagem da atitude da cor do poeta é levada a cabo no exemplo dos colorativos do tom negro que são dominantes em sua poesia lírica.

Formas analisados verbalização dos significados do autor no nível de contato e conexões distantes podem revelar áreas poeta consciência cognitivas, mentais e emocionais, e nos permite interpretar o fenômeno da *Universum Mandelstam* como um fenômeno difícil de definir a sua caráter único e originalidade na literatura russa. Note-se que a realização textual das palavras sobre as condições de discurso poético leva à integração de vários aspectos da realidade e reproduz a visão de mundo do autor com base na unidade indissolúvel e interpenetração da objetiva e subjetiva, a lógica e o sensual, o racional e o emocional.

Pesquisa é realizada sobre a síntese de métodos tradicionais e modernas de análise da realização de um componente palavra poética, discurso e análise textual de nomes, bem como análise de texto cognitivo e hermenêutica que destacou a correspondência entre o texto de unidades, informação codificada por eles e as estruturas mentais ou seus elementos que são apresentados por esta informação, estudando a natureza das conexões entre eles.

**Palavras-chave:** léxico de cor, visão do mundo poético, estilo individual, componente conotativo, semelhança associativa.

## Introduction

The research of one of the vital issues of modern linguistics and a number of interdisciplinary sciences, the problem of semantics of the text from the point of view of the ratio of informative and connotative components of the contents and the immersion into *idiostyle* of a talented and original poet of the Silver age, Osip Emilyevich Mandelstam, is caused by the main task of our research which is to identify esthetic and conceptual constants of his view of the world on the example of one of the most ancient layers of words, colourative lexicon.

Unlike the famous linguistic researches in the field of colour lexicon and speech means of expressiveness in O.E. Mandelstam's works we will consider the compatibility potential of words of this group which is implemented in syntagmatic contexts of various extent. The most interesting is the possibility of Mandelstam's word to get a "new valence" allowing "to interconnect words, usually considered as very distant from each other or even opposite of each other in the semantic relation" is of the greatest interest (Levin Yu.I., 2001). "...The habitual relations legalized by common sense are being loosened and being demolished... The new, not usual relations arising at the same time... contribute the appearance of "new meanings" (Levin Yu.I. O., 1998). Such violation of lexical word compatibility, the semantic shift, brings the

reader out of automatic perception of the poetic speech.

According to A.A. Vasilyeva, one of essential features of O. Mandelstam's poetics is "the orientation to various opportunities of combination (associative rapprochement) of words and their components in the text that as a result gives the multiple, but interdependent associative connections which foreground different micromeanings" (Vasilyeva A.A., 2000).

In the poetic system organized like this, each its element gains special importance, i.e. each word participates in the expression of the general sense of the poem, and the complex of associations, generated by this word, expands and deepens the semantic structure of the poem (Lakoff G., Johnson M., 1980; Worth D.S., 1963; Fauconnier G., 1994).

In this regard in O. Mandelstam's poetry an important role is played by the colour naming allowing more precisely and at the same time more brightly and figuratively to describe signs, qualities, features of the surrounding realities represented by the poet. The colouratives thanks to their semantic and emotional intenseness are a significant component of the mental space of the writer, act as peculiar "semantic focus" which involves in its orbit other

text elements which are externally far from this lexeme.

### Materials and methods

When studying the colour lexicon, we recognize the fact that colour lexemes have the field organization, i.e. are characterized by the existence of the core and the periphery, the intrasystem relations formed by their lexical and semantic variations.

The denoted tendencies predetermine the importance of studying of distributively supported and full of meaning functioning of the word in artistic speech, which allows learning the inexhaustibility of semantic convergences and divergences, connections and repulsion of meanings (Nurullina G.M., Usmanova L.A, 2016; Usmanova L., Nurullina G, 2017; Guzel M. et al, 2016).

The originality of our approach to the studied subject is explained by the combination of three main aspects: the semantic, the associatively figurative and the syntactic ones, as well as the complex nature of the work – not only the active valence of names, but also the passive one, not only their direct compatibility but also indirect one, which is dictated by the expansion of a context, are taken into consideration.

The peculiarities of the individual perception of colour by O.E. Mandelstam are evolved by the analysis of the lexemes containing the seme of this colour used by the poet in his works.

The complex of lexical units transferring the colour semantics in texts of the poet makes the individual author's lexical and semantic field (LSF) of the colour naming in O.E. Mandelstam's poetry which is presented by eight microfields of *black, white, grey, red, yellow, blue, green, and brown* colours. The names of focal colour concepts coincide with the names of microfields. Inside the microfields the core and the periphery (the near and the distant one) are identified which have been distinguished by the quantitative factor of the use of shades of the focal colours. The colour meaning in O.E. Mandelstam's poems is expressed explicitly (by the direct name of a colour or a colour sign) and implicitly (by the name of a subject whose colour sign is fixed in the culture at the level of tradition). Forming of a lexical paradigm is connected with the need to distinguish semantic

signs of the colour naming providing their compatibility.

### Results

The analysis of O.E. Mandelstam's colour picture of the world is carried out on the example of the colouratives of **black tone** which are the most significant in the revelation of attitude of the poet to the world. The collected material demonstrates that lexemes of this microfield have mainly negative value, acting as a symbol of fear, alarm, concerns that is especially peculiar to his book of poems "Tristia" (1915-1922) which appeared during the World War I and the revolution in Russia; in his further works these motives amplify that was caused by the poet's hostility of the official state ideology of Soviet period, of the public order. On the background of the beauty of the "God's" world, the terrible face of the existing order and its destructive force makes the poet think and feel gloomily.

The microfield of black colour consists of the core (lexeme *black*), the core zone covering derivative colour naming with a dominant element (*common people / ink / monks / to blacken / blackened / darkened / roughly*) and the peripheral zone presented by secondary names which realize the semantics of this field in specific contextual conditions or their primary meanings entering other LSF as well as presented by semantic transformations of the analyzed field. The near periphery of the field is formed by compound adjectives in which a. the first and second parts express the colour: *black-green, black-yellow, black-blue, black-azure, black-red, black-black*; b. the second component is presented by non-colour lexeme: *черноголосый (with black voice), чернобровый (dark-browed), черноречивый (with black speech), чернопахотный (black plowing), черноверхий (black top), чернолюдые (common, black people), черноземный (black earth), чернорубашечники (people wearing black shirts)*. The units united at the lexical level of the general (integrated) seme with the central lexeme of this microfield and reflecting this conceptual sphere in the language belong to the distant periphery: *траурный (mourning), гробовой (deathly), грифельный (slate), завороненный (nielloed)*. To transfer the colour images the poet uses lexemes in their figurative sense which by the initial semantics are connected with other lexical semantic groups (*tar, resin, agate, ink, soot, shoe-polish*). To transfer the shade of black colour in the poetic

Mandelstam's speech the use of combinations with allegoric colour value are noted (e.g., *with the taint of a raven*).

The combination opportunities and associative routes of the studied colour naming in O.E. Mandelstam's poetic texts are of the greatest interest to us. The colour characteristic of black shades is given to the realities included in the semantic field "Universe": the names calling heavenly bodies (*the sun*), reservoirs and their parts (*lakes, the sea, the Neva*), the landscape and the relief (*the earth, potholes, distance, etc.*), the names connected with flora (*roses, oats, fern, coffee beans, tea, etc.*) and fauna (*a hare, an ant, etc.*), etc. as well as to the semantic field "Person": the names denominating body and its parts (*a body, eyes, moustache, hair*), household items and tools of other spheres of activity (*silk, velvet, a veil, stairs, a vessel, wine, a bow, a sail, asphalt, etc.*).

In combinations with the specified words one can observe the realization of both traditional colour images, and non-standard, individual author's ones which possess the dominating role in the revelation of peculiarities of the author's attitude to the world. O. Mandelstam prefers to ready language formulas his own occasional metaphorical word usage, for example: **With the taint of a raven – pigeons, / Nielloed hair** <...>; / I love your hair so much / **Stuffy, black and blue; The black speech silence** in work (*Black earth*); **Black plowing night steppe edge** ("I live on important vegetable gardens"), etc. The use of complex colour combinations in these contexts can be explained by the desire of the poet to connect in one unit as much as possible semantic shades, proceeding from the "diffusive" nature of word meaning.

The mechanisms of the formation of derivative meanings of colour naming in O. Mandelstam's lyrics are a metaphor and a metonymy. The use of the group of words under consideration within poetic texts is caused by their associative structure and the installation of the relations with other words by semantic attraction or sound similarity where the most important is not the direct meaning of words, but their shades. The objective picture of the real world is interpreted subjectively which is connected with visual and psychological associations of the poet: **Black lakes of asphalt / Are pitted by the rage of hoofs** ("Phone").

Mandelstam's poetry is characterized by the richness of lexical structure of texts caused by the variety of, first of all, concrete words and words with material semantics. According to M. Epstein, "O. Mandelstam densifies those absolute elements of a landscape divided into by symbolists, he returns them to the real nature and according to the general principles of acmeism they become substances... Mandelstam is a poet of concrete substances and some of which he introduced into the figurativeness of the Russian poetry for the first time: black earth, clay, sand, flint, slate, straw, wool, fur, salt, honey, tar ..." (Levin Yu.I., 2001). The widespread approach in the poet's lyrics, such as the principle of objectification, assumes the investment of the defined word with the features of any substance or material, which therefore results in a sinesthesia: **And flakes of black roses are flying / Under this windy moon** ("Meganom"); **In a black velvet of the Soviet night / In a black velvet of the world emptiness** ("The thousand-jet stream ..."). The concreteness of colour experiences on the basis of colour association is an indicator of figurative and emotional perception of the world by the poet. The metaphorical image finds the sign which does not contain in the semantic structure of the initial nominative meaning, but "is tied" to the denotate by the association (petals – flakes; night – (world) emptiness – a velvet).

The change of the principles of word combination, of the use of literary and national symbolics and the creation of absolutely new symbols reflects the subjectivity of O. Mandelstam's poetic speech. In his lyrics the poet widely use the oxymoron combinations of colour attributes and the nominations of the objects and phenomena mutually excluding each other, for example, the black-yellow light, the black sun, the black flame, the black love, etc. For example: **The Phaedra burns with a black flame / In broad daylight** (*As these covers and this attire ...*); **At gate of Jerusalem / The black sun has risen. / The yellow sun is more terrible - / Hush-a-bye** <...>; **I woke up in cradle - / Lit by the black sun** ("This night is irreparable, And it is still light at us") where the eclipse of the sun – of the black sun – is a herald of death. In Mandelstam's poems the image of the sun becomes the polysemantic symbol generating all new, referential meanings: it is nostalgia on the past, and regret about its irrevocability, and herald of death, of worldwide catastrophe.

The poetics of "semantic correlations", "semantic shifts" is actively implemented in O.E. Mandelstam's poetic texts in comparative constructions with an epithet *black*. Linguistic means of expression of the comparative relations are various and are most often shown explicitly by means of the conjunctions *as, like* as well as in combinations with nouns in instrumental case. The comparative situations formed at the level of psychophysical feelings draw attention to themselves by their extraordinary character. For example: *That song, as wild as black wine* ("The arrow-shaped wood of the organ did not sing that evening").

Another widespread Mandelstam's approach is the use of the principle of "opposite colours" when double, triple or multiple contrast ranks of colours are created: *white – black, black – yellow; green – black, white – black – gold; blue – black – white*, etc. According to the principle of mutual complementarity, the oppositions of the colour naming are not considered as contradicting, but their opposition creates in the system of figurative means a special expression, the effect of "doubling" of the expression of a feeling (Pustejovsky, 1995). The analysis of the material proves that the colour oppositions are usually built on the basis of black colour.

In Mandelstam's poetry the phenomenon of the synonymic representation of colour signs within poems and their cycles complemented with the estimating meaning expressing the emotional relation to the called realities also takes place. The motive of death penetrating the poetry leads to even more negative perception of the word *black*. Some additional meanings appear: "black is terrible, mourning". The tendency to semantic assimilation of the lexemes *black* and *mourning* is traced when building the poetic images correlated to the colour of clothes (*mourning silk*), of the mourning border on a flag, of a whirlpool, of the naked trees that causes the centralisation of their semantic structures of the complex of the psychological associations set by feeling of death, inevitability: *The thin veil / Is dressed in mourning silk / It was black too...* ("Thousand-jet stream...").

## Discussion

The use of colour lexicon in O.E. Mandelstam's poetry is characterised by its variety, during the creation of metaphorical expressions the lexeme of the microfield of black colour in his poetic texts are not only used in a figurative sense, but

in most cases they gain a new meaning, new semantics which can be understood and comprehended only in the context. The destruction of usual compatibility and the activation of verbal connections and opportunities of the literary language reveal individual author's meanings thanks to which lexical units, being far at the usual meaning, are approaching. The observations of the peculiarities of the use of lexemes of black tone as a part of means of expression, such as metaphors, metonymies, epithets, comparisons, antonymic and synonymic relations, allowed revealing the specifics of Mandelstam's attitude to the world based on the understanding of a word as "a bunch of meanings" directed in different ways. The studied material showed that Mandelstam's poetry in general is characterized by the actualization of associative connections of the lexical units which often relate to absolutely various spheres of reality when the remote, unjoinable phenomena are approaching (*a black flame, the black sun, azure is black, etc.*).

## Conclusion

The colour naming in the context of Mandelstam's poetry plays the role not only to poeticize the objects connected with the world of the nature, but also, what is the most important, to make it more conceptual and symbolical, as well as to identify the constants of the attitude to the world of the author, that he decides to do at the level of polysemy (symbolical character) of images themselves and richness of their associative connections.

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