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Language Manifestations of Colour in Persian and Arabic: An Educational and Cognitive Analysis

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Abstract

Colour, as one of the high-frequency concepts, constitutes an important part of the expressive realm of any language. Given that language, thought, and culture are inextricably linked, studying language while considering this inseparable connection can influence the way language is viewed and taught. This research focuses on the educational and cognitive study of the aforementioned languages, with an emphasis on the field of colour. The colour words studied are the equivalents of the eleven colour words proposed by Berlin and Kay (1969). The authors' goal is to examine and compare the conceptual metaphors of "colour" in Persian and Arabic, define the target domains, key maps, and similarities and differences. The research method is descriptive-analytical, and the data were analysed within the framework of the cognitive semantics approach. Data analysis indicated that: 1- The basic colour terms (BCTs) in Persian correspond to their Arabic equivalents, with the difference that "آبی" in Persian, unlike "أزرق" in Arabic, is not considered one of the colour terms that have a metaphorical-linguistic representation. 2- The assumption that metaphorical compounds are only made with the main colour words is reinforced, because no model has been found for brown, violet, pink, and grey in the two languages, in addition to blue in Persian. 3- Most of the metaphors related to colours in both languages have a cultural nature, and it does not seem very realistic to imagine them as being equivalent.

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Introduction

Colour is associated with information obtained from the visual field. Colour allows us to see objects and the surrounding environment; having colour is a sign that the thing is physical and visible. Colour, in addition to this important function, allows for the understanding and interpretation of many mental and abstract matters due to its perceptibility. In other words, colour is used in the formation and processing of human thought, In fact "color is more than aesthetics" (Zarei, 2021, p. 16). This study focuses on the cognitive study of Persian and Arabic languages in the context of colour.

Literature Review

Assume being asked to guess which colour words are used in the Persian and Arabic languages to make the most metaphorical combinations. Your response might be "blue, pink, brown, green," or "in the order you suggest, the mentioned colours should be prioritised". However, when this question is investigated from a linguistic point of view, the findings are quite different. This study focuses on the cognitive study of Persian and Arabic languages in the context of colour. The colour words studied are the Persian and Arabic equivalents of the eleven colour words proposed by Berlin and Kay (1969). The authors' goal is to examine and compare the conceptual metaphors of the field of colour, to introduce the target fields, to identify name mappings, and to express the metaphorical similarities and differences of this field in the mentioned languages.

  As mentioned earlier, part of the process of thought and language is made possible by colour. By means of colour, sensible things are explored with tangible things and mental things with objective things. This is the conceptual metaphor, which consists of the source domain and the target domain, as well as a set of mappings from the origin to the target. In many cases in this research, the colour domain acts as the source domain, which presents its concept, and the many domains conceptualised and expressed by colours are the target domains, receiving the presented concepts based on which they are understood and expressed.

 To determine whether colour itself can be the target domain or not, it should be noted that generally, more tangible concepts become the source domain. However, if it is mapped onto another tangible domain, like what we see in "primary colours", "colour" is tangible, and so is "base," which may refer to the base of an object or a building. In this case, the part considered simpler and less familiar can be regarded as the target, while the more structured and complex part is the source domain, whose components are used to understand the intended target. With this description, in the aforementioned example, the base is more structured than the colour and is the source domain. Based on this, this article is also in search of colour representations in Persian and Arabic languages to answer the following questions:

1)   What domains of target have the Persian and Arabic languages conceptualised using the field of colour?
2)   What is the significance of the metaphorical use of the words "Berlin" and "Key" in the languages mentioned?
3)   Do Persian and Arabic speakers use colour metaphors in the same way?

Methodology

The present study's method was descriptive-analytical, and the data were analysed within the framework of the cognitive semantics approach and in accordance with and Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and Kovecses's revised standard theory (2005). During library studies and field observations, relevant data were gathered from a variety of sources, both written and unwritten. Kovecses regards metaphor as a linguistic, conceptual, neurological, physical, and socio-cultural reality all at once, and he believes that Lakoff & Johnson's theory of cognitive metaphor frequently emphasises the universality of metaphors and their physiological basis, despite the fact that many metaphors are created for cultural considerations. On the other hand, in their study of colour words, Berlin and Kay emphasised the existence of universals and semantic commonalities

and believed that the word colour could be easily translated from one language to another. This is contrary to Sapir and Whorf's (1971) belief that colours are coded differently in each language and that colour metaphors are frequently cultural in nature. Regarding the research background, some studies that have focused on colour linguistics in Persian with a semantic approach include the following:

- Afrashi and Samet (2012), in their article "Conceptual Metaphors of Color in Persian: A Cognitive and Corpus-Based Analysis", examined the metaphorical conceptualisation patterns of the colour domain in Persian. They believe that Persian, in the realm of conceptualising abstract domains, shows a significant tendency towards visual perception and the visualisation of concepts.

- Sarrahi (2014), in his article "A Typological Approach to Color-Related Metaphors in Persian", leans towards the idea that translating colour-related metaphors from one language to another, if not impossible, at least seems very challenging (Tavangar, 2002).

- Zarei (2019) in "Categorization of Color Terms in Persian: A Cognitive Process" identified colour categories in the Persian language. The results of this study indicate that colour categories in Persian are culture-based.

- Al-Rasheed and Thabet (2011), in an English article titled "Basic Color Terms in Arabic (BCTs)", presented a study on the basic colour terms of the Arabic language, which was conducted within the framework of Berlin and Kay's (1969) theory on universal colour categorisation. Another study by Al-Rasheed is the article "The Berlin and Kay's Universal Color Theory and Linguistic Relativity: A Case Study of Arabic" (2014), which concludes that Arabic has 11 basic colour terms, consistent with Berlin and Kay's primary and universal colour terms. The colours (*Samawee*) and (*Kuhlie*) are not considered BCTs in Arabic.

Results and Discussion

Examining the current study's data reveals that:

- A variety of targets, such as various feelings, desires and tendencies, character, race and class, politics, life and death, and so on. During this research, they are listed as the source domain that are understood and expressed through colour; it was also discovered that the colour itself acted as the target domain in many ways, with common source domains including the body and its condition, animal, plant, building, dish, tool, game, cooking and food, temperature, light and darkness, force and movement, and direction.

- The basic colour terms (BCTs) in Persian correspond to their Arabic equivalents, with the difference that "آبی" (blue) in Persian, unlike "أزرق" (blue) in Arabic, is not considered one of the colour terms that have a metaphorical-linguistic representation.

- No example was found for metaphorical combinations related to colours (brown, purple, pink, and grey) in the two languages, in addition to blue in Persian. Therefore, the assumption that metaphorical compounds in languages are made only with the colours of the main words is strengthened.

- The hierarchy of colour words (black and white, red, yellow or green, blue, and the remaining four colours alike) in various languages corresponds to the abundance of metaphors related to colour in Persian and Arabic. Additionally, the initial colour of the words black and white in various languages and the frequency with which they are used metaphorically can suggest that these two colours were first inspired by the light and darkness of day and night, that is, by the earliest human experiences.

Conclusion

It does not seem very realistic to imagine that colour metaphors in the languages of the research subject are equivalent to one another because many colour metaphors in both languages have a cultural component. Additionally, compared to the Arabic language, the Persian language's lexical units exhibit more description and elaboration to express the metaphorical meanings of colour. The reason can be found in the number of specific level metaphors of the Persian language because for each meaning, a composite structure has been created, which, in the case of the present research, has created the basis for creating

more metaphorical interpretations such as painting, making, giving, taking, losing, putting, returning, pouring, mixing, jumping, wearing, getting, removing, and rubbing. While the Arabic language uses derivation for different applications and practically the derivation property of the Arabic language has made it here unnecessary to create multiple lexical constructions to express the meanings related to colour.

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