

The Language of Colors: Symbolism of Hues in Kazakh Proverbs and Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract—This paper explores the symbolic and cultural meanings of color terms in Kazakh proverbs. It examines how colors such as white (*ақ*), black (*қара*), red (*қызыл*), yellow (*сары*), and blue (*көк*) function as cultural codes that convey moral values, aesthetic ideals, and philosophical concepts within Kazakh traditional thought. Proverbs that include color references reflect complex ideas about truth and justice, beauty, patience, and respect for the natural and spiritual world. The study is based on a qualitative linguo-cultural approach, using Kazakh paremiological dictionaries as primary sources and employing comparative analysis with Turkic and global proverb traditions. The paper also addresses the contemporary relevance of color-based proverbs in Kazakh media, public messaging, and educational discourse, showing how they retain pedagogical and communicative power. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes the role of color symbolism as a medium for transmitting cultural memory and shaping national identity across generations.

Index Terms—language, culture, Kazakh proverbs, cultural metaphors, cross-cultural comparison

I. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of proverbs, particularly those incorporating color symbolism, reveals their multifaceted role in cultural and linguistic contexts. Proverbs serve not only as conduits of wisdom and cultural heritage but also as tools for linguistic and social analysis. Understanding the nuances of color in proverbs enriches our grasp of how societies use these expressions to convey deeper meanings, reflect values, and shape perceptions.

Proverbs can significantly enhance lexical competence and language acquisition because they contain condensed cultural knowledge that transcends mere vocabulary. Rajapova highlights that proverbs contribute to language learning, serving as a bridge between vocabulary enhancement and cultural contextual understanding, which is essential for effective communication (Rajapova, 2024). Through the examination of various proverbs, learners can gain insights into the cultural and moral frameworks of a language community, thus elucidating the intricate links between language, thought, and cultural identity.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the symbolic and cultural meanings of color terms in Kazakh proverbs and to interpret their relevance in a broader cultural context. Kazakhstan is a culturally diverse and strategically located country in Central Asia, serving as a bridge between East and West. As the world's ninth largest country by territory, it

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plays a growing geopolitical and cultural role both in the region and globally. Kazakhstan promotes a trilingual policy – Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as a language of international integration. In this multilingual and multicultural context, Kazakh proverbs offer unique insight into the nation's worldview, value system, and linguistic creativity. Studying these proverbs allows us to reveal the symbolic meanings of language, particularly in how color terms reflect cultural identity, moral concepts, and social norms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different cultures possess distinct associations with colors, which play a crucial role in the symbolism embedded in proverbs. In the comparative analysis of the significance of the red color across Russian, French, and Chinese linguistic cultures, Zheng demonstrates that the interpretation of color symbols differs based on historical and cultural factors (Zheng, 2024). This highlights a critical aspect of proverbs that utilize color: they serve as reflections of the collective consciousness and unique ideologies of different societies. Embedding colors in proverbs introduces layers of meaning that resonate within specific cultural contexts.

Color symbolism also features prominently in ethnolinguistic studies, as evidenced by the Madurese proverbs analyzed by Fadhilah et al. (2019). In their exploration of proverbs containing color elements, they uncover how these colors symbolize various life principles intrinsic to the Madurese way of life (Fadhilah et al., 2019). This ethnolinguistic perspective allows for a more profound understanding of how specific color associations in proverbs can shape cultural practices and thought processes. Similarly, Mukabenova et al. (2024) track the symbolic meanings of colors such as red and blue in Korean proverbs, illustrating how these colors resonate with national identity and collective consciousness.

Furthermore, the role of color in proverbs extends to ecological knowledge, as highlighted by Kim et al. (2017), who discuss how proverbs encapsulate traditional ecological wisdom that can foster ecoliteracy. This connection underscores the practicality of proverbs, which serve not only as artistic expressions but also as tools for conveying vital knowledge about the environment and sustainable practices. In many cultures, proverbs function as mnemonic devices for preserving essential information regarding ecological balance and resource management, effectively merging cultural expression with ecological awareness.

In a comparative inquiry into the proverbs of various languages, such as the English and Karakalpak languages analyzed by Baxitovna (2024), we find that proverbs significantly reflect labor culture and societal values. This linguistic and cultural interaction is essential for understanding how color symbolism can be employed differently across cultures to embody specific values or societal norms. Moreover, the pragmatic functions of proverbs, like those articulated in Yoruba culture, serve to promote communal harmony and social values, which are often intertwined with color imagery (Yede et al., 2025). These examples illustrate that proverbs are not merely decorative linguistic constructs; they carry significant implications for social cohesion and cultural preservation.

Analyzing proverbs through different lenses, such as metaphorical conceptualization, reveals additional insights into the roles colors play in conveying implicit meanings. The study of proverbs involving animal lexicons in different languages, by Bachrun and Suhandano (2023), points out how metaphorical associations enhance the richness and depth of proverb meanings, often linked to color imagery. Such metaphorical dimensions enable proverbs to function dynamically within communicative contexts, facilitating nuanced expression and understanding.

As proverbs continue to be significant cultural artifacts, their role in educational environments cannot be overlooked. Both traditional and contemporary methodologies, as explored by Ibrayeva et al. (2022), illustrate how proverbs are effective in developing language proficiency and cultural competence among learners. The unique characteristics of proverbs in pedagogy enhance the learning experience by providing culturally relevant and contextually rich material that resonates with students, thereby fostering both language acquisition and cultural appreciation.

Further reinforcing the symbolic power of proverbs, studies by Nkomazana and Tabalaka (2024) analyze how proverbs are not merely decorative phrases but integral to governance and community dynamics, encapsulating wisdom that guides both social conduct and leadership. The ability of proverbs to convey profound insights through simple assertions is remarkable, and the inclusion of color symbolism serves to augment this effectiveness, layering additional context onto their meanings.

Thus, the role of color in proverbs is a compelling area of study that sheds light on broader cultural meanings and the functional use of language in society. From Rajapova's insights into lexical development through proverbs to Fadhilah's ethnolinguistic interpretative frameworks, the research consistently underscores how proverbs emerge as rich sites of cultural negotiation, expression, and cognition. Proverbs endowed with color not only articulate cultural narratives but also foster intergenerational dialogue and continuity of wisdom, making them central to understanding both language and identity.

The synthesis of findings across different studies emphasizes the indispensable role of proverbs in cultural expression, identity formation, and social guidance. The integration of color symbolism into proverbs serves to deepen their meanings, allowing these idiomatic expressions to function as repositories of wisdom, reflecting social values and cultural narratives. As such, exploring the interplay between proverbs and color not only enriches our understanding of these traditional expressions but also highlights the profound connections between language, culture, and societal values.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach rooted in cultural linguistics and ethno semantics. The primary material consists of selected Kazakh proverbs that explicitly contain references to main color terms such as *ақ* (white), *қара* (black), *қызыл* (red), *сары* (yellow), and *көк* (blue). These proverbs were sourced from published collections of Kazakh paremiology, including classical anthologies, contemporary compilations, and online databases maintained by cultural and educational institutions. Mainly, “*The Golden Book of Kazakh Proverbs and Sayings*” (Keikin, 2015) which contains 8675 items and Explanatory Dictionary of Kazakh Proverbs and Sayings by Aubakirov (2007).

The analytical method combines semantic, symbolic, and contextual interpretation. Each proverb was analyzed in its literal and figurative dimensions to identify the color’s function as a cultural symbol. Special attention was given to the socio-historical context in which these proverbs emerged, their persistence in modern Kazakh discourse, and their roles in shaping behavioral norms and aesthetic values.

Comparative examples from Turkic and global paremiological traditions were occasionally referenced to highlight unique or shared symbolic functions of color. The study also considered the proverbs’ use in contemporary media and popular culture to assess the continuity and transformation of color symbolism in Kazakh society.

In most languages of the world, basic colors are those that are most frequently mentioned and have stable, distinct names. According to the theory of Berlin and Kay (1969), basic color terms tend to emerge in a universal sequence: black / white (*қара / ақ*); red (*қызыл*); yellow / blue (*сары / көк*); green (*жасыл*); brown, gray, purple (*қоңыр, сұр, күлгін*) – less common.

After selection and analyzing of use of colors in Kazakh proverbs, we revealed the same tendency in Kazakh language, the main colors are mostly used in them, especially white and black. In the current study we will analyze the most actively used and still relevant proverbs that are illustrated in the Table 1:

TABLE 1
SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF COLORS IN KAZAKH PROVERBS AND CULTURE

Color (Kazakh)	Color (English)	Symbolic Meaning in Kazakh Culture	Examples in Proverbs
Ақ	White	Purity, truth, honor, holiness	" <i>Аққа Құдай жақ</i> " - God is on the side of the pure (white). " <i>Ақ жол - айғақ</i> " - The white path is the evidence (witness). " <i>Ақты ақ, қараны қара де</i> " - Call white white, and black black.
Қара	Black	Evil, depth, justice, seriousness, strength	" <i>Қара қылды қақ жарған</i> " - Split a black hair exactly in half. " <i>Қара жер – қазына</i> " - The black soil is a treasure. " <i>Қара жол – тайғақ</i> " - The black path is slippery.
Қызыл	Red	Beauty, festivity, desire, emotional vividness	" <i>Қыздың көзі қызылда</i> " - A girl's eyes are on the red. " <i>Әсіреқызыл тез оңар</i> " - Excessive red fades quickly. " <i>Өнер алды – қызыл тіл</i> " - The foremost art is the red tongue.
Сары	Yellow	Patience, wisdom, seasonal change (autumn), spiritual richness	" <i>Сабыр түбі – сары алтын</i> " - The root (end result) of patience is yellow (pure) gold. " <i>Сары майдай сақтады</i> " - Preserved like yellow butter.
Көк	Blue	Sky, freedom, hope, cosmic awareness	" <i>Көкке қарап түкірме – бетіңе түседі</i> " - Do not spit at the sky – it will fall on your face.
Жасыл	Green	Nature, renewal, fertility, growth	(Used in metaphorical descriptions; less frequent in proverbs)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of color symbolism in Kazakh proverbs reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and collective psychology. Far from being arbitrary descriptors, color terms in proverbs serve as semiotic markers that reflect the community’s values, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical frameworks.

A. White and Black in Kazakh Proverbs

One of the profound examples is “*Ақ жол – айғақ, қара жол – тайғақ,*” (“The white path is evident, the black path is slippery”) which conveys a deep moral and philosophical message about life choices, honesty, and responsibility. At first glance, “white path” and “black path” may seem to describe the color or condition of roads. However, in this context, the “white path” symbolizes honesty, righteousness, and justice, while the “black path” represents deceit, immorality, and corruption.

The first part, “*Ақ жол – айғақ,*” implies that a person who walks the righteous path is always supported by clear evidence, truth, and dignity. In other words, the white path is solid, transparent, and trustworthy. On the other hand, “*Қара жол – тайғақ*” warns that taking the dishonest path is slippery – meaning it is unstable, dangerous, and ultimately leads to failure or shame.

Kazakh worldview traditionally divides human moral choice into two roads: the right (white) path and the wrong (black) path. This proverb speaks to one's inner moral compass. In life, every individual face choice: to pursue success honestly, or to take shortcuts through lies or injustice. Yet, as the proverb reminds us, the black path may seem easier, but it will cause one to slip and fall sooner or later.

This proverb has strong social implications, emphasizing the importance of honesty in institutions, relationships, and governance. Justice, law, education, and trust—all are built on the “white path.” Any success achieved through dishonest means is fragile and unsustainable. From a spiritual perspective, the proverb teaches us to preserve inner purity and external integrity. Honest labor, sincere intention, and truthful speech are a person's true evidence and support. Deceit, falsehood, and unjust actions, by contrast, weaken the soul and ultimately lead to downfall. This metaphor reflects a broader pattern found in many cultures where light is equated with truth and goodness, and darkness with doubt or wrongdoing. Similar dichotomies appear in other languages: for example, in English, the expressions “a clear conscience” or “a white lie” contrast with “blackmail” or “black-hearted.” In Islamic-influenced cultures, “*sirat al-mustaqim*” (the straight path) also echoes the ideal of a righteous, visible way – conceptually close to *ақ жол* (Al-Sheikh, 1999; Wikipedia, 2025).

The following frequently used proverb is “*Аққа Құдай жақ*,” which literally translates as “God is on the side of the pure (white).” Though brief, this proverb conveys a deep moral philosophy rooted in justice, honesty, and spiritual resilience. In Kazakh, the word “ақ” (aq) signifies more than just the color white. It symbolizes purity, truthfulness, righteousness, and moral cleanliness. The phrase “*Құдай жақ*” (Qūday jaq) means “God is near” or “God is supportive.” Put together, the proverb states: “One who is pure and truthful is always under the protection of God.” This proverb reflects a worldview in which justice and truth ultimately prevail. Even if a person faces hardship or injustice in the short term, if they are honest and act with integrity, they will ultimately be supported by divine justice or fate. “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” serves not only as a belief in spiritual protection, but also as a moral compass and source of hope for those who choose the path of truth in a world where dishonesty may sometimes seem rewarding. It expresses the conviction that truth is not defenseless—there is always a higher force that defends it.

This proverb has a strong educational function in Kazakh society. It teaches individuals—especially the younger generation—to value honesty, live ethically, and trust that moral conduct will not go unnoticed. In a social environment, where people are often tempted by shortcuts or corruption, the proverb reminds us that only truth and righteousness lead to lasting success and inner peace. Parents, teachers, and elders use this saying to instill resilience, faith, and ethical courage, emphasizing that being honest might be difficult, but it is always worth it. It is more than a traditional saying—it is a spiritual and ethical guideline. It expresses a timeless truth: those who stand for what is right and live with honesty will never truly be alone, for they walk with the support of truth—and of God. The Kazakh proverb “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” (God is on the side of the pure) shares conceptual similarity with Turkish expressions like “*Doğruya Allah yardım eder*” (God helps the honest), where white and purity are linked with divine favor (Temir, 2013; Yıldırım, 2007).

The proverb “*Ақты ақ, қараны қара де*” (“Call white white, and black black”), delivers a powerful message about honesty, fairness, and moral clarity. It is a call to recognize and express the truth without distortion or bias. The literal meaning is simple: call the color white what it is – white, and black – black. It encourages people to acknowledge things as they truly are, without embellishment, excuses, or deception. In Kazakh cultural symbolism, white represents purity, truth, and honesty, while black often signifies weight, depth, or difficulty. Both must be recognized and respected in their rightful place.

Beyond its surface meaning, this proverb emphasizes the importance of truthfulness and moral responsibility. People may sometimes twist facts or present lies in order to serve personal interests, protect someone close, or avoid conflict. This proverb, however, teaches that integrity means naming things truthfully, regardless of context or relationship. Whether the subject is good or bad, right or wrong, honesty demands calling it what it truly is.

This proverb carries strong educational value. In raising the younger generation, it teaches the importance of fairness, objectivity, and courage to speak the truth. In modern society—where misinformation, social manipulation, and personal bias often dominate—this principle remains crucial for healthy communication, trust, and justice.

It aligns with another Kazakh saying: “Truth may be bitter, but it is just.” Honesty may not always be comfortable, but it is necessary.

Kazakh proverbs are vivid reflections of the nation's life philosophy and worldview, particularly in relation to nature. One such expression of ancestral wisdom is “*Қара жер – қазына*” (“The black soil is a treasure”). This proverb underscores the importance of the land as a source of sustenance, labor, and the deep connection between humans and nature. The surface meaning of the proverb is simple: black soil is wealth. For Kazakhs, “*қара жер*” refers to cultivated land, pastures, and places of settlement. It is the source of bread, livestock, and life itself. The land provides everything essential for human survival. Therefore, it is truly a treasure – the greatest form of wealth. In this context, “*қара жер*” is not just physical soil, but a symbol of life itself, the foundation of labor and abundance. The proverb reflects the Kazakh people's respect for the land, their dependence on it, and a lifestyle rooted in harmony with nature.

It also emphasizes the value of hard work: when a person works the land, they receive harvest and sustenance. But laziness or detachment from the land leads to poverty. Thus, the proverb teaches the importance of diligence and staying close to the land.

In the Kazakh language, the word “*қара*” (black) is not only used to describe color, but also carries rich figurative and symbolic meanings. It frequently appears in proverbs and idioms, often conveying deep philosophical and cultural connotations. The phrase “*қара жер*” (black earth) in the proverb is one such example, holding a strong symbolic significance:

1. As a color – a symbol of fertility, in agriculture, black soil is considered the most fertile and productive. It is ideal for growing grains and vegetables. That is why “*қара жер*” is seen as a source of abundance and sustenance.

Across the vast Kazakh steppes, much of the soil is brown, gray, or yellowish. Truly black soil is rare – and therefore especially precious. Thus, calling it a “treasure” (*қазына*) reflects its unique value.

2. As a metaphor – depth and stability. In Kazakh worldview, the word “*қара*” often means ancient, enduring, sacred, modest, yet essential. For example:

қара халық (common people),

қара шаңырақ (ancestral home),

қара жол (main road),

қара домбыра (traditional dombra).

Similarly, “*қара жер*” symbolizes something humble but foundational. It is the basis of life for all living beings – animals, plants, and humans alike.

3. Land – a sacred concept in Kazakh Culture

For Kazakhs, land is not just a natural resource, but a spiritual space, a homeland inherited from ancestors, and a part of collective memory and identity. Even the phrase “to be laid to rest in the black earth” (*қара жерге тапсырдық*) – used when referring to burial – reflects the sacredness of land. Such a positive connotation of black is also found in other cultures with agricultural traditions. For example, in Turkish, the phrase “*kara toprak*” (black soil) is also used poetically to refer to the fertile ground that nourishes life. In Slavic languages, rich soil is often described as “*chernozem*” (literally “black earth”) and is seen as the most valuable farmland (Britannica Editors, n.d.; Etymology Online, n.d.).

Today, this proverb carries even greater significance. Issues such as ecology, land preservation, agricultural development, and food security are all tied to the concept of “*қара жер*.” Respecting and caring for the land is a bridge to the wellbeing of future generations. For Kazakhs, land is not merely a possession – it is the legacy of ancestors and a core element of national identity. That is why this proverb also embodies values of national consciousness, patriotism, and a deep love for the land.

Another such deeply meaningful proverb is “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*” – literally, “Split a black hair exactly in half.” This phrase is used to describe a person of exceptional fairness, integrity, and honesty. It embodies the idea of absolute justice and total devotion to truth.

The expression “*қара қыл*” (black hair) refers to an extremely thin, barely visible strand – like a hair or a fine thread. To “split it in half” implies dividing it perfectly down the middle, an act almost physically impossible. Yet that is precisely the point: a truly just person can detect and resolve even the most invisible injustice. This metaphor represents an extraordinary level of precision and fairness.

Figuratively, this proverb refers to a person who lives by justice, never infringes upon others’ rights, and always makes decisions based purely on truth and law – not influenced by others’ opinions or power.

In traditional Kazakh society, such virtues were especially expected of judges (biys), elders, and wise leaders. Expressions like “*Töle bi*, who split the black hair exactly in half” or “*Aiteke bi*, known for his fairness” (Nysanbayev, 2008; Suleimenov, 2013) highlight legendary historical figures known for such righteous qualities.

This proverb promotes the importance of justice in society and the need for people to stay on the path of righteousness. Justice is the foundation of social harmony and trust. Without it, chaos and conflict take hold.

Even today, the relevance of this proverb is profound. In judicial systems, governance, and daily disputes, the demand remains for “splitting the black hair” fairness. Educating younger generations in this spirit of justice is essential for a brighter future.

Why does the proverb say “black hair”, and not white or red? If it were “*white hair*”, the metaphor might lose its weight and feel too soft. “*Red hair*” might distract with emotional or other symbolic associations. But “black hair” evokes clarity, seriousness, and groundedness.

Similarly, “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*” (Split a black hair exactly in half) echoes broader Turkic values of extreme justice and fairness, found in phrases like “*Kıl kadar haksızlık etmemek*” (Not to commit injustice even the size of a hair) in Turkish.

In Kazakh culture, “black” (*қара*) is associated not just with color, but with depth, stability, sacredness, and essence. Therefore, “black hair” in this proverb is a precise and meaningful metaphor for the thinnest, yet most vital line between right and wrong.

Among the rich tapestry of Kazakh proverbs, many are deeply connected to nature, human character, and the logic of life. One such proverb is “*Қарға баласын аппағым деп*” (“A crow calls its chick snow-white.”) Though it may sound simple on the surface, this expression carries profound meaning, reflecting the boundless love and unconditional affection of parents for their children.

The crow is not typically regarded as a beautiful bird in Kazakh culture. Its appearance and voice are often considered unpleasant. Yet despite this, the crow sees its own chick as the most beautiful, the whitest, the purest. This is a natural reflection of maternal instinct and innate parental bias.

The central idea of this proverb is that to every parent, their own child is the most precious and beautiful. Others may find the child unattractive, weak, or naughty, but to the parent, the child is flawless. It speaks to a subjective view shaped by love and emotional closeness. The proverb is also used more broadly when people overly praise or defend someone close to them, ignoring their flaws or faults.

This proverb illustrates the depth and limitlessness of parental love, one of humanity's highest spiritual values. It also subtly touches on the idea that this love can sometimes cloud objective judgment. Therefore, the proverb can have a slightly ironic or critical tone when someone refuses to acknowledge a loved one's shortcomings.

Another Kazakh saying that complements this one is: "Even a bad child is mourned when gone." It similarly reflects the unbreakable bond between a parent and child. This reflects a universal cultural motif found in other traditions as well. For instance, the Turkish expression "*Karga yavrusunu şahin görür*" ("A crow sees its chick as a hawk") conveys the same idea of parental partiality. In English, expressions like "*Every mother thinks her own gosling is a swan*" and "*A face only a mother could love*" highlight the same theme of love distorting perception.

B. The Symbolism of Red in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs are vessels of collective wisdom, passed down through generations and rooted in deep life experience. Each proverb encapsulates an entire philosophy in just a few words. One such saying is "*Қыздың көзі қызылда*," which literally means "A girl's eyes are on the red." Despite its brevity, this expression holds rich cultural and ethical significance.

Literally, the phrase suggests that a girl is drawn to the color red. However, in Kazakh culture, "red" symbolizes much more than just a color—it stands for beauty, elegance, festivity, and visual appeal. Expressions such as "*қызыл көйлек*" (red dress), "*қызыл отау*" (decorated bridal yurt), or "*қызыл шырай*" (rosy complexion) reflect this connotation of splendor and charm.

Therefore, the deeper meaning of the proverb is that young women are naturally drawn to beautiful, eye-catching things. This may manifest in a desire to dress fashionably, wear jewelry, or be surrounded by attractive objects. Such behavior is typical and even expected at a youthful age, reflecting a natural inclination toward beauty and self-expression. The proverb "*Қыздың көзі қызылда*" (A girl's eyes are on the red) reflects cultural associations between red and beauty, a pattern also seen in Russian ("*красна девица*") or Chinese traditions, where red symbolizes celebration and attraction (Portal of Tyumen Culture, 2021; Wikipedia, 2024).

Yet this proverb is not merely an observation—it also carries an implicit lesson. Elders often use it to offer gentle guidance or even caution. While external beauty and elegance are appreciated, true value also lies in a young woman's inner qualities: dignity, wisdom, and modesty. The saying encourages balance, reminding young women not to be overly consumed by superficial appearances.

In today's world, the relevance of this proverb remains intact. In an age dominated by social media, advertising, and consumer culture, young girls are frequently influenced by glittering ideals. Remembering proverbs like this one can serve as a moral compass, reminding them to nurture both outer beauty and inner grace. On the other hand, this proverb is actively used in social media and YouTube in advertising content for women.

Another well-known proverb is "*Өнер алды – қызыл тіл*," which literally means "The foremost art is the red tongue." This proverb highlights the value of language and eloquence, placing the art of speech above all other forms of artistic expression. The main message of the proverb is that among all the arts, the art of language—eloquent and expressive speech is the most esteemed. In Kazakh tradition, people valued words so highly that they would yield even in a dispute if the other party spoke wisely and justly. Disagreements were often resolved not by force, but by speech. Kazakh biys (judges), poets, and orators played a vital role in shaping society, resolving conflicts, and transmitting values through skillful language. Thus, this proverb elevates language not just as a tool of communication, but as the foundation of culture and the highest form of art.

One of the most striking features of the proverb is the phrase "*қызыл тіл*"—"red tongue." Why, we might ask, is the tongue described as "red"? In Kazakh culture, the color red (*қызыл*) carries symbolic meaning far beyond its literal sense. It is associated with beauty, elegance, festivity, brightness, and allure. So, when the proverb refers to the "red tongue," it doesn't just mean any tongue—it refers to a beautiful, expressive, captivating, and articulate form of speech. In other words, it is a metaphor for eloquence, for speech that inspires, persuades, moves, and uplifts. The red tongue is the tongue of a poet, an orator, a thinker—it is the speech that becomes art. Even today, the proverb remains highly relevant. In a world driven by communication, those who speak well—politicians, teachers, writers, lawyers, journalists—often lead and influence society.

Comparatively, similar notions are found across the Turkic world. For instance, in Turkish, expressions like "*Tatlı dil yılanı deliğinden çıkarır*" (A sweet tongue can lure a snake from its hole) highlight the power of speech. Globally, proverbs such as the English "*The pen is mightier than the sword*" or the Arabic "*Al-kalima tayyiba sadaqa*" (A good word is charity) echo the idea that eloquent and kind speech carries authority and moral weight.

Another insightful expression is: "*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*," which literally means "Excessive red fades quickly." Though simple in form, this proverb conveys a powerful message about artificiality, exaggeration, and the fleeting

nature of superficial beauty. The term “*әсіреқызыл*” refers to an overly bright or unnaturally intense red color, while “*тез оңар*” means that it fades quickly. So, the literal meaning is: colors that are too bold or exaggerated lose their vibrancy faster. But behind this physical observation lies a broader moral and philosophical lesson.

At its core, this proverb warns that what is overly artificial or exaggerated will not last. It applies not only to appearances, but also to fake behavior, empty praise, or superficial status. When a person attempts to impress others through unnatural charm, flashy displays, or pretentiousness, it might catch attention briefly—but it will not endure. In time, such “bright red” fades, revealing the lack of authenticity beneath.

This proverb remains deeply relevant in today’s world, especially amid social media culture, advertising, and the pursuit of image over substance. In a time when people often present a glamorous, filtered version of their lives, this proverb reminds us that surface-level beauty is temporary, while genuine character and depth are timeless. It also applies to leadership, public reputation, or even fame—when built on exaggeration or deceit, it cannot withstand the test of time. True value lies in natural simplicity, sincerity, and inner strength. “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” is a timeless proverb urging us to avoid artificiality and exaggeration in our actions, speech, and appearance. It encourages us to value authenticity over showiness, and to seek beauty in what is real, modest, and lasting. The proverb teaches that truth and simplicity endure, while false brilliance fades. “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” (Excessively red fades quickly) carries a cautionary meaning, warning against superficial brilliance. This mirrors idioms in English like “*All that glitters is not gold*”, or “*Too much of a good thing can be bad*,” suggesting that excessive outward beauty or showiness may not last.

C. Yellow in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs, born from centuries of life experience, represent a spiritual and cultural treasure trove. One of the most profound is: “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*,” which literally translates as “The root (end result) of patience is yellow (pure) gold.” This proverb praises one of the most noble human qualities – patience – and elevates it to the level of great wisdom. In Kazakh philosophy, patience is not just a moral virtue but a powerful force that leads to success.

Looking at the structure of the proverb, the word “*түбі*” means “the result” or “the end.” The phrase “*сары алтын*” refers to pure, high-quality gold. Therefore, the meaning becomes clear: true patience leads to priceless reward. This is not about passive inaction but about inner discipline, self-control, and the ability to remain calm and think rationally in difficult moments. Kazakh culture has long viewed impulsiveness as dangerous, expressed in another proverb: “*A rush is the devil’s work*.” Impatience often leads to regret, while patience brings resolution and reward. This saying offers hope and resilience during hardship. Patience reflects not only personal strength but also emotional intelligence and spiritual maturity.

The choice of the phrase “*sary altyn*” (“yellow gold”) is symbolic. In Kazakh thought, “yellow” is associated with richness, value, brightness, and warmth. Gold is universally recognized as a symbol of enduring value and reliability. So, in this proverb, patience is not just rewarded with material gain—it is likened to spiritual wealth, purity of character, and moral superiority. The use of gold as a metaphor implies that patience is rare, precious, and timeless—something to be valued and protected. A patient person, in this sense, becomes as valuable and respected as gold itself. In today’s fast-paced world, where information overload and constant competition often breed impatience, the ability to remain calm, composed, and steady becomes even more crucial. Those who exhibit patience are often better at navigating personal relationships, managing stress, and making thoughtful decisions. Modern psychology and coaching also emphasize the importance of emotional regulation and long-term thinking—principles deeply embedded in this ancient Kazakh proverb. In that sense, the wisdom of the past aligns perfectly with contemporary science. “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*” (Patience ends in yellow gold) finds parallels in universal proverbs that connect yellow/gold with reward and patience, such as the English “All things come to those who wait”.

Another proverb is “*Сары майдай сақтады*” (“Preserved like yellow butter”), capturing the idea of cherishing and protecting something valuable with utmost care. In traditional Kazakh life, *сары май* (clarified yellow butter) was one of the most valued and delicious foods. Among pastoral communities, yellow butter symbolized abundance, hospitality, and prosperity. It was carefully stored and served only on special occasions or to important guests. Thus, to “preserve something like yellow butter” means to guard it attentively, protect it from harm, and treat it as something deeply treasured.

While the proverb originates in reference to food, its figurative use extends much further. It can refer to cherishing a person, memory, object, or even a feeling with deep care and respect.

Examples include: A mother cherished her child like yellow butter. He protected the entrusted item like yellow butter. She kept their friendship like yellow butter. In all these cases, the proverb implies trust, responsibility, loyalty, and heartfelt appreciation. The saying promotes values such as mindfulness, responsibility, and the importance of safeguarding what truly matters. It reminds us that both material and intangible things—like relationships, promises, and memories—require dedicated care and respect.

To fully understand the proverb “Preserved like yellow butter,” we must explore the cultural, historical, and symbolic importance of *сары май* (clarified yellow butter) in Kazakh life. Its mention is far from accidental – it carries deep meaning in traditional Kazakh culture.

In the Kazakh nomadic lifestyle, *сары май* was considered a precious and rare food item. It was made from the best cream or fermented milk, carefully churned and stored for long periods, often preserved with salt and kept in special containers. Because of this it was a symbol of abundance and prosperity, served only to honored guests or on special

occasions, and thus treated with great care and respect. In Kazakh culture, yellow (sary) is associated with ripeness and maturity (like autumn), wisdom and patience (e.g., “Patience ends in yellow gold”), and even preciousness, as it is linked metaphorically to gold. Meanwhile, butter (май) itself symbolizes richness and comfort – a “buttery life” (*майлы өмір*) is an idiom for a smooth, prosperous existence. This association of yellow with rarity and protection finds resonance in other cultures. For example, in English, the word “golden” often conveys not just color, but value: “golden days,” “a golden opportunity,” etc. Similarly, in Turkish expressions, “*altın gibi saklamak*” (to protect like gold) implies the same careful reverence for what is valuable.

D. The Symbolism of Blue in Kazakh Proverbs

Kazakh proverbs, rooted in centuries of lived experience and harmony with nature, are not mere phrases but profound reflections of cultural philosophy. One such proverb is: “*Көкке қарап түкірме – бетіңе түседі*,” which literally means, “Don’t spit at the sky – it will fall on your face.” While this may seem like a simple observation of physical cause and effect, it actually conveys a deep moral lesson about responsibility, humility, and consequences.

On a literal level, the proverb refers to a basic truth: if you spit into the air, gravity will bring it right back to you. However, Kazakh wisdom transforms this into a metaphor about human behavior. Whatever negative words or actions one directs toward others—or toward life itself—will inevitably come back in some form. The proverb serves as a moral reminder that our deeds and words have consequences. It aligns with the universal concept of “what goes around comes around,” or the ethical law of reciprocity: do good, and good returns; do harm, and harm follows.

In Kazakh culture, “*көк*” (sky) doesn’t only refer to the physical sky—it also carries a symbolic meaning as a representation of heaven, fate, the divine, or higher powers. So, to “spit at the sky” may also be interpreted as a metaphor for defying nature, disrespecting the sacred, or mocking what is greater than oneself. This reverence for the sky is deeply rooted in the Tengrian worldview, where the sky (*Көк Тәңірі*) was seen as the supreme deity. The proverb thus blends color symbolism with cosmological ethics, turning the color blue into a metaphor for fate, justice, and spiritual balance. Comparable concepts exist in other cultures. For example, in English, the phrase “What goes around comes around” carries a similar message, though without the color-based imagery. In Chinese tradition, Heaven (天) also symbolizes moral authority, and disrespect toward it is thought to bring misfortune (New World Encyclopedia, 2025; Wiki.Agenda, 2025; EWA Direct, 2024).

The phrase “it will fall on your face” emphasizes that the consequences of one’s own arrogance or disrespect will be personally felt. It teaches us that nothing done in negativity remains without a result. This proverb underscores the principle of moral justice: every action has its price. In modern society, this proverb remains as relevant as ever. Whether in ecological terms—polluting nature and facing climate disasters—or in personal relationships, where negative energy, gossip, or cruelty can destroy one’s own peace, the lesson is the same: every action has a reaction.

It is especially pertinent in an age of social media, where thoughtless words or harmful behavior can quickly turn against the person who initiates them. The proverb is a powerful reminder to think before we speak or act, and to cultivate humility and respect.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of color symbolism in Kazakh proverbs reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and collective psychology. Far from being arbitrary descriptors, color terms in proverbs serve as semiotic markers that reflect the community’s values, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical frameworks.

Proverbs such as “*Қыздың көзі қызылда*” or “*Әсіреқызыл тез оңар*” exemplify how *қызыл* (red) conveys both allure and impermanence. While red symbolizes beauty, passion, and festivity, it also warns against superficiality and excess. Similarly, *ақ* (white) is associated with purity, truth, and moral clarity, as seen in sayings like “*Аққа Құдай жақ*” or “*Ақты ақ, қараны қара де*”. The contrast with *қара* (black) underscores the Kazakh worldview’s dualistic moral logic: black often implies hardship, seriousness, or hidden depth, yet also justice and strength—as in “*Қара қылды қақ жарған*”.

Other colors such as *сары* (yellow) and *көк* (blue) represent seasonality, wisdom, or cosmic freedom. For instance, “*Сабыр түбі – сары алтын*” illustrates how patience, though associated with aging or slowness (sary), leads to golden outcomes. Likewise, “*Көкке қарап түкірме – бетіңе түседі*” transforms the sky-blue symbol into a moral compass, warning against disrespect toward the divine or fate.

This chromatic system operates as a culturally specific framework through which life experience, ethics, and emotion are encoded in metaphor. The meanings of colors are fluid yet contextually bound, and their symbolic use in proverbs functions as both pedagogical and mnemonic devices in oral tradition. Notably, such color-coded wisdom also reflects evolving perceptions in contemporary Kazakhstan. While many of these proverbs are rooted in traditional settings, their usage today—in media, education, and even advertising—attests to their adaptive capacity and continued relevance. Proverbs remain a dynamic channel through which heritage and modern identity coalesce.

Comparisons with other languages reveal that while the symbolic interpretation of colors can be culturally specific, certain associations – like white with purity, red with passion or beauty, and gold with value are cross-cultural and deeply embedded in human cognition.

Kazakh proverbs that incorporate color terms provide a rich site for understanding the nation's ethical values, aesthetic norms, and cultural worldview. Colors in these expressions go far beyond literal description; they are metaphors loaded with historical meaning and symbolic resonance. By examining proverbs involving red, black, white, yellow, and blue, this study has shown how each hue operates within a specific cultural logic. These linguistic forms not only convey moral judgment and emotional nuance but also encode cosmological beliefs, social roles, and behavioral expectations. As such, Kazakh chromatic proverbs are not just linguistic artifacts—they are living expressions of national consciousness. In an era of globalization and digital communication, the symbolic richness of traditional proverbs offers a meaningful counterbalance to rapid cultural change. Understanding and preserving these color-coded expressions can play a vital role in cultural education, intergenerational dialogue, and the assertion of identity in both local and global contexts.

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