



LITERARY EXPRESSION OF COLORS IN KAZAKH CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

Aliqulova Hulkar Qahramonovna

Senior Lecturer, PhD

Alisher Navo'i Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature

aliqulovahulkar@gmail.com

Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 20 th September 2025 Accepted: 14 th October 2025	Oral folk literature represents a system of genres distinguished by unique artistic expression. Particularly, the analysis of color imagery in songs that are closely connected with ancient worldviews and early perceptions of the relationship between the universe and humankind reveals the people's wisdom, eloquence, and mastery of verbal art. In this respect, the folklore of kindred peoples is also remarkably distinctive. This article analyzes and systematizes examples related to colors in Kazakh folklore.
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In folklore texts, colors function not only as descriptive devices but also as semantic units that convey specific meanings, symbols, concepts, and values. Through colors, human aesthetic taste, worldview, beliefs, and attitudes toward social life are expressed. In Kazakh folklore, colors are closely associated with mythological perceptions and ancient beliefs, each possessing its own distinctive semantic field. Colors are not merely external attributes or images; rather, they reflect spiritual concepts such as ancient beliefs, the relationship with nature, sacredness, fear, and faith.

In Kazakh folklore, colors are formed through two main sources. The first is real-life observation, encompassing perceptions derived from natural changes, the animal world, and human activities. The second source consists of mythological and religious beliefs. Consequently, colors often perform symbolic, metaphorical, and emblematic functions. The formation of color mythology is a multi-stage process that originates from early religious-philosophical concepts and later becomes ingrained in collective consciousness through oral texts. For example, the association of the white (ақ) color with sacredness corresponds to ancient Tengrist beliefs related to the sky and light, while the blue (көк) color symbolizes Tengri, eternal life, and belief in infinity (1; 76–78).

The analysis of Kazakh proverbs, fairy tales, lullabies, legends, and folk songs demonstrates that colors represent not only external appearance but also embody philosophical ideas rooted in folk consciousness. For instance, the red (қызыл) color simultaneously symbolizes vitality, love, and beauty, while also being associated with danger, war, and sacrifice. This duality highlights the multifaceted nature of colors and their profound role in oral folk tradition. Moreover, color combinations and their contextual transformations hold significant importance in folkloric thinking. For example, ақ пен қара (white and black) express the opposition between good and evil, whereas көк пен жер (sky and earth) signify harmony between heaven and earth. Such oppositions and harmonies constitute fundamental principles of mythopoetic thought. Thus, colors function not merely as aesthetic elements but as mythological codes forming the foundation of the people's worldview.

In traditional Kazakh perceptions, the black (қара) color carries broad and multifaceted symbolic meanings. It is distinguished by its simultaneous positive and negative connotations. Historically, black has represented tragedy, hardship, resilience, poverty, simplicity, lower social status, crime, falsehood, and injustice, while also symbolizing loyalty, abundance, and sacredness. Common expressions such as қара қазан (black cauldron) and қара шаңырақ (black hearth) are directly connected with notions of family, sanctity, and stability. For instance, қара қазан symbolizes family life and prosperity, while қара шаңырақ represents the ancestral home and continuity of lineage. These expressions reflect the people's everyday culture, values, and social life. Consider the following example:

Қара қазан көтеріп,
Қара шаңырақ шайқалмасын,

which conveys the wish that the family remain peaceful and intact.

Black also functions as a symbol of courage and strength: қара батыр refers to a brave hero, and қара күш denotes the collective strength and physical power of the people. In the context of love and affection, black appears in expressions such as қара көз (beautiful, captivating eyes) and қара домалақ бала (a beloved child). Mythologically, black has deep roots as well. According to legends, the black swallow symbolizes loyalty and kindness. On this basis, the expression "қазақтың қара қарлығашы" is used affectionately and respectfully among the people (2; 114–119).

In Kazakh folk imagination, the white (ақ) color symbolizes purity, honesty, divinity, harmony, happiness, and benevolence. It often represents light, new life, peace, and abundance. Expressions such as ақ тілек (pure wish), ақ жол (good journey), and ақ бата (blessing) firmly establish the positive connotations of this color in oral tradition. Furthermore, phrases associated with white include ақ үй (symbol of state authority), ақ дастархан (hospitality), and ақ анадай тіс (symbol of beauty). The sacredness of the mother figure is also strongly conveyed through white: ақ сүт (mother's milk) symbolizes maternal labor, rights, and the gift of life.

White likewise occupies an important place in mythological perceptions. In ancient Turkic worldview, white represented the sky, Tengri, sacredness, and divine power. In ritual practices, white holds a special status: wrapping a newborn child in white cloth or presenting elderly parents with white garments reflects reverence, respect, and prayers for well-being. In Kazakh oral folklore, this color appears frequently across poetic lines and narrative expressions, underscoring its enduring symbolic significance.

Ақ бата берді қария,

Ақ жол тіледі анасы...

(The elders gave a blessing, the mother wished for a smooth journey...)

Here, the white color is depicted as a symbol of prayer, blessing, and goodness. In particular, the phrase "white path" expresses the desire for light, happiness, and success on the path of life. Blue is a symbol of God, sky, hope, movement, eternal life, will, and freedom. The blue color was especially valued in ancient Turkic mythology as a direct symbol of God. In the popular imagination, the blue color represents eternal life, vital force, and permanence. Also, the "blue flag" (blue flag) is a symbol of independence and homeland.

Көк аспанға қол созып,

Көк далада ер жеттім, –

The expression "reaching toward the blue sky, we grew up in the blue steppe" depicts the harmony between freedom and nature. The blue color is associated with friendship, honesty, compassion, faith, and endurance. From a mythological perspective, it is directly connected with the Sky God, Kөk Tengri, who occupies a central place in the belief system of Turkic peoples.

The red color symbolizes life, vitality, love, fire, and power, and at times also danger and conflict. Through red, human passions, beauty, and a festive emotional atmosphere are expressed. The predominance of red in bridal attire is not coincidental; it signifies the beginning of a new life, vitality, and abundance. In folk usage, expressions such as қызыл тіл (eloquence), қызыл гүл (beauty), and қызыл шырақ (a symbol of joy and happiness) are widespread. At the same time, қызыл қан (red blood) functions as a symbol of sacrifice, devotion, and warfare. In mythology, red is associated with the sun, fire, power, and life force, while in certain contexts it may also represent warning and severe trials.

In folk consciousness, the yellow color symbolizes the sun, abundance, maturity, and beauty. For the Kazakh people, who lived in close harmony with nature, yellowish hues indicated the ripening of fruits and the season of harvest. However, in some poetic fragments and legends, yellow also appears as a symbol of transience, separation, and decay.

Сары күз келді, самал жел,

жапырақ жерге түсті

Сары

"The yellow autumn has arrived, a gentle breeze blows,

A yellow leaf has fallen to the ground"

— these lines evoke decay, melancholy, and calmness. This color symbolizes a transitional period between spring and autumn. In this sense, the yellowish hue simultaneously embodies the ideas of vitality and transience.

In Kazakh children's folklore, there are two types of songs intended for children. The first type is created from the children's perspective and is performed by the children themselves. The second type is composed by parents and performed by them. Thus, children's songs can be divided into two groups based on authorship and performance: children's creativity and parental creativity. This principle has long been applied by Russian folklorists and is also widely observed in the folklore of other nations (3; 97).

Although colors have been analyzed in various genres of Kazakh folklore, their semantic functions and lexical meanings in children's folklore—particularly in children's songs—have not been sufficiently studied. In the course of this research, reference is made to certain studies by Kazakh scholars on color symbolism, which serve as a methodological basis for analyzing color symbolism in children's songs. As noted in previous chapters, the symbolic meanings of colors demonstrate a degree of universality across many cultures, as they have been formed as shared archetypal images in human cognition.

An analysis of Kazakh children's songs reveals that color-related imagery carries significant aesthetic and semantic weight. The most frequently occurring color terms include ақ (white), қара (black), қызыл (red), көк (blue), сары (yellow), жасыл (green), күлгін (purple), and қоңыр (brown). In song texts, these colors function not only to describe objects and phenomena but also to convey specific emotions, moods, and symbolic meanings. Therefore, the system of colors in children's folklore reflects the people's aesthetic thinking and cultural values.

One of the most widespread genres of Kazakh children's songs is *besik zhyry* (lullabies), in which the colors white and red occur most frequently. White symbolizes the child's future, innocence, and protection, while red represents maternal love, vital energy, and emotional intensity. In Kazakh lullabies, colors often convey the poetic meaning of the child and typically appear in combination with other words, forming stable collocations. For example:

**Әлди, әлди, ақ бөпем,
Ақ бесікке жат бөпем!
Жылама, бөпем, жылама,
Жілік шағып берейін (4;27).**

**(Alla, alla, oq bolam,
Oq beshikka yot bolam!
Yig'lama, bolam, yig'lama,
Senga suyak chaqib berayin)**

In this lullaby, the white color appears in two instances: ақ бөпем ("my white baby") and ақ бесік ("white cradle"). Here, white signifies purity and innocence, and the expression "my white child" presents the infant as an innocent and sacred being. White also functions as a symbol of maternal love and affection. The "white cradle" carries the meaning of a sacred space: the cradle is not merely a physical object but represents safety and the center of the mother's protective world for the child. The attribute "white" sacralizes this space, elevating it to a symbolic and spiritual level.

In lullabies, colors serve as expressions of warmth, care, and affection toward the child. In the following examples, loving descriptions are conveyed through colors from the mother's perspective:

Қара көзім, қой көзім,
Қарлығаштай сүйкімдім.

In this context, the expression қара көзім ("my black-eyed one") describes the infant's eyes as pleasant and expressive. The black color here does not carry a negative connotation; rather, it symbolizes depth and beauty.

Анамақтар (counting rhymes) are songs intended to develop children's cognitive abilities, particularly counting skills and an understanding of sequence. Through rhythmic structure and contrasts, these rhymes help shape children's attention and logical thinking. An analysis of Kazakh children's counting rhymes reveals the frequent use of contrasting colors:

Ақ таяқ, қара аяқ,
Көк қалпақ пен сары бақ (4; 42)...
("White stick, black leg,
Blue hat and yellow garden...")

This excerpt contains four colors, each carrying a distinct semantic load. Ақ таяқ ("white stick")—here, white does not symbolize power or force but rather purity and innocence, instilling a positive interpretation of an object associated with strength in the child's mind. Қара аяқ ("black leg")—black is used in a contrasting manner, symbolizing negativity or lack, thereby functioning as a cognitive stimulus that introduces the notion of opposition in the child's thinking. Көк қалпақ ("blue hat")—blue represents height, aspiration, and vastness; as a head covering, it conveys admiration and dreams. Сары бақ ("yellow garden")—yellow signifies fertility and joy, indicating a positive evaluation of the surrounding environment.

In counting rhymes, colors are presented sequentially, and through rhythmic repetition, children's memory is activated while symbolic associations between humans and objects are formed in the mind. Here, colors are arranged according to the principle of semantic dualism. For example, the opposition between white and black evokes archetypal concepts such as life and conflict, good and evil, purity and impurity. It is precisely through such oppositions that the foundational elements of a child's worldview are shaped.

Жаңылтпаштар (tongue twisters) constitute a genre aimed at phonetic play, enhancing speech speed, and correcting pronunciation. Through repeated sounds, the semantic and aesthetic impact of the text is intensified.

**Қара көже, көк кесе,
Ақ апамның қол кесесі.
(Qora ko'je, ko'k kosa,
Oq opamning qo'l kosasi).**

Here comes the black soup (black soup) - the national dish is symbolically shown through the black color, a sign of simplicity, antiquity and devotion to values; blue cup (blue payola) - the blue color is given here in the meaning of purity and nobility, as an aesthetic taste in the form of dishes. White grandmother (white grandmother) - the white color is given in the image of an old woman as a symbol of honor, purity and respect. This ensures that the white color is associated with an appreciative, positive image in the child's mind. There are also cases of giving the quality of white to old people. In Kazakh children's songs, color images are not limited to mythological or symbolic meanings. They also play a special role in how children perceive the environment, observe and perceive things as children. Colors serve as mediators in the concrete and figurative formation of a child's thinking. In particular, colors form the child's first ideas about the world by distinguishing between movement, space and events. For example, in the following children's song, a moving picture of life is created through the use of color imagery:

Көк самолёт келеді,
Қызыл гүлдер тереді,
Сары күнде жүгіріп,
Жасыл шалғын көреді (5; 44).

*(Ko'k samolyot keladi,
Qizil gullar teradi,
Sariq quyoshda yugurib,
Yashil mayсалarni ko'radi)*

In this example, the colors blue, red, yellow, and green convey not only aesthetic beauty but also reflect the child's perception of reality and their attitude toward the surrounding environment. Көк самолёт ("blue airplane") is interpreted as a symbol of technological progress; қызыл гүлдер ("red flowers") represent the beauty of nature; сары күн ("yellow sun/day") signifies a source of light; and жасыл шалғын ("green meadow") depicts a peaceful natural landscape. These images serve to explain simple concepts to children through artistic imagery. Songs associated with colors function as an important means of aesthetically shaping a child's language, thinking, and perception. Through this process, the child begins to perceive colors not merely as external attributes but as markers that express movement, states, space, and phenomena.

The analyses presented above demonstrate that the system of colors in Kazakh children's folklore is not a simple descriptive device, but a complex semantic layer intertwined with collective thinking, national aesthetic principles, and educational values. Colors play a crucial role not only in shaping a child's worldview but also as one of the most significant symbolic elements of national culture. Therefore, color symbolism remains a rich scholarly foundation for future research.

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