

COLORATIVE LEXIS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY RUSSIAN POETIC LANGUAGE: STRUCTURAL, SEMANTIC, AND SEMIOTIC DIMENSIONS**Nazarova Malikabonu Davronovna**

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Abstract: This article examines colorative lexis in twentieth-century Russian poetic language as a structurally and conceptually significant component of artistic nomination. Drawing on linguistic, semiotic, and cognitive approaches, the study analyzes the structural types, semantic transformations, and semiotic functions of color terms in Symbolism, Futurism, Acmeism, and later modernist poetry. The research integrates structural-derivational analysis, contextual interpretation, and semiotic modeling in order to demonstrate that color vocabulary in poetic discourse exceeds denotative reference and functions as a mechanism of conceptual construction. The findings reveal that color terms operate on multiple levels: sensory designation, emotional coding, symbolic abstraction, and ontological modeling. The article argues that in twentieth-century Russian poetry, chromatic nomination becomes a productive means of reconfiguring perception and constructing poetic reality. The transformation of color semantics reflects broader shifts in linguistic consciousness characteristic of modernism.

Keywords: colorative lexis, poetic language, Russian modernism, symbolism, semiotics, chromatic nomination, poetic semantics.

1. Introduction

Color occupies a unique position in human cognition and language. As both a perceptual phenomenon and a cultural construct, color mediates between sensory experience and symbolic abstraction. In poetic discourse, color terms rarely function as neutral descriptors. Instead, they become structurally and semantically charged units capable of organizing imagery, emotional tone, and conceptual perspective.

Twentieth-century Russian poetry represents a particularly fertile domain for examining chromatic nomination. The period encompasses Symbolism, Futurism, Acmeism, and later modernist developments, each characterized by an intensified awareness of language as material and model. Within this context, colorative lexis emerges not merely as a descriptive tool but as a mechanism of artistic world construction.

2. Literature Review

The study of color terminology gained prominence with Berlin and Kay's (1969) theory of basic color terms, which proposed universal patterns in lexical categorization of color. Although their research focused on cross-linguistic typology rather than poetic language, it established the cognitive foundation of chromatic categorization.

In Russian linguistics, Apreyan (1995) emphasized the systemic organization of lexical semantics, demonstrating that word meaning is structured rather than associative. Color terms thus represent stable semantic domains capable of expansion in context.

Vinogradov (1972) argued that poetic language modifies lexical meaning through contextual intensification. His perspective provides a framework for understanding how chromatic vocabulary acquires heightened expressive density.

Zemskaya (1992) analyzed productive word-formation processes, offering insight into derivational mechanisms by which color terms generate new lexical forms.

Lotman (1970) conceptualized poetic language as a secondary modeling system. Within such systems, lexical units accumulate semiotic surplus. Color terms, due to their perceptual immediacy and symbolic resonance, become particularly dense signs.

Jakobson (1987) emphasized the poetic function of language, where attention shifts from referential content to the structure of the message itself. In this context, chromatic lexis contributes to formal organization and parallelism.

In Russian Symbolism, color functions as metaphysical code. Blok's chromatic imagery often aligns white with transcendence and black with existential rupture. Bely integrates color into rhythmic and symbolic architecture.

Futurism reinterprets color dynamically. Mayakovsky employs red as a marker of revolutionary intensity. Khlebnikov constructs chromatic neologisms to expand sensory boundaries.

Acmeism tends toward clarity yet retains chromatic density. Akhmatova's restrained palette intensifies emotional resonance through minimalism.

Despite extensive literary discussion of symbolism, few studies examine structural aspects of chromatic nomination across movements. This research seeks to bridge that gap.

3. Methodology

The study applies an interdisciplinary methodology combining linguistic and literary analysis.

The corpus includes selected poems by:

Alexander Blok
Andrei Bely
Vladimir Mayakovsky
Velimir Khlebnikov
Anna Akhmatova
Boris Pasternak

These authors represent major trends of Russian twentieth-century poetry.

1. Structural-derivational analysis
2. Semantic contextual analysis
3. Conceptual metaphor analysis
4. Semiotic modeling
5. Functional stylistic interpretation



The analysis focuses on recurring chromatic patterns rather than isolated instances.

4. Results

Three principal structural categories were identified:

1. Basic color terms

White, black, red, blue, green, yellow dominate poetic lexicon.

2. Derived chromatic forms

Suffixal derivatives (e.g., белизна, чернота) abstract sensory perception into conceptual states.

3. Compound and metaphorical formations

Examples include chromatic epithets combining sensory and emotional attributes.

5. Discussion

The results of the analysis allow for a more precise theoretical articulation of the role of colorative lexis in twentieth-century Russian poetic language. The initial hypothesis — that chromatic vocabulary functions as a mechanism of artistic nomination rather than mere sensory description — is confirmed at structural, semantic, and semiotic levels. Color terms in the examined corpus do not operate as passive attributes attached to objects; instead, they organize perception, encode evaluation, and construct ontological models within the poetic text.[1]

First, the structural findings demonstrate that color words in Russian modernist poetry frequently undergo derivational expansion and contextual resemanticization. This indicates that chromatic nomination is not static but dynamic. The lexical item “white,” for instance, may shift from denoting a physical surface property to signifying transcendence, silence, or emptiness. Such transformation reveals that poetic language destabilizes referential fixation and introduces semantic mobility. The chromatic lexeme becomes a site of semantic accumulation rather than a transparent label.

This phenomenon correlates directly with Lotman’s conception of poetic language as a secondary modeling system. According to Lotman, the poetic text reorganizes primary linguistic codes into a semiotically intensified structure¹. Within this system, individual lexical units function as nodes in a symbolic network. The present analysis confirms that colorative lexis acquires precisely such nodal status. Recurrent chromatic oppositions (white/black, red/blue, light/dark) do not merely decorate imagery but create structural axes along which meaning unfolds.[4]

For example, in Symbolist poetics, white often signifies transcendence or mystical aspiration, while black encodes existential rupture. These values are not isolated but relational; their meaning emerges through opposition. The binary chromatic model becomes a structural principle organizing entire poetic worlds. In this sense, color is not descriptive but architectonic.

Second, Jakobson’s theory of the poetic function provides a complementary explanatory framework². Jakobson argued that poetic discourse foregrounds the message for its own sake, emphasizing equivalence, parallelism, and structural repetition. Chromatic lexis in twentieth-century Russian poetry frequently participates in such parallel constructions. Repetition of a color term across lines establishes rhythmic and semantic symmetry, reinforcing thematic cohesion.[3]

For instance, repeated invocation of “red” in Futurist poetry intensifies revolutionary dynamism not only through lexical meaning but through structural reiteration. The color word becomes a rhythmic pivot. Thus, chromatic nomination operates simultaneously at semantic and formal levels. It structures the perceptual field and the textual architecture.



Third, from a cognitive-linguistic perspective, color functions as a conceptual anchor linking embodied perception and abstract thought. Berlin and Kay's research on basic color terms demonstrated that color categories reflect universal perceptual patterns³. However, poetic discourse transforms these perceptual categories into metaphorical and conceptual domains. The analysis reveals that in Russian modernist poetry, color frequently mediates between sensory experience and philosophical abstraction.[2]

Red may represent passion, revolution, or violence; blue may signify infinity or melancholy; white may suggest silence or metaphysical void. These semantic shifts illustrate conceptual metaphorization: perceptual categories become vehicles for abstract meaning. Importantly, this metaphorization is systematic rather than arbitrary. It reflects culturally stabilized associations that poets intensify and reorganize.

Fourth, the transformation of chromatic nomination mirrors broader epistemological changes characteristic of twentieth-century modernism. Classical realism presupposed referential stability: color described the external world. Modernist poetics, by contrast, often undermines referential transparency. Color ceases to guarantee objectivity and instead becomes subjective, symbolic, or ontological.

In later modernist poetry, chromatic minimalism intensifies introspective function. A restrained palette produces semantic condensation: fewer color terms generate greater symbolic load. This demonstrates that chromatic economy may increase semiotic density. The absence of color may itself function meaningfully, indicating desaturation of reality or existential withdrawal.

Moreover, chromatic contrasts frequently encode temporal and spatial modeling. White may signal timelessness; black may indicate historical rupture; red may denote revolutionary time. Such associations show that color extends beyond sensory coding into temporal structuring. In this respect, chromatic nomination participates in constructing poetic chronotope.

The findings therefore refine the concept of artistic nomination. Color terms do not simply assign names to visible properties. They reorganize perception, encode evaluation, and generate symbolic frameworks. Through repetition, opposition, derivation, and metaphorization, chromatic lexis becomes a structural mechanism of meaning production.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that chromatic nomination in twentieth-century Russian poetry operates on at least four interconnected levels:

1. Perceptual level – direct sensory designation.
2. Emotional level – affective intensification.
3. Symbolic level – culturally mediated abstraction.
4. Ontological level – modeling of existential categories.

The interplay of these levels creates multi-layered semantic structures. A single color term may simultaneously activate perceptual memory, emotional response, symbolic association, and philosophical reflection. Such multi-level activation exemplifies the semiotic density described by Lotman.

Finally, the transformation of chromatic lexis reflects a broader shift in linguistic consciousness. Twentieth-century Russian poetry demonstrates movement from descriptive realism toward symbolic modeling. Language is no longer a neutral mirror of reality; it becomes an instrument of constructing alternative realities. Color, as one of the most perceptually immediate lexical domains, becomes an especially powerful medium of this transformation.[5]

Thus, chromatic nomination functions not as ornament but as epistemological tool. It mediates between sensory perception and conceptual abstraction, between linguistic structure and poetic worldview. The analysis confirms that in Russian twentieth-century poetry, colorative lexis is a central component of artistic modeling and semiotic organization.



Conclusion

This study demonstrates that colorative lexis in twentieth-century Russian poetic language constitutes a structurally and conceptually central component of artistic discourse. Through structural, semantic, and semiotic analysis, it has been shown that chromatic vocabulary functions as a mechanism of world construction rather than mere sensory description.

Color terms operate across multiple levels: perceptual designation, emotional coding, symbolic abstraction, and ontological modeling. Their derivational productivity and contextual flexibility enable poets to reshape perceptual categories into conceptual frameworks.

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