

## Linguocultural Specificity of Color Symbolism in the Rituals of the Karakalpaks and Russians

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is devoted to a linguocultural analysis of color symbolism in the rituals of the Karakalpak and Russian peoples. The aim of the study is to identify the specific features of color lexemes and ritual terms in the linguistic worldview of the two ethnic groups. Using methods of semantic, conceptual, comparative analysis and the ethnolinguistic approach, both universal and ethnospecific characteristics were established. For the first time, a systematic comparison of color concepts in the Karakalpak and Russian languages has been carried out, contributing to the fields of linguoculturology and ethnolinguistics. The results show that color lexemes act as cultural codes reflecting social, sacred, and aesthetic values. This research opens up new perspectives for studying the linguistic mechanisms of cultural identity in the context of globalization.*

**Keywords:** Color terms, concept, linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, Karakalpak language, Russian language, ritual terms, linguistic worldview, symbolism.

### INTRODUCTION

Color concepts encoded in linguistic units play a pivotal role in shaping a people's linguistic worldview, reflecting the cultural values and worldview of ethnic communities. Linguoculturology, as a field exploring the interrelation between language and culture, provides a theoretical and methodological framework for

analyzing color lexemes as carriers of ethnocultural codes [6]. In both Karakalpak and Russian, color terms such as *kızıl* (red), *aq* (white), *qara* (black), *kók* (blue/green), *sarı* (yellow), and their Russian counterparts extend beyond their denotative meanings. These lexemes encapsulate culturally embedded concepts associated with ritual practices, social identity, and sacred beliefs. This article examines the linguocultural specificity of color lexemes within the ritual contexts of the Karakalpak and Russian peoples – two ethnolinguistic groups with rich and distinctive cultural traditions. The study aims to identify both universal and culture-specific patterns in the symbolic use of color across these traditions.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

The study by Orazymbetova explores the linguocultural symbolism of color in Karakalpak and Russian rituals, highlighting both universal and ethnospecific features. Previous works focused on individual traditions, while this research provides a comparative perspective. It enriches ethnolinguistics by revealing how color lexemes reflect cultural identity, social roles, and ritual functions in both cultures.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs semantic, conceptual, and comparative analyses alongside an ethnolinguistic approach. The material includes ethnographic sources, field data, and a lexical corpus of color and ritual terms. The methodology enables identification of universal and culture-specific symbolic meanings of colors in Karakalpak and Russian ritual contexts.

This study examines color lexemes as markers of social, sacred, and aesthetic values across various ritual contexts – namely wedding, funerary, childbirth, agrarian, and magical practices. Special attention is given to terms such as *kızıl kiymeshek* (a symbol of fertility), *qara asy* (a mourning meal), and *kók kóylek* (blue shirt), along with their Russian equivalents.

These examples shed light on the linguistic mechanisms by which cultural identity is articulated.

Ethnographic analysis reveals that traditional rituals place particular emphasis on thematic clothing, especially its color. Therefore, this paper first explores the symbolic function of color in the traditional garments of the Karakalpak and Russian people. In both traditions, the use of color in costume underscores not only aesthetic considerations but also symbolic and functional meanings. Depending on environmental, religious, and social factors, colors performed communicative-informational as well as protective (apotropaic) functions.

Most vividly, the apotropaic role of color is reflected in rituals and customs aimed at protection from the evil eye, malevolent spirits, and other supernatural threats. In scholarly discourse, this protective function of objects is defined as *apotropaion* [16, 36]. In both Karakalpak and Russian cultures, certain red-colored garments and accessories serve as apotropaic elements. For example, in traditional Karakalpak men's outerwear (*ton, postin*), a red embroidered or dyed triangular patch called *duashiq* (a talisman) was placed below the collar on the back. A.S. Morozova suggests that this triangle, resembling a *tumara* (amulet), likely served a protective rather than decorative function in ancient times [14, 43].

Numerous examples illustrate the protective symbolism of red in clothing and ornamentation. Particularly elaborate and colorful were the costumes of young women, who often wore red textiles. For instance, the *kızıl kiymeshek* (a chest covering) was traditionally worn by married women until the end of their childbearing years. It was removed only during mourning periods. Elderly women would then replace it with a white (*aq*) *kiymeshek*. Originally, the red *kiymeshek* was associated with family fertility cults and symbolized the safeguarding of reproductive potential [7, 69].

In Karakalpak culture, there is also a custom of adorning new houses, vehicles, cradles, and other objects with red items—often red cloth scraps, ribbons, triangular *dua* made of red fabric, red peppers, or household items such as red pitchers and basins.

This protective symbolism of red also exists in Russian culture. Magical circles were drawn with red paint; on Easter, people would wash their faces with water containing a red egg or plant. A red thread was widely used as both a protective and healing object – it was tied around the wrist or ankle, or hung on bushes. Red wool or fabric strips were also tied around joints to relieve pain and ward off fevers or fright. Red was believed to protect against snakes, mice, wolves, evil spirits, and bad weather [9].

Thus, in both Karakalpak and Russian cultures, the lexeme *red* verbalizes the conceptual domains of “protection” and “talisman” in similar ways.

Additionally, the red color concept in clothing served as a social marker to distinguish age groups and social status. In both cultures, red was typically worn by younger individuals, particularly women of childbearing age. Chromatic colors (red, green, brown) were preferred by the younger generation, while the elderly tended to wear achromatic tones—most often white—as symbols of peace, wisdom, and spiritual transition. For instance, young Karakalpak women's ceremonial cloaks (*jegde*) with false sleeves were usually red. Head coverings such as *taqiya*, *oramal*, *saukele*, and *turbans* were also predominantly red. M. Karlybayev and Z. Kurbanova note that red in Karakalpak women's clothing symbolizes youth, beauty, vitality, and love [10, 6; 10].

A similar tendency is observed in Russian culture. According to G. Maslova, red prominently features in wedding and childbirth rituals as a symbol of life, health, beauty, and marital union. In many Russian provinces, wedding attire included red garments such as skirts, sarafans, coats, and sashes. Brides would also thread red ribbons into boutonnières for guests [13, 40].

Therefore, in both traditions, the concept of red encapsulates notions such as “youth,” “beauty,” “energy,” and “love.”

However, it is important to note the cultural divergence in red color associations. In Russian funerary rituals, red is widely used as a safeguard against contact with the otherworld. The deceased's limbs were tied with red thread, and coffins were wrapped in red thread multiple times. Pregnant women attending

funerals would tie red thread around their fingers [9, 199]. In contrast, Karakalpak funerary traditions avoid the use of red, favoring achromatic (white and black) and blue tones instead.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the treatment of measles – commonly referred to in the vernacular of both Russian and Karakalpak cultures as rubella or “kızylsha” – the Karakalpaks traditionally made extensive use of the color red, in line with the principle of “like cures like.” A red cloth would be hung on the gate of a sick person’s home, serving as a warning to passersby about the risk of contagion. This functioned as a form of quarantine, aiming to prevent the further spread of the disease. The patient was dressed entirely in red clothing. Moreover, within the home of the afflicted individual, people avoided uttering the name of the disease, believing that doing so could worsen the patient's condition [1, 10]. This unique approach to treatment is not found in Russian cultural traditions.

The use of the color white in ritual practices of both peoples also exhibits numerous similarities and differences. In both traditions, white symbolizes wisdom, purity and innocence, mourning, and peace – meanings that are reflected in clothing and ceremonial attributes.

Among the Karakalpaks, both men and women gradually replaced their colorful garments with white attire as they aged. Young men typically wore *sheckpen* (a traditional robe) made from light brown fabric, while older men wore white versions. Boys and girls donned skullcaps in blue or green, made from local fabrics or velvet, whereas the elderly and children wore white skullcaps. Elderly women’s clothing was predominantly made from white or dark fabrics – either plain, striped, or checkered. In contrast, young women avoided plain white or blue dresses, as both colors were associated with mourning. Older individuals also refrained from wearing brightly ornamented clothing. As they aged, women would exchange their red headscarves (*kızıl kiymeshek*) for white ones (*ak kiymeshek*), and their red outerwear (*kızıl jegde*) for white (*ak jegde*), and so on [7, 69].

A similar trend of wearing white in old age is observed in Russian culture. Given that Christian doctrine permitted burial in clothing, it was common for the elderly to prepare a "death outfit" in advance, typically sewn from white fabric in a traditional style [13, 118].

White also played a significant role in wedding rituals, symbolizing innocence and the beginning of a new chapter in the couple's life. In contemporary times, due to globalization and the integration of foreign customs, brides in both Karakalpak and Russian cultures now wear white wedding dresses and veils. However, historically – particularly in Karakalpak culture – white was rarely seen in wedding ceremonies. In Russian tradition, elements of white attire occasionally appeared but held different connotations. In Russian, the word "white" verbalizes the concept of purity in rituals. In some provinces, a bride wore a so-called "grieving" *poneva* (a traditional skirt) made of white homespun cloth, typically worn during mourning for a deceased relative. Only after the wedding ceremony would she replace it with festive clothing [13, 145].

The color white was widely used in funeral rites as well. In Islamic tradition, white is associated with purity and mourning, which is why the deceased are always buried in a white shroud (*kafan*). Among Russians, news of a death was traditionally marked by hanging a white cloth or towel outside the home—believed to be used by the deceased to wipe away tears for forty days. In Northern Russia, the custom of a "wedding-funeral" was observed, in which a deceased unmarried girl was dressed in a white wedding gown. Women's mourning attire included a white, shirt-like *shushka* made from semi-wool fabric, while men wore white shirts, trousers, stockings, and felt hats [13, 145]. The idiom "white death" also attests to the widespread use of the color white in Russian mourning practices.

In spring and summer seasonal rituals intended to promote agricultural fertility, both the Karakalpak and Russian peoples employed white as a symbolic color. According to S. Kamalov, in Karakalpak villages, the best plowman was chosen to begin the sowing season. He would bathe, dress in clean white linen, and then put on a fur coat turned inside out. Housewives would

anoint the horns of the oxen with oil and flour. Great attention was paid to starting the work auspiciously, as the success of the harvest was believed to depend on it [7, 189]. Here, white clothing and flour symbolized fertility and abundance.

In Russian villages, a similar tradition called *opakhivanie* (plow-rounding) was performed, where a furrow was plowed around the perimeter of the settlement to symbolically protect it from disease. Women who participated in this rite often wore white, symbolizing their connection to the spiritual realm.

Black, as the antithesis of white, holds similarly negative connotations in the traditions of both cultures. It symbolizes darkness, earth, death, mourning, and evil forces. Due to these associations, black was generally avoided in ritual practices – except for funerals. In Karakalpak culture, black is completely excluded from wedding and childbirth ceremonies, as it is believed that garments in black or dark tones might bring sorrow. Among Russians, however, widows or grieving women sometimes wore black dresses and tied black headscarves “in mourning,” as previously noted.

As a symbol of mourning, black was the dominant color in the funeral rituals of both the Karakalpaks and Russians, serving as the main color of the deceased’s clothing. Among the Karakalpaks, a ritual called *kara asy* (literally “black feast”) was held before the funeral [12, 127]. During this ceremony, those gathered to see off the deceased would share a meal and recite prayers.

Black objects and sacrificial animals were also used in magical practices. Particularly in Russian tradition, black possessed apotropaic power – that is, the ability to ward off evil spirits. For example, a knife in a black sheath was believed to protect against fright. A black hen was carried around crops to protect them from hail and sacrificed to prevent plague. The egg of a black hen was thought to cure “chicken blindness,” and milk from a black cow was used to extinguish fires. Similarly, among the Karakalpaks, black rams or chickens were sacrificed for protective, apotropaic purposes. An interesting custom involved hanging a black bird in the home of childless couples to

encourage fertility. The bird's stuffed body would remain until the child grew old enough to ask why it hung there [1, 26].

Yellow in the rituals of Russians and Karakalpaks often symbolized positive concepts such as prosperity, joy, and divine presence. In Russian culture, yellow is strongly associated with the sun – a powerful emblem of life, warmth, and renewal. This connection is especially evident during celebrations like Maslenitsa, where yellow foods like butter and pancakes symbolize the sun and the arrival of spring. Thus, yellow carries connotations of rebirth and happiness. In folk rituals, often linked to gold, yellow in weddings may symbolize wishes of wealth and happiness for the newlyweds.

However, yellow can also bear negative connotations. For example, one Russian fever was called “yellow fever.” During memorial rituals on Easter, Semik, and Trinity days, eggs were often dyed yellow.

In Karakalpak ceremonies, yellow frequently represents wealth, prosperity, and joy. For instance, yellow fabrics or items were sometimes included in the bride's dowry, symbolizing wishes for well-being and abundance for the new family. Traditional Karakalpak clothing often features yellow embroidery and patterns that highlight festivity and cultural identity. This indicates that yellow is perceived as a bright and positive symbol.

In our research, we found only one example of yellow in Karakalpak ritual practice. According to ethnographic studies by T.A. Zhdanko and S.K. Kamalov, during the first cattle drive to pastures, young men would wait outside the *aul* and ask women and girls for a *jol bolsyn* – a payment wishing them a safe journey. The women would give them a *sary aydyn belbeu* – a yellow locally made cloth – to use as a belt [7, 179]. While detailed information about the role of yellow in Karakalpak rituals is scarce, it likely shares similar associations with earth, natural abundance, and happiness as seen in other Central Asian cultures. The lexeme *sary* in *sary aydyn belbeu* (yellow belt) verbalizes the concept of prosperity, linked to the *jol bolsyn* ritual. In Russian, “yellow” also associates with the sun and wealth, as seen in the Easter tradition of yellow eggs.

Thus, in the rituals of both Russians and Karakalpaks, yellow carries predominantly positive symbolism. Despite differences in religious and cultural traditions, in both cultures yellow is a symbol of life, prosperity, and happiness, especially in ceremonies connected to important life events.

Green plays an important role in the rituals of Russians and Karakalpaks as well, symbolizing similar ideas such as life, fertility, and renewal, though with differences shaped by their cultural and religious backgrounds. The Karakalpak word *kók* covers both green and blue and is connected with Islamic sacredness and fertility [3, 120]. In Russian culture, green is closely linked to nature and its cycles. It frequently appears in traditional rituals. The folk name for Trinity week is *Zelenye Svyatki* (Green Holy Days). During this time, homes and churches are decorated with green branches symbolizing life and the action of the Holy Spirit. Green is associated with spring and summer – times of nature's awakening. In sowing and harvest rituals, green branches or herbs are used to attract fertility. In wedding traditions, green elements can symbolize freshness and youthfulness in the new family. Wedding songs often mention images of green rye, pine forest, and meadows.

In Islamic tradition, the color green is considered the color of paradise and is closely associated with the Prophet Muhammad, which endows it with significant religious meaning. Naturally, the religious background of the Karakalpaks has shaped their positive associations with this color.

Like the Russians, the Karakalpaks see green as a symbol of nature and its life-giving force. In rituals – such as weddings – green fabrics or decorations are used to attract blessings and prosperity for the newly formed family.

Both Russians and Karakalpaks share common symbolic meanings for green: it represents life, fertility, and hope for well-being. However, the contexts in which green is used differ. In Russian tradition, green is more often connected to natural cycles and Christian holidays like Trinity Sunday (Troitsa). Among the Karakalpaks, green carries a more explicit religious significance rooted in Islamic symbolism.

Blue holds a special place in the rituals of both Russians and Karakalpaks, symbolizing spirituality, harmony, and protection. Its meaning varies according to the cultural and religious traditions of these peoples.

As a Turkic people with Islamic traditions, the Karakalpaks attribute meanings of spirituality and well-being to blue. The colors blue, light blue, turquoise, and sometimes green are collectively known by the term *kók* (meaning blue). In Islam, blue is associated with the sky and the divine realm, although green is usually regarded as the holier color. Blue can symbolize harmony and connection to higher powers, which is why mosque domes are often painted light blue.

In modern times, Karakalpaks commonly associate blue with mourning and wear blue clothing during funerals—a custom observed historically as well. Nevertheless, contrary to this association of blue with mourning, young women traditionally wore distinct blue dresses made of handcrafted fabric, richly embroidered with multicolored patterns – these dresses are known as *kok-kóylek* (blue dress) or *kesteli kóylek*. These dresses were worn on special occasions, often when a girl was getting married. Mourning attire consisted of plain blue dresses without ornamentation.

Blue was also used in amulets and jewelry as a protective talisman against the evil eye and misfortune. Among the Karakalpaks, as with other Islamic cultures, the "Fatima's eye" (*nazar*) is a popular blue amulet believed to ward off the evil eye.

A curious ritual for treating whooping cough (locally called *kok jotel*) involved stopping a rider on a blue horse, wearing a blue headdress (*shogirme*), and asking for a remedy. The rider would randomly instruct the patient to eat or do something, and after following this, the patient supposedly recovered.

In Russian culture, blue is associated with the sky, spirituality, and purity, reflected in rituals and folk traditions. In Orthodox Christianity, blue is often linked with the Virgin Mary, symbolizing her purity and heavenly nature. It appears in church vestments and iconography.

Black and blue colors are frequently mentioned in funeral and mourning clothing. Men wore blue coats (*zhupan*), women

wore blue skirts (*plakhta* or *sinyatka*), and women in mourning covered their heads with black or blue scarves.

In wedding traditions, blue elements in clothing or embroidery could symbolize the bride's fidelity and purity – for example, blue ribbons woven into wreaths or belts.

In agricultural rituals related to sowing, blue fabrics or items were sometimes used to invoke favorable weather, associated with clear skies.

Thus, in the rituals of both Russians and Karakalpaks, blue unites ideas of spirituality and protection, though its specific applications reflect the religious and cultural contexts unique to each tradition.

The lexeme *ala* (meaning variegated, striped, or multicolored) in ethnography refers to the use of bright, diverse, or multicolored elements in clothing, ornamentation, and rituals, reflecting cultural particularities and symbolism.

Among Russians and Karakalpaks, multicolored palettes have unique manifestations connected to tradition, aesthetics, and practical life.

In Russian ethnography, multicolored hues are associated with festivity, wealth, and the expression of vital energy. Traditional Russian folk costumes such as sarafans and shirts were embroidered using red, blue, yellow, and green threads. The richness of colors achieved by combining these shades in patterns highlighted craftsmanship and beauty. For example, embroidery in northern regions could include five to six colors. During festivals like Maslenitsa or Trinity, multicolored decorations – ribbons, wreaths, fabrics – symbolized joy and renewal. The multicolor pattern expressed abundance and harmony, and often served as a protective charm.

Among the Karakalpaks, multicolored motifs relate to their nomadic past and Islamic traditions. Women's costumes, including the *saukele* headdress, were embroidered with red, blue, green, and yellow threads. The vibrant colors underscored status and beauty but were combined into strict geometric patterns.

In wedding ceremonies, multicolored fabrics decorated yurts and clothing, symbolizing joy and prosperity. The diversity of

colors in ornaments such as carpets (*tekemet*) had an apotropaic function—to repel evil. Multicolored threads were also tied around wrists and various household items, livestock, and vehicles to protect against the evil eye.

In the traditional ceremony *tysau kesu*, which means "cutting the fetters," when a child begins to walk, their legs are symbolically "freed from fetters" so that they can move freely. In this ritual, a respected person chosen to perform it ties the child's legs with a colorful rope. Then, with good wishes, they cut the rope [17, 11].

In both cultures, multicolored patterns are associated with festivity and positive emotions, and are used in life cycle rituals. For Russians, the use of color is more expressive, with an emphasis on decorativeness. For Karakalpaks, it is more structured and often carries a protective meaning.

Analysis of color lexemes and ritual terms in Karakalpak and Russian cultures revealed their role as markers of social, sacred, and aesthetic values. To generalize and compare the universal and ethno-specific features of color symbolism, the research results are presented below in the form of a table reflecting the connotations of key colors.

Table 1. *Connotations of color lexemes in Karakalpak and Russian rituals*

Kyzyl/Red	Fertility, protection, youth, beauty	Life, beauty, protection, energy
Aq/White	Mourning, wisdom, purity, fertility	Mourning, purity, innocence, grief
Qara/Black	Mourning, death, expulsion of evil spirits	Mourning, darkness, protection from evil spirits
Kók/Blue	Mourning, spirituality, protection (evil eye)	Spirituality, purity, loyalty, mourning
Sary/Yellow	Wealth, joy, prosperity	Life, sun, joy, wealth
Jasyl/Green	Fertility, life, Islamic sacredness	Fertility, life, renewal, Trinity
Ala/Motley, striped	Festivity, protection, well-being	Festivity, abundance, amulet

The diagram illustrates the percentage distribution of flowers in wedding, funeral, agrarian, and magical rituals of Karakalpaks and Russians, based on the analysis of the lexical corpus and ethnographic data.

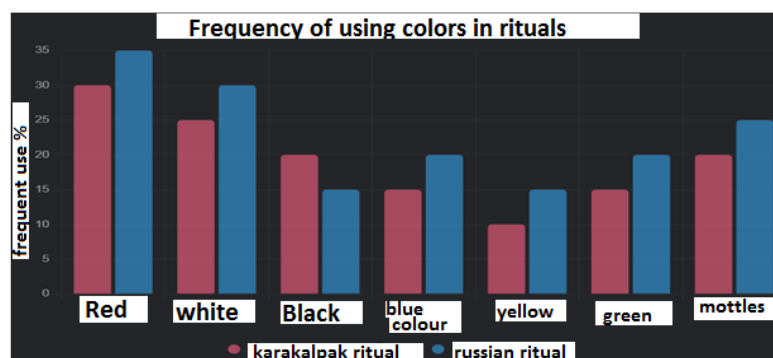


Diagram 1. *Frequency of using colors in rituals*

The conducted research revealed the linguocultural specificity of color concepts in the linguistic worldview of the Karakalpak and Russian peoples. Color lexemes (*kyzyl, aq, qara, kók, sary*; "red", "white", "black", "green", "blue") and ritual terms (*kyzyl kiymeshek, kara asy, kók kóylek*) act as cultural codes verbalizing the concepts of "protection", "mourning", "youth", "fertility", etc. Universal features such as the apotropaic function of *kyzyl*/"red" or the mourning semantics of "aq"/"white" reflect archetypal representations, while ethnospecific features (exclusion of *kyzyl* from Karakalpak funeral rites, mourning role of *kók*) emphasize cultural uniqueness [5].

## CONCLUSION

Analysis revealed that color lexemes structure social and sacred values, shaping the linguistic identity of ethnic groups. Globalization, manifested in the borrowing of white wedding dresses, complements traditional meanings by creating new cultural layers. The research contributes to linguoculturology by revealing the linguistic mechanisms of cultural dialogue. The

prospects include studying color vocabulary in other Turkic languages and comparing it with Russian-language phraseologisms to deepen understanding of intercultural interactions.

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