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SYNESTHETIC METAPHORS IN THE KYRGYZ EPIC "MANAS": TYPES AND CULTURAL SEMANTICS

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СИНЕСТЕТИЧЕСКИЕ МЕТАФОРЫ В КИРГИЗСКОМ ЭПОСЕ «МАНАС»: ТИПОЛОГИЯ И КУЛЬТУРНАЯ СЕМАНТИКА

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Abstract. This study examines synesthetic metaphors in the Kyrgyz epic "Manas" as a culturally conditioned poetic phenomenon. Through analysis of 247 synesthetic constructions identified in canonical variants by Sagymbai Orozbekov and Sayakbai Karalaev, the research reveals four primary types of synesthesia: visual-auditory (the most frequent), tactile-visual, visual-gustatory, and metaphors based on natural phenomena. The study demonstrates that synesthetic metaphors in the epic perform multiple functions including imaginative, emotional, cultural, and aesthetic roles, while encoding specific cultural values of the Kyrgyz nomadic worldview. Color symbolism (blue/kok associated with divinity and eternity, white/ak with purity and blessing, red/kyzyl with vitality and energy) forms a systematic code for expressing abstract concepts through concrete sensory experiences. Precious metals (gold and silver indicating social status and sacred power) and natural elements (thunder symbolizing divine force, wind representing freedom, water embodying life-giving power) constitute the conceptual foundation of epic synesthesia. The analysis reveals that these metaphorical constructions are deeply rooted in Kyrgyz cultural codes and reflect the nomadic lifestyle, spiritual connection with nature, and traditional value system. The predominance of visual-auditory synesthesia is explained by the performative nature of the oral epic tradition, where manaschi (epic storytellers) transform auditory narrative into vivid visual imagery. This research contributes to Manas Studies by providing the first systematic typology and cultural-semantic analysis of synesthetic constructions, filling a significant gap in existing scholarship on the epic's poetic devices.

Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено анализу синестетических метафор в кыргызском эпосе «Манас» как культурно обусловленного поэтического феномена. В результате анализа канонических вариантов эпоса, записанных Сагымбаем Орозбаковым и Саякбаем Каралаевым, было выявлено 247 синестетических конструкций, которые были классифицированы на четыре основных типа: зрительно-слуховые (наиболее частотные), тактильно-зрительные, зрительно-вкусовые и метафоры, основанные на природных явлениях. Исследование показывает, что синестетические метафоры в эпосе выполняют множественные функции — образную, эмоциональную, культурную и эстетическую, одновременно кодируя специфические культурные ценности кыргызского кочевого мировоззрения. Цветовая символика (көк/синий, ассоциирующийся с божественностью и вечностью, ак/белый с чистотой и благословением, кызыл/красный с жизненной силой и энергией) формирует систематический код для выражения абстрактных концепций через конкретные чувственные переживания. Образы драгоценных металлов (золото и серебро, указывающие на социальный статус и сакральную силу) и природных стихий (гром,

символизирующий божественную силу, ветер, представляющий свободу, вода, воплощающая жизнедающую силу) составляют концептуальную основу эпической синестезии. Анализ выявляет, что эти метафорические конструкции глубоко укоренены в кыргызских культурных кодах и отражают кочевой образ жизни, духовную связь с природой и традиционную систему ценностей. Преобладание зрительно-слуховой синестезии объясняется перформативной природой устной эпической традиции, где манасчи (сказители эпоса) трансформируют слуховое повествование в яркие зрительные образы. Данное исследование вносит вклад в культурологию и манасоведение, предоставляя первую систематическую типологию и культурно-семантический анализ синестетических конструкций, заполняя значительный пробел в существующих научных работах о поэтических средствах эпоса.

Keywords: synesthetic metaphors, Manas epic, Kyrgyz literature, cultural semantics, oral tradition, sensory modalities, nomadic worldview, typology

Ключевые слова: синестетические метафоры, эпос Манас, кыргызская литература, культурная семантика, устная традиция, сенсорные модальности, кочевое мировоззрение, типология

The epic “Manas” is an important monument of oral folk art of the Kyrgyz people and one of the largest epic works in the world literature. The epic is included in the UNESCO list of masterpieces of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of mankind, and is also listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest epic in the world. The artistic richness of the epic is largely determined by the developed system of visual and expressive means, among which synesthetic metaphors occupy a special place. The Kyrgyz epic Manas differs from other epics in its rich musical tonality, diverse color rhymes, and strong emotional content, which creates a unique imaginative system of the work.

Synesthesia comes from the Greek word *syneisthesis*, which means joint feeling. It is a literary device based on combining various sensory perceptions in one image: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory [1]. Although synesthesia is found in ancient literary works, including The Iliad and The Odyssey, it became especially popular in the 19th century thanks to the works of poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. In a poetic text, synesthetic metaphors create a multidimensional image and enhance its emotional impact on the listener or reader [2].

In the Kyrgyz epic, synesthetic constructions reflect the peculiarities of national artistic thinking, man’s connection with nature, and the specifics of a nomadic lifestyle. They are an integral part of the idiosyncrasy of the Manaschi (epic storytellers) and form a unique imaginative system of the work. The manuscript of the epic “Manas” as narrated by the narrator Sagymbai Orozbekov, created from 1922 to 1926, and was the first specially planned and organized event to record the epic, which was traditionally transmitted exclusively orally [1].

The problem of translating synesthetic metaphors into English is becoming particularly relevant in the context of the globalization of cultural space and the need for an adequate representation of Kyrgyz culture in the international arena. The epic Manas has been translated into 20 languages, which attests to its international significance. English translations of the epic, made in different periods by different translators, demonstrate different approaches to the transfer of the original’s image system. Particular difficulty of the translation is the fact that the epic contains numerous old terms, stable expressions, proverbs and names of objects that are difficult to translate into English, as well as comparisons and metaphors that require a deep understanding of Kyrgyz

culture. Synesthetic metaphors, being culturally conditioned, pose a special challenge for translators who seek to preserve both the artistic value and the cultural authenticity of the original.

It is necessary to add that Manas Studies (Kyrgyz. Manas taanuu) is a specialized field of research within the framework of Kyrgyz studies, which focuses on the scientific study of the Kyrgyz epic "Manas", which emphasizes the scientific importance of a comprehensive study of various aspects of the epic, including the specifics of its translation into foreign languages.

The aim of the study is to identify some features of synesthetic metaphors in the epic "Manas" and to identify strategies for their translation into English. For the present work we have decided to analyze the semantic structure of synesthetic constructions and their cultural conditioning, to assess the degree of preservation of imagery and cultural specificity in English translations.

The study of the epic "Manas" has a long and rich tradition. Scientific research of the epic began in the 19th century with the works of Russian Orientalists, including V. Radlov and C. C. Valikhanov, who were the first to record and publish fragments of the epic [3]. The fundamental research of V. M. Zhirmunsky (1960) laid the foundation for a comparative study of the Turkic epic and determined the place of "Manas" in the world epic tradition. The works of S. M. Abramzon (1971) are devoted to the ethnographic context of the epic and its role in preserving the cultural identity of the Kyrgyz people [1].

Among the group of storytellers, Sagymbai Orozbekov was considered the best and was recognized as a classic. His version of the epic is still considered the most complete and artistically valuable. In addition to him, the version of Sayakbai Karalaev, recorded in the middle of the 20th century and which has become canonical in modern Manas studies, which is of particular importance.

In Kyrgyz philology, a significant contribution to the study of the poetics of the epic was made by the works of R. Sarypbekov (1961), K. Rakhmatullin (1982), who studied the artistic features of the epic, and Sh. Japarova (2003), who analyzed the linguistic specifics of heroic epics. Modern research continues the tradition of a comprehensive study of the epic as a living oral tradition [4].

The problems of translating the epic "Manas" into various languages have been considered in a number of works. Analyze the general problems of epic translation and strategies for preserving national color. Studied the peculiarities of the transmission of folklore formulas and stable expressions. More recent studies, including work on the cultural aspects of epic translation, emphasize the importance of preserving culturally specific elements in translation. However, there are practically no special studies devoted specifically to synesthetic metaphors and their translation into English in the scientific literature, which determines the novelty of this study [10].

In the general theory of literature, synesthesia is studied as an important stylistic device. S. Ulman's classic work "The Principles of Semantics" (1957) laid the foundations for the semantic analysis of synesthetic constructions. S. Day (1996) investigated synesthesia as a cognitive phenomenon and its expression in language and literature. In Russian linguistics, synesthetic constructions were analyzed by L. I. Grishaeva (2008) and E. A. Ogneva, who considered synesthesia as a way of representing perception in a literary text [10].

In the theory of translation, the problems of transferring figurative means were considered in the works of V. N. Komissarov (1990), who developed a classification of translation transformations, and L. K. Latyshev (2000), who proposed a technology for translating figurative constructions. L. Venuti (1995) discussed the problem of the "invisibility of the translator" and strategies of domestication and forenization, which are especially relevant when translating culturally specific metaphors [5-9].

An analysis of the scientific literature shows that, despite extensive research on the epic "Manas" and theoretical developments in the field of synesthesia and translation studies, there are still no works that would comprehensively investigate synesthetic metaphors in the epic "Manas" and systematically analyze strategies for their translation into English. This study aims to fill this gap by combining the methodology of synesthesia analysis with the practice of literary translation based on one of the greatest epic works of world literature. A set of the following methods was used in the work: descriptive method — for systematization and classification of synesthetic metaphors in the epic text; the comparative method - to analyze the original and translations, to identify translation transformations; component analysis — to study the semantic structure of synesthetic constructions; the method of translation transformations — to determine the strategies of synesthesia transmission [11].

As a result of the analysis of the epic, 247 synesthetic constructions were identified, which were classified according to the type of interaction of sensory modalities.

I. The most frequent type of synesthesia in the epic connects visual and auditory images:

"Kumush undu kylygy" (literally "silver-voiced nature") — Sayakbay Karalaev's variant of the "Manas" epic. Here the voice is characterized as "like silver" – indicating its clarity, purity, and value. "Altyn dobush" (golden sound/voice) — Sagymbay Orozbekov's "Semetey" epic (Book 2, p. 340). In Kyrgyz culture, gold is a symbol of wealth, power, and sacredness. "Golden voice" is not just a good voice; it's a voice possessing sacred power. "Kok un" (blue/heavenly voice) — Sayakbay Karalaev's variant of "Manas" (Book 3, p. 89). In Kyrgyz worldview, "көк" (blue) is associated with the sky, Tengri (heaven), and sacred forces. Therefore, "көк үн" is translated into English as "heavenly voice" or "celestial voice." "Kyzyl zhuz" (Red Face) — The epic "Semetey", Sayakbai Karalaev (Book 2, p. 678). "Кызыл жүзү кызарып, Кызуу кандуу жигит бул, Кыйынчылыкты көрбөптүр." ("Kyzyl zhuzu kyzaryp, Kyzuu kanduu zhygit bul, Kyynchylykty korboptur."), "His red face flushed, This is a hot-blooded young man, Who has not seen hardship." Here, we see cultural interpretation that "Kyzyl zhuz" is a sign of health, energy in contrast "tatygan zhuz" (pale face) – illness, weakness. The ideal of an epic hero: ruddy, red face. "Ak Sakal akylы" — The epic "Manas", Sayakbai Karalaev (Book 2, p. 567). (Ak Sakal akylы kop), literally: "White-beard wisdom is much". "Ak sakal" is a cultural code (dear elder). The simple translation of "white beard" loses its cultural meaning. "Elder's wisdom" loses its imagery. Here, "White-beard wisdom" is the image of elder's wisdom. In these examples, visual characteristics (the color of precious metals, the color of the sky, experience and face) are transferred to sound phenomena, creating images of high value, health, energy, wisdom and beauty of the voice [9].

II. Tactile-visual synesthesia uses tactile sensations to describe visual images. "Zhylу zhuz" (warm face) — Sayakbay Karalaev's variant of "Manas" (Book 1, p. 234) "Жылуу жүзү жайнап турат, / His warm face is beaming, Жыпар жыттуу сөзү бар." / He has fragrant words. "Warm face" refers not to physical warmth but to emotional warmth — kindness, friendliness. "Suuk koz" (cold look) — "Semetey" epic (Sayakbay Karalaev variant, p. 567). "Суук көзү жаш төкпөйт, / His cold eyes shed no tears, Суук жүзү күлбөйт." / His cold face doesn't smile. In Kyrgyz culture, the word "суук" (cold) signifies bad attitude, ruthlessness. "Cold eyes" describe the gaze of a cruel, harsh person. "Zhumshak nur" (soft light) — "Manas" epic (Sagymbay Orozbekov variant, p. 445). "Жумшак нур чачылат, / Soft light spreads, Жумшак жел желбирейт." / A gentle wind blows. Physical vs. Metaphorical: Light cannot physically be "soft," but this metaphor indicates the light's intensity (soft = not strong) and its pleasant effect. III. Visual-Gustatory Synesthesia uses taste sensations to describe visual images. "Таттуу көрүнүш" (Sweet appearance) — "Manas" epic (Sayakbay Karalaev, Book 1, p. 678): "Таттуу түрү бар экен, / He has a sweet appearance, Тартынчаак кыялы бар." / He has a modest demeanor. In Kyrgyz, the word "таттуу" (sweet)

extends from physical taste (sweet tea) to general pleasantness: sweet person, sweet words, sweet appearance. "Ачуу жүз" (Bitter face) — "Semetey" epic (Sayakbay Karalaev, Book 2, p. 890): "Ачуу жүзү карангы, / His bitter face is dark, Ачуу козу жаш төккөн." / His bitter eyes shed tears. "Ачуу" (bitter) in Kyrgyz culture signifies anger, sorrow, suffering. "Bitter face" — the face of a sorrowful, suffering person.

IV. Natural phenomena: Thunder — force, power, authority. "Күн чагылган үн" (A voice reflecting thunder) — The epic "Manas", Sayakbai Karalaev (Book 1, p. 789). "Күн чагылган үнү бар, Күркүрөгөн добушу, Күчтүүлөрдү чочутат." ("Kun chagylgan unu bar, Kurkurogon dobushu, Kuchtuulordu chochutat.") "He has a voice like thunder, His rumbling sound, It frightens the strong ones." It means connection with nomadic lifestyle: thunder is the loudest natural phenomenon in the steppe; association with the heavenly Force (Tengri), the metaphor of power and might. "Шамал үн" (Голос ветра) — Semetei epic (Sagymbai Orozbekov, p. 234). "Шамал үнү желбиреп, Шам себеп чыккан сөз, Шарттуу кабар келиптир", "The wind-like voice blowing, Words emerging like a breeze, An important message has come", in the meaning that: ind is a constant companion of the nomad, freedom, movement, change, lightness, elusiveness. "Суу үнү" (Water Voice) — The epic "Manas" by Sayakbai Karalaev (Book 2, p. 456). "Суу үнү агып турат, Суу сыяктуу жумшак, Сүйлөгөндө тынчтандырат." ("Suu unu agyp turat, Suu syyaktuu zhumshak, Suilogondo tynchtandyrat."), "His water-like voice flows, Soft like water, It calms when he speaks." Here, we understand the nomadic concept of water, that water is the greatest value in the steppe, life-giving power. Water means — fluidity, softness, life [12].

Table 1

TYPOLOGY OF SYNESTHETIC METAPHORS

Type of Synesthesia	Kyrgyz Example	Literal Translation	Cultural Meaning	Frequency	Source
Visual-Auditory	Кумуш үндү кылыгы (Kumush undu kylygy)	Silver-voiced nature	Clarity, purity, high value of voice	112 (45.3%)	S. Karalaev, Book 1, p. 125
	Алтын добуш (Altyn dobush)	Golden sound/voice	Sacred power, high social status		S. Orozbekov, Book 2, p. 340
	Көк үн (Kok un)	Blue/heavenly voice	Divine connection, association with Tengri		S. Karalaev, Book 3, p. 89
Tactile-Visual	Жылуу жүз (Zhylu zhuz)	Warm face	Emotional warmth, kindness, friendliness	68 (27.5%)	S. Karalaev, Book 1, p. 234
	Суук көз (Suuk koz)	Cold eyes/look	Cruelty, ruthlessness, harsh character		S. Karalaev, p. 567
	Жумшак нур (Zhumshak nur)	Soft light	Pleasant, gentle, not intense light		S. Orozbekov, p. 445
Visual-Gustatory	Таттуу көрүнүш (Tattuu korunush)	Sweet appearance	Pleasant, attractive person	43 (17.4%)	S. Karalaev, Book 1, p. 678
	Ачуу жүз (Achu zhuz)	Bitter face	Sorrow, suffering, grief		S. Karalaev, Book 2, p. 890
Natural Phenomena	Күн чагылган үн (Kun chagylgan un)	Voice like thunder	Divine power, might, authority	24 (9.8%)	S. Karalaev, Book 1, p. 789
	Шамал үн (Shamal un)	Wind voice	Freedom, movement, lightness		S. Orozbekov, p. 234
	Суу үн (Suu un)	Water voice	Life-giving force, calmness, fluidity		S. Karalaev, Book 2, p. 456
Total				247	

The analysis showed that many synesthetic metaphors in the epics carry culturally specific information:

1. Color symbolism: "Kok" (blue/heavenly) in Kyrgyz culture is associated with eternity, divinity, nobility; "Ak" (white) — purity, holiness, blessing; "Kyzyl" (red) — vitality, energy, beauty.

2. Materials: The gold and silver in the description of the voice reflect not only the beauty of the sound, but also the social status and value of the person.

3. Natural phenomena: Synesthesia is often based on images of nature (thunder, wind, water), which is associated with the nomadic lifestyle of the Kyrgyz [13].

Table 2

CULTURAL SEMANTICS OF COLOR SYMBOLISM IN SYNESTHETIC METAPHORS

<i>Color (Kyrgyz)</i>	<i>Primary Associations</i>	<i>Secondary Meanings</i>	<i>Cultural Context</i>	<i>Examples in Epic</i>
Көк (Kok)	Sky, heaven, Tengri	Divinity, eternity, nobility, sacredness	Associated with Tengri (supreme deity), eternal blue sky of steppe	Көк үн (heavenly voice) - divine connection
Ак (Ak)	White, pure	Purity, holiness, blessing, goodness	Symbol of positive qualities, cleanliness, spiritual purity	Ак сакал акылы (white-beard wisdom) - elder's wisdom
Кызыл (Kyzyl)	Red, ruddy	Vitality, energy, beauty, health	Ideal of heroic appearance, life force, blood, passion	Кызыл жүз (red face) - sign of health and energy
Алтын (Altyn)	Golden	Wealth, power, sacredness, high value	Precious metal indicating social status and divine qualities	Алтын добуш (golden voice) - voice of sacred power
Кумуш (Kumush)	Silver	Clarity, purity, value, beauty	Precious metal, clarity of sound and spirit	Кумуш үн (silver voice) - pure, clear voice
Караңгы (Karangy)	Dark	Sadness, evil, misfortune	Negative associations, absence of light/joy	Used in descriptions of sorrow

From the given tables we can state that synesthetic metaphors in the epic "Manas" perform several important functions:

1. Imaginative function: creating vivid, multidimensional images of characters and events.
2. Emotional function: enhancing emotional impact on the audience.
3. Cultural function: preservation and transmission of national worldview, value system.
4. Aesthetic function: creating the poetic beauty of the text.

The predominance of visual-auditory synesthesia is explained by the peculiarities of the oral performance of the epics: Manaschi should not only tell, but also show events, making them "visible" to listeners through sound as given in the following table [14]:

Table 3

FUNCTIONS OF SYNESTHETIC METAPHORS IN THE "MANAS" EPIC

<i>Function</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Impact on Audience</i>
Imaginative	Creating vivid, multidimensional images of characters and events	Combining different sensory modalities to make abstract qualities tangible and "visible"	"Silver voice" makes sound quality visually imaginable; "warm face" makes emotional state tactilely perceptible	Enhances mental visualization during oral performance; makes narrative more memorable

<i>Function</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Impact on Audience</i>
Emotional	Strengthening emotional impact on the listener/reader	Engaging multiple senses simultaneously creates deeper psychological resonance	"Bitter face" evokes both visual image and taste sensation of suffering; "cold eyes" combines visual and tactile unpleasantness	Increases emotional engagement; creates empathy with characters; intensifies dramatic moments
Cultural	Preserving and transmitting national worldview and value system	Encoding cultural codes (color symbolism, nature associations, nomadic values) in poetic language	"Blue voice" transmits belief in Tengri; "golden sound" reflects social hierarchy; water/wind metaphors encode nomadic experience	Maintains cultural continuity across generations; educates audience in traditional values; reinforces collective identity
Aesthetic	Creating poetic beauty and artistic sophistication	Using unexpected sensory combinations; rhythm and sound patterns; rich imagery	The entire system of synesthetic metaphors contributes to the epic's recognition as masterpiece of oral literature	Elevates epic to high art; demonstrates sophistication of Kyrgyz poetic tradition; provides aesthetic pleasure

Synesthetic metaphors of the epic "Manas" represent a unique cultural and linguistic phenomenon that requires an attentive and sensitive approach to translation. The preservation of these figurative constructions in English-language versions of the epic is important not only for conveying the artistic value of the work, but also for representing Kyrgyz culture in the international arena. The successful translation of synesthetic metaphors promotes intercultural dialogue and allows English-speaking readers to come closer to understanding the unique worldview of the Kyrgyz people, captured in the great epic [14].

This comprehensive analysis of synesthetic metaphors in the Kyrgyz epic Manas uncovers the deep interconnection between linguistic expression, cultural worldview, and artistic tradition. The identification and classification of 247 synaesthetic constructions show that these literary devices are fundamental components of the epic's poetic system, deeply rooted in the nomadic culture and spiritual values of the Kyrgyz people [15].

The study created a systematic typology that distinguishes four different types based on the interaction of sensory modalities. The prevalence of visual-auditory synesthesia (45.3%) reflects the unique performative nature of the epic tradition, in which manaschi must transform auditory narration into vivid visual images. The analysed synaesthetic constructions — from the "silver voice of nature" and "golden sound" to the "warm face" and "lovely appearance" — encode complex cultural meanings that go far beyond literal interpretation [16].

The analysis highlights the deep cultural conditioning of these metaphors. Colour symbolism (kok/blue, representing divinity; ak/white, symbolising purity; kyzyl/red, signifying vitality) functions as a systematic code for expressing abstract spiritual and social concepts. Metaphors based on precious metals and natural phenomena (thunder, wind, water) reflect both the material culture of the nomadic lifestyle and the spiritual connection with nature that characterises the traditional worldview of the Kyrgyz people [17].

Functional analysis shows that synaesthetic metaphors perform several interrelated roles: figurative (creating vivid, multidimensional images), emotional (enhancing psychological impact), cultural (preserving and transmitting traditional values) and aesthetic (contributing to poetic perfection). These functions underscore their important role in transforming Manas into a recognised masterpiece of world oral literature [18].

This study makes a significant contribution to the study of Manas by providing the first systematic typology and cultural-semantic analysis of synesthetic metaphors, filling a gap in existing research. The methodology developed here can be applied to other oral epic traditions, facilitating comparative studies of how different cultures encode sensory experience and worldview in poetic language [19].

Future research directions include a comparative analysis of different variants recorded by different manaschi, a study of how these metaphors function in oral performance compared to written text, and diachronic studies tracing their evolution over time. The question of translating synaesthetic metaphors into other languages arises as an important practical and theoretical problem, suggesting the need for specialised methodologies that preserve both artistic value and cultural authenticity [20].

By highlighting the complex system of synaesthetic metaphors that contribute to its artistic power, this study confirms the epic's place in world literature and deepens our understanding of how oral traditions encode cultural knowledge and aesthetic values. The synaesthetic metaphors of Manas are a testament to the sophistication of Kyrgyz poetic art and the richness of the cultural worldview they express.

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