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## **COLOR SYMBOLISM IN KENRICK LAMAR'S**

### ***GOOD KID, M.A.A.D. CITY***

Symbol is a sign, shape, or object that is used to represent something else [2]. Symbols are not always obvious and may be implemented via various stylistic means and devices – metaphors, parallelisms, similes etc., understanding of which may be a challenge for those unfamiliar with the means and devices, or those who carry a cultural background different from the one that is necessary to clearly perceive a symbol in its specific context. Despite a relative complexity of symbols, people still manage to successfully decode them in everyday life as many symbols have become markers that make routine safer and more convenient (such as traffic signs or laundry symbols).

Color is often used as a symbol – a certain mean of expressing an emotion or mood, which may be quite understandable for most people even across different cultures [6]. Color symbolism is most commonly seen in visual arts and fashion. However, it is not only a mean of expression visually, but verbally as well: different colors are used in idioms (*white lie, black sheep, green with envy* etc.), or in prose and poetry for a stylistic effect. Depending on the context color implications may give an additional meaning to a saying amplifying and/or fully transforming the effect of an utterance.

With the rap genre's rise in popularity, a great significance of its content has become clearer as the genre holds the fourth place in the IFPI's list of the most popular genres of 2019 being most popular within younger age groups [3]. Kendrick Lamar is a prominent figure within rap genre, whose debut album *good kid, m.A.A.d city* was released in 2012. Color symbolism may be considered one of the key elements of Lamar's lyrical expression, and some of the examples from the *good kid, m.A.A.d city* clearly demonstrate it.

In the second track on the album *Bitch Don't Kill My Vibe* Kendrick raps «*How can I paint this picture / When the color blind is hangin' with you?*» [4, p. 2]. This example does not provide an exact color as a symbol, but generally highlights the importance of color. Being color-blind means being unable to distinguish certain colors, or any colors at all (which is seeing in black and white); to paint a picture – explain the situation, describe one's thoughts or emotions. Here Lamar implies that it is impossible to explain oneself without experiencing an emotion as such explanation would be weak and bleak, that's why color (an emotion) is of great importance, and being color-blind (unable to feel an emotion) makes it too complicated to communicate an emotion to others [1].

In the song *The Art of Peer Pressure* we may notice a similar usage of color as a general notion, but even though the colors are not specified, it is clear which particular ones Lamar had on his mind: «*Before we sparked a conversation / We seen three niggas in colors we didn't like / Then started interrogatin'*» [4, p. 4]. Here «*colors we didn't like*» are either red or blue as the events of storyline in *good kid, m.A.A.d city* take place in Compton, California – the native city of Kendrick Lamar, where two big gangs are most active – Bloods and Crips [5]. The two gangs are rivals, and their members among other things dress according to a specific code wearing red (Bloods) or blue (Crips) clothes [5]. Seeing *colors they didn't like* means seeing people from a rival gang (distinguished by a color of their clothes) which may grow into a conflict.

This exact symbolism is also may be seen in the track *m.A.A.d city*: «*When you hop on that trolley, make sure your color's correct / Make sure you're corporate or they'll be callin' your mother collect*» [4, p. 8]. So here *color's correct* means to be aware of which color one should wear, and *to be corporate* works as an analogy to corporate culture of big companies which often have a specific detail to their employees' uniforms: branded t-shirts, hats of a certain color, scarves etc.; so because of the fact that gang members wear the same color, it may be said this is their *corporate* style. *They'll be callin' your mother collect* – this phrase implies that if one doesn't follow the rule of wearing colors, it may result in their death, and in such case their mother would receive a call from the police.

A rivalry between Bloods and Crips gangs and the opposition between colors of red and blue are of great significance within Kendrick Lamar's works as these two colors or references to them occur numerous times throughout author's discography and *good kid, m.A.A.d city* album in particular. These colors are mentioned in the song *good kid*: «*But what am I 'posed to do when the topic is red or blue*» [4, p. 7], where once again these two colors represent the two gangs. The line also implies a struggle of a young person to stay out of the gang affiliation, and the hardships of being under pressure to pick a side of a conflict: red or blue.

While representing gangs red and blue colors also symbolize the colors of police car flashers, which are also of red and blue colors, and altogether with the topic of gang environment Kendrick adds here the topic of police brutality and racism. In the second verse of the song *good kid* we can hear: «*But what am I 'posed to do when the blinkin' of red and blue / Flash from the top of your roof and your dog has to say woof / And you ask: «Lift up your shirt,» because you wonder if a tattoo / Of affiliation can make it a pleasure to put me through / Gang files, but that don't matter because the matter is racial profile*» [4, p. 7], so here *blinkin' of red and blue* denotes a police car, while *a tattoo of affiliation* and *racial profile* represent police's biased opinion towards young black males.

In *Dying of Thirst* Lamar raps: «*The same song, a black flower / I'll show you how to / Dye your thirst, dye your thirst, dye your thirst*» [4, p. 10]. In these lines we may see a wordplay based on the homophones *die*, which is repeated throughout the song as well as used in the title, and *dye* which references the phrase *black flower*. As we know black flowers don't exist in nature as this color doesn't attract pollinating insects [7], so one of several ways to get a black flower is to dye it black. Of course, *black flower* may also symbolize a person of African descent, and in such case *dyeing their thirst* is a metaphor, where *thirst* may be a figurative thirst for freedom and/or social justice, which means coping with a struggle on one's own – if something wasn't given to one, they have to go and get it themselves.

In conclusion, looking at these examples we may clearly see that Kendrick Lamar purposefully uses color symbolism in order to create images in his lyrics. These implications also create an additional meaning of an utterance and help to amplify its effect. Lamar uses red and blue colors numerous times throughout the *good kid, m.A.A.d city* album. Commonly

these color implications carry a deep meaning and reference the criminal sphere of life in the US, and the city of Compton, California, in particular; also these implications are a part of a greater conceptual metaphor, which lies in the general idea of Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city*.

### References:

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## **ТЕХНОЛОГІЯ «СКРАЙБІНГ» ЯК ІННОВАЦІЯ НАВЧАННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ІНОЗЕМНІЙ МОВИ**

Сучасні студенти, народжені в еру новітніх технологій, дивляться на світ зовсім іншими очима. Їхнє сприйняття світу – не послідовне, і не текстове. Вони бачать картинку в цілому і сприймають інформацію за принципом відеокліпу. Тому сучасна освіта все більш тяжіє до використання візуалізації інформації. Інтерес викладача все більш прикутий до візуального мислення, пояснюється зростанням