



The Pragmatics of Color in Antara's Poetry

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Abstract

Perhaps rarely is there any piece of Pre-Islamic Arabic literature where color features more strongly and less naturally than in Antara's poetry. Therefore, the intended message of color in Antara's poetry is adequately understood inasmuch as the pragmatic implicatures of color are worked out. Evidence in literature explicitly attributes Antara's extraordinary concern with color to the dramatic impact of his dark complexion, which is, in turn, closely reflected in his careful choice of the lexical elements and black poetic images and metaphors throughout his poetic works. However, none of the previous attempts, devoted to analyzing his poetry, has pointed to the possibility of the involvement of pragmatics, pretext or abstract context in the interpretation of color. That is, color has been always interpreted literally in all the previous studies devoted to exploring Antara's poetry. This article argues that much of the message of color in Antara's works goes beyond the natural or literal meaning, and thus, much of the color story has not been revealed yet. To this end, an attempt is made here to reveal the color subtext via a psycho-pragmatic construct. Results reveal that Antara skillfully and purposely uses color in an attempt to: (i) alleviate the negative connotations clung to *blackness* via associating it with all that of precious values, immortality, elegance, eternity and strength and (ii) belittle the prevailing social values associated with *whiteness* by using it in contexts where blackness outweighs whiteness.

Keywords: Color; Pragmatics; Intention; Non-literal Meaning; Pretext; Thematic Inferencing

1. Introduction

Antara (A.D. 525-615), a pre-Islamic black poet and hero, was the son of the chieftain of the Bani Abs tribe, 'Shaddad' and an Abyssinian slave maid, 'Zabaibah'. In spite of the superiority of his father's race and status, it was the habit of the society, Antara was part of, to enslave the children of slave women. Thus, due to his dark complexion, Antara was enslaved and socially neglected until he was freed due to his chivalry deeds on the occasion of a fatal encounter with a powerful enemy tribe. In spite of the outstanding reputation and great social status he gained after the battle, color discrimination remained the most influential factor impacting Antara's psyche and works till his death.

Research on Antara's poetry has shown that Antara is deeply impacted by his dark complexion. Such impact, according to the previous literature, is closely reflected in his careful choice of the black-colored and black-skinned objects (Abu Sweilim, 1987; Shafagoj, 1999; Mawlawi, 1983; Badawi, 1988, among others). The frequent use of the black color throughout Antara's poetry was obviously the very reason behind researchers' profound belief in Antara's blackness complex and their exclusive reliance on literal meaning and textual information rather than thematic inferencing or pragmatics in the interpretation of color throughout his poetry. By relying heavily on *textual information*, it becomes pretty obvious that researchers have tackled only the superficial layer of color rather than the intended meaning.

Louwers and Van Peer (2002) clarify that interpretation should include, among other things, *thematic inferencing*, which, they argue, lies in "the crossroads of various processes (linguistic, mental, cultural, literary), so that the study of theme must be carried out at the interface of several disciplines: linguistics, psychology, (art) history, literary studies" (p. 2). A close look at research devoted to Antara's poetry shows that previous researchers not only ignored thematic inferencing but also marginalized Grice's (1989) notion concerning the centrality of expressions and recognition of intentions in human communication. No doubt, recognition of intention requires the involvement of psychology and contextual features that contribute to the recovery of the intended meaning which is almost calculable. Considerable evidence in previous research on black Arab poets (i.e. Badawi, 1988) has pointed to the importance of the psycho-literary approach as a way to explore the real intention and underlying themes. Graesser et al. (2002: 21) illustrates the claim that themes are encoded by writers and decoded by readers is in agreement with psychological theories of comprehension:

Themes are intentionally constructed by writers and by comprehenders in a system of communication. The writer intentionally writes the text to convey the theme (consciously or unconsciously) to a target audience (or a family of audiences). Most readers intentionally attempt to recover the writer's intended meaning. The claim that themes are intentionally composed by authors and recovered by readers is perfectly compatible with contemporary psychological theories of comprehension (Clark, 1996; Gibbs, 1999; Graesser, Mills and Zwaan, 1997).

In spite of the full endorsement of this study to the previous views concerning the close connection between psychology and literature (e.g. Fergusson, 1961; Elms, 2000, to name just two), it still purports that color in Antara's poems goes far beyond the literal sense. Hence a full analysis of such poems needs to take into account both psychological as well as pragmatic modules concurrently. It would be, therefore, more convenient to approach Antara's poems from a psycho-pragmatic perspective rather than a literary or even a psycho-literary perspective.

Dahlgren (2005:1081) contends that pragmatics "offers a powerful tool when analyzing poetry, due to the fact that it accounts for elements that are not present 'on the face' of the utterance, but have to be inferred." The ongoing controversy over the notion of meaning has strongly emphasized the gap between the linguistic meaning of the message and the sender's intention of how that message should be interpreted (Hofmann, 1997, Gibbs, 1999, to name but two). Jordan (1992:200) (cited in Crompton, 1998) argues that "... we cannot possibly know what was in the writer's mind ... we must instead analyze what she [any writer] did write." What this view suggests is the need to rely on the semantic interpretation of texts. A counter view, however, asserts the importance of the *non-natural meaning*; meaning based on the sender's intention. For Hofmann (1997), there are usually gaps between the literal meaning of words and the sender's intention. For him, whenever language is used, there is a speaker and his intent, and the ultimate intent is often hidden behind the literal meaning or between the lines of what is mentioned. Meaning, according to this view, is context- and intention-dependent. A typical example of the second view is found in Antara's poetry as shown below. It is worth mentioning in this context that inferential pragmatics is not always constraint-free. Rather, inferring the speaker's meaning must be based on evidence. This is, of course, relevant to the contextual implication, where the meaning is determined from the input and the context simultaneously (Widdoson, 2004).

An important improvement on the notion of meaning expressed above was developed by Gibbs (1999:110-111), who distinguishes between three major theoretical views of language understanding.

- (i) The *independence view* asserts that the literal or direct meaning of a sentence is arrived at by various computational processes which do not extend to supplying referential and real-world knowledge.
- (ii) The *constructivist view* states that elaborate mental edifices are built up for the situation a sentence describes including contextual and real-world information. This view acknowledges the constraining influence of real-world knowledge in the interpretation of context-sensitive meaning.
- (iii) The *intentional view*, which lies between the other views, sees comprehension as a process by which people arrive at the interpretation a speaker/author *intended* them to grasp for that utterance in that context. Unlike the independence view, the intentional view requires listeners/readers to draw inferences that go well beyond the literal or direct meaning of a sentence.

Like literary analysis, literary criticism and theory also strongly endorse the intentional view. Pilkington (2000: 65) argues that:

The issue of interpretation has played a significant role in literary criticism and theory. The notion of intentional fallacy in new criticism was critical of appeals to an author's explicitly stated intentions in order to clarify the meanings expressed in her works.

As for Van Dijk (1981), some types of poetry texts are more difficult to understand than most other literary narratives. He asserts that the theory of literature should consist of, in addition to a theory of literary text and a theory of context, a theory that relates the former to the latter.

By establishing a close link between *text*, *context* and *thematic inferencing*, this study argues that Antara's use of black poetic images with such remarkable degree of frequency can never be classified under unconscious artifices or under blackness complex as other researchers contend (Abu Sweilim, 1987; Shafagoj, 1999; Mawlawi, 1983; Badawi, 1988, among others). Rather, the verses used in this study to exemplify this phenomenon constitute concrete evidence in support of Antara's determinant attempt to alleviate the inferior social connotations clung to blackness, via associating it with all that of precious values. Antara, who is primarily addressing his own flesh, and who, in turn, knows his dark complexion, tries to go against the dominant social stereotypes of color by linking together blackness to preciousness. What further proves the pragmatic use of color in Antara's poetry is his attempt to belittle the prevailing social values associated with whiteness by using it in situations where blackness outweighs them. However, the themes of color in Antara's poetry are clearly interrelated; discussing any of them will necessarily bring others by implication. This, therefore, interprets the concurrent concern about blackness and whiteness in all the following subsections.

2. Themes of Blackness

Before launching into the details of the pragmatics of the black color, it might be worth reiterating that a great deal of confusion in the interpretation of Antara's poetry often occurs as a result of the heavy reliance of researchers on the plain or literal meaning of the lexical elements and poetic images. Obviously, the failure to account for the meant aim, which is more often not inferred by the receiver, confounds researchers and makes much of the earlier accounts of color themes in Antara's poetry pretty implausible.

Pilkington (2000: 14) argues that the precise message in verbal communication “can only be determined by bringing non-linguistic contextual information to bear upon some linguistically decoded semantic representation.” At all accounts, deriving meaning from the context, as pointed out by Fukkink (2005: 26), begins with clues: “The actual process of deriving word meaning from context starts with a search for clues. Three sources may be involved in this process, namely internal clues in the word, external clues in the context and personal knowledge from long-term memory...” The terms raised here are best dealt with in conjunction with Sperber and Wilson's (1995: 15-16) Relevance Theory:

The set of premises used in interpreting an utterance (apart from the premise that the utterance in question has been produced) constitutes what is generally known as the *context*. A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumption about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation.

Among the profound consequences that accrue from the application of Sperber and Willson's theory of relevance are that expressions and intentions become essential features for the apprehension of the text and the subtext simultaneously. No doubt, these two ends are essential to understand Antara's poetry, which is in effect a psychological self-analysis of a person suffering from persistent color and racial discrimination. While there is a consensus among researchers on the deep influence of Antara's skin tone on his poetry, the situation is completely altered when it comes to how color is manifested in his poetry and for what purposes. Two contradictory views dominate the previous relevant literature concerning this issue. The first view argues that Antara unconsciously associates himself with black images because he and those images have something in common. The second view, on the other hand, clearly states that Antara avoids mentioning his dark complexion via unconscious artifices such as projection and repression (Shafagoj, 1999). Drawing on the following implicit and explicit themes of color, this paper argues that neither of these views sounds plausible.

2.1 Preciousness and Strength

A simple comparison between the previous literature devoted to Antara's poetry and the present attempt may serve to bring out by contrast the role of the pretext or abstract context in the process of interpretation. It would be also rather obvious from the excerpts ahead that the poet insists to bring blackness up in all contexts where whiteness rather than blackness is confidently expected. Antara's tactics to alleviate the negative connotations clung to blackness might be clearly seen through his deliberate attempt to deprive whiteness from all its inherent social privileges. His choice of the *black horse*, *black camels*, *three dark-spotted stones* and *Musk* paves the road to evidence-based arguments and analyses. Mainly, the choice of blackness implies superiority and proudness rather than inferiority or dishonoring as it has long been believed and held as an undeniable truth.

2.1.1 The Black Horse

Over the centuries, the Arabian horse has remained the Bedouin's closest companion in peace and war and also the chief partner and witness of victories and defeats. This, therefore, explains the superior status of the horse in all Bedouin societies. Since the choice of the *horse* is of extreme importance for Bedouins, then, one is compelled to bring a question up: what makes *the black horse* exceptional for Antara as explicitly stated in numerous poems, including the “The Suspended Ode” and “The End of Honor” poem.

(1)

She spends her evenings and mornings rested on a cushioned couch/
Whilst I spend my nights mounted on a bridled *black* stallion”

(Sharf Addin, 1997: 58)

(2)

My horse was intensely *black* upon entering the war
But, when the war ceased, the horse's coat was dyed with blood and remains from the aftermath”

(Sharf Addin, 1997: 213-14)

Though it is not explicitly spelled out, Antara's strategic choice of the *black horse* throughout his poetic works requires appropriate recognition of the abstract context, including the social beliefs and standards, the mental state of the speaker, the anecdotal memories and knowledge of speaker-hearer backgrounds. For Pilkington (2000), sharing contextual assumptions is not enough. Rather, successful communication requires pre-existence of mutual knowledge.

For communication to be failsafe and code-like, it has been argued, it is not enough for A and B to share contextual assumptions. A has to know that B knows that p; A has to know that B knows

that A knows that p; A has to know that B knows that A knows that B knows that p; and so on ad infinitum. (p. 61).

Over the centuries, the Arabian *black* stallion has remained the best, strongest and most favorable type in all Bedouin societies (Ibin Mandour, 1990). Support and justification for the superiority of the black horse in Arabic societies, literature and traditions can be also observed in Glob (1989). Whatever the contextual clues happen to be, it is still to be concluded that the poet implicitly intends, via the social conventions of the *black horse*, to remind his sweetheart and the people of his own flesh that *blackness* is the source of preciousness. In this sense, mutual knowledge between the poet and the receivers is a prerequisite for the success of communication. However, the meaning is entirely altered when one relies on the physical context since contextual considerations are deprived from all the essential roles that they normally have. This depicts *blackness* as implying a coded message that can be adequately understood inasmuch as the abstract context is involved. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the mutual knowledge between the sender and the receiver as an integral element in the interpretation process (Levinson, 1983).

As such, it hardly seems adequate to attribute Antara's choice of the black horse in the above excerpts to one or even more of the artifices or explanations raised above. The basic factor motivating Antara's preference of the *black camel* over all other kinds of camels as shown ahead is no different from his preference and choice of the *black horse*.

2.1.2 The Black Camels

Another situation, in which more information is communicated than is said, is clearly seen in the following sets of verses, which provide a concrete example in support of Antara's persistent concern with the correlation between blackness and preciousness. *Camels*, which occupy an exceptional status in all Arabian nomadic societies, are also *black* as be explicitly stated in the "Suspended Ode".

(3)

Nothing caused me fear of her departure,
 Except that the baggage camels of her tribe were eating the seeds of the Khimkhim
 Amongst them were forty two milk-giving camels,
Black as the wing-feathers of *black* crows
 (Sharf Addin, 1997: 54-55)

Perhaps the easiest way to comprehend the message expressed is to question the classes of camels in Bedouins societies in that era. Antara's choice of the *black camels* has social bases since this very type is the most precious, expensive and unique in all Bedouin societies (Al-Qurashi, 1986). In contrast to the previous interpretations of the use of black images, the above verses provide concrete evidence that the presence of *blackness* here is attributed neither to repression nor to inferiority. On the contrary, the poet implicitly aims to draw his people's attention to the superiority, scarcity and valuability of blackness.

As we look back at some of the lexical items frequently used in Pre-Islamic societies to refer to slaves or black, we are likely to understand that Antara's choice of (black) *crows* in second verse above is also not accidental. On the contrary, the poet deliberately compares black camels, the most valuable type in Bedouin societies, with the *crow*, the very name that Pre-Islamic Bedouins preferred to use when addressing or talking about slaves (Lewis, 1985). In spite of its numerous negative social connotations in all Arab societies, the *crow* was and still is used in Arabic proverbs to express both youth and strength: "his hair is as black as the wing-feathers of the crow." So, the crow is used strategically here to emphasize the blackness of the camels, which, in turn, is an implicit sign of their preciousness and strength.

The examples cited in these two subsections allow a strict separation between literal and non-literal meaning. That is, the intentional meaning of blackness (the black horse, the black camels and the crows) cannot be understood perfectly unless the broader (social and physical) context and mutual knowledge are tackled concurrently.

2.2 Eternity

The belief in the non-literal use of color and the integral relationship between blackness and preciousness in Antara's poetry remains the most efficient way of working out his hidden intentions. Undoubtedly, Antara resorted to this tactic so as to defend his unmatched heroic traits in a society that believes neither in black nor in their deeds. In the opening stanza of the *suspended ode*, Antara, following the steps of the poets of that era, stops by the ruins of his sweetheart (Abla) to convey his grief to them. Nevertheless, Antara finds out that all traces of the ex-place of his sweetheart had been already vanished by the time he arrived the very place, except for the three dark-spotted stones, which are standing *firm* in their place.

(4)

Have the poets left in the garment a place for a patch to be patched by me;
 And did you know the abode of your beloved after reflection
 The vestige of the house, which did not speak, confounded thee,

Until it spoke by means of signs, like one deaf and dumb.
 Verily, I kept my she-camel there long grumbling,
 With a yearning at the blackened stones, keeping and *standing firm* in their own places
 (Sharf Addin, 1997: 52)

However, despite all the evidence for reading these verses literally, there are several clues that call for a non-literal reading of these verses. On the literal level, Antara is complaining to the dark-spotted stones since these are the only remaining ruins of the ex-place of his sweetheart. But beneath the surface, these verses present another notable theme of blackness in the wealth of Antara's poetry, viz., eternity. Here, we observe the difficulty that Antara has encountered while looking for the ex-place of his sweetheart; he knew the place after an exhausting process of mediation and rumination. The question arises here is on what basis all the ruins of the ex-place of his sweetheart had already vanished except for the three *dark-spotted stones*, which are still standing *firm* in their place. In an attempt to provide an answer to this question, Shafagoj (1999) argues that Antara complains to the dark-spotted stones simply because he and the three stones have something in common viz., the black color. Yet, even if such an interpretation is a possibility, there is an ample warrant to conclude that Antara implicitly conveys that he complains to the dark-spotted stones since these are the only remains of the ex-place of his sweetheart. Explicitly, the dark-spotted stones are still standing firm in their position after the disappearance of all other ruins for no reason other than being black. So, *eternity* for him is restricted to *blackness*.

2.3 Uniqueness & Elegance

Although the overwhelming majority of color meanings in Antara's poetic works is conveyed indirectly and often understood by means of sociolinguistic competence and mutual knowledge between the sender and the receiver, there are few instances where Antara states the message explicitly rather than implicitly. The following verses show that the poet compares his dark complexion with the best and most valuable perfume in the Arab Peninsula in that time period, with the joint of blackness.

(5)
 Indeed if I am black, then
 Musk is the color of my skin
 And the darkness of my skin has no cure
 (Sharf Addin, 1997: 218)

Though it has not been difficult to sense the pragmatics of color in the previous sections, these verses have stated the real message that Antara intends to convey via the black objects explicitly. Put differently, the inferred messages of color match the clear message stated here. The verses also mirror what is going on inside Antara's mind, who attempts to impose the superiority of blackness in a blatant racial society. No doubt, the explicitly stated message of color in these verses gives credibility to the pragmatic use of color in Antara's poetry.

Thus far in this section, the scope of the discussion has been restricted to blackness. However, the picture becomes pretty clear if the polar opposite is brought into light. Thus being so, the coming subsections will extend the scope of discussion to incorporate whiteness.

3. Themes of Whiteness

Whiteness in Pre-Islamic Arab societies, as the literature shows, occupies an unmatched status when compared with all other colors due to the superior social status of whiteness vis-à-vis that of blackness and the sacredness of this color in the Arab Peninsula as it symbolizes purity, kindness and faith. For these two reasons, the white color has been always used as a symbol of nobility, generosity, courage, purity and wisdom. Blackness, on the other hand, has been often associated with misfortune, war and slavery. However, the following excerpts indicate that Antara's use of color is deviant from the norm operative in the society in that we see blackness closely associated with all that are highly esteemed whereas whiteness is connected with hypocrisy, cowardliness, war and death.

To get another sense of how Antara employs color for personal purposes, this section continues with an in-depth analysis of the pragmatics of color so as to explore the pragmatics of whiteness. Accordingly, the objectives of this section are parallel to those of the previous one: what the poet is about to say when he uses a white poetic image or metaphor. It is still possible, in this section, to demonstrate that there are perceptible differences between the pragmatics of blackness and that of whiteness. As was the case in the blackness themes, white color themes require thematic inferences based on the abstract context, and thus, they might take a bit of thought to understand. As it shortly turns out, it is quite plausible, depending on the clues, to assume that the poet is extremely cautious and a bit indirect in his attempts to belittle whiteness, particularly in a white-dominant society.

3.1 Hypocrisy

What emerges clearly from Antara's concern with color is not only his attempt to alleviate the negative conventions clung to *blackness*, but rather his deliberate attempt to belittle *whiteness* whenever possible as well. However, any

account of the meaning of whiteness must incorporate the linguistic cues, intention, mutual knowledge and abstract context. Generally, the contrast between the underlying meaning of *blackness* and that of *whiteness* makes it clear that color has been rarely used in its literal sense throughout Antara's poetry. The following images depict the interior conflict between Antara and his people as being essentially a conflict between blackness and whiteness. The primary grounds for this conclusion stem from the different contextual and pragmatic associations of each color. The following verses illustrate this.

(6)

Descending from my noble steed with the intention of killing the man,
He gazed at me and his face twisted into a wicked smirk revealing poorly white teeth
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 64)

A close look at these verses illustrates that (teeth) *whiteness* in this example, which is no more than a sign of hypocrisy, operates as a polar opposite to *blackness*, which always stands for everything of a great value. That is, the fake smile of the white man here is a deceptive sign aiming to ease the horrible fate he is facing. In this sense, Antara closely ties together whiteness with deception. In the context of hypocrisy portrayed from the above-mentioned set of verses, it is worth mentioning that Antara tackles this topic (hypocrisy of the white people) explicitly in another poem.

(7)

In times of peace they [the white] refer to me Oh *Ibin Zabebah* [son of a black slave]
When I am needed most in times of war they refer to me as nothing less Oh Son of Nobles
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 252)

Extracting the message of these verses conveys an undoubted help to gain a better insight on the preceding verses. Here as well as there, the poet refers to his white people as hypocrites since they acknowledge his superior race (of his father's side) only in the difficult times.

3.2 Cowardliness

While there is, to a great extent, no inherent link between lexical choices and their meanings, it remains true that the speaker and his intention, as shown earlier, radically affect the social conventions of the word meaning. An explicit and straightforward example of belittling whiteness comes from the following verses.

(8)

It is no wonder if you see that I got skinny
Whoever is the target of lances must get so
Perhaps a *white* man like your fat husband
Huge on the back of the horse
I left his imputed limbs rolled in the dust
And people were either wounded or lying down on the earth
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 79-80)

It appears that none of these verses is surprising since they reassert the poet's two predispositions toward color, associating blacking with everything of great value and minimizing the value of whiteness. Though the comparison is exclusively built on *weight* (skinny vs. huge) rather than on *color*, Antara insists on bringing *whiteness* up just to associate it with cowardliness, one of the worst traits of men in that society. These verses again mirror Antara's deliberate attempt to lessen the value of whiteness.

3.3 Weakness

Mutual knowledge between senders and receivers is necessary to get the sender's precise message or intention, but sometimes the intended message requires no such knowledge. The average reader probably finds it less problematic understanding the precise message in the following verses.

(9)

My hair has grayed and become white
After being intensely black
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 181)

Instead of repeating exactly the same word, Antara sometimes employs another tactic whereby two words of similar meanings are used. It is noticeable from these verses that though lexical repetition is not used here, both *grey* and *white*

are linked in the same way as repeated words. There is no need for *white* since its meaning is entailed by the *grey* color which is always white.

On the basis of the above poetic images, it is a bit straightforward to figure out that the poet successfully ties *whiteness* with another important theme, namely, *weakness*. This conclusion is helpful to understand the reasons underlying the use of the intensifier in the second verse *intensely black*. That is, the poet ties *blackness* with *strength* and *youth* and *whiteness* with *aging* and *weakness*.

3.4 Immorality

Besides hypocrisy, cowardliness and weakness, Antara uses color creatively to denude the white people of the simplest morals and to demonstrate the superiority of blackness as shown below.

(10)

Indeed if I am black, then
Musk is the color of my skin
And the darkness of my skin has no cure
But adultery is far away from me
As far as the earth is away from the sky
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 218)

The haunting idea of racial and color discrimination makes Antara determinant to associate blackness with good morals and whiteness with immorality and sins. It is rather uncontroversial that pretext must be widely involved here to uncover the hidden message concerning the immoral deeds of his white people. In support of this claim, Sharf Addin (1997) illustrates that the ultimate goal of Antara in these verses is not only to free himself from sins, but also to attribute all bad and immoral deeds to the white people of his tribe. Antara tackles a similar point in another poem. He says:

(11)

They [the white people] curse my dark complexion
But their evil disposition is darker than my skin
(Sharf Addin, 1997: 254-55)

3.5 Mortality and Suffering

Antara's failure to get involved in the white dominant society via his chivalry deeds encouraged him to find another alternative. Perhaps, the best potential alternative available to him was to marry a white woman of superior class. However, in spite of his love to his cousin Abla which is frequently and explicitly expressed throughout his poetic works, we find no single piece of evidence in support of Abla's love to Antara. So, Antara succeeded to integrate in the society neither by his chivalry deeds, nor by his attempt to love and marry an upper-class white woman. This is why we see a close tie between his sweetheart Abla and the swords of enemies with the joint of both *whiteness* and *hostility*. Demonstration of this struggle is quite obvious in the following scene where Antara is completely surrounded by the white tools of death.

(12)

And surely I recollected you, even when the lances were drinking my blood,
And bright swords of Indian make were dripping with my blood.
I wished to kiss the swords, for verily they shone as bright as the *flash of the foretooth of your smiling mouth*
(Sharf Addin, 1997:86)

It seems very undoubtful that the outer surface in these verses reflects a strong and faithful lover, who remembers his sweetheart even at the peak time of the battle; however, the white scene – which is clearly interwoven with blood and wounds – pragmatically signifies both death and suffering. Antara uses this image to express two opposing attitudes towards whiteness. On the one hand, he is describing the nice look of his sweetheart's smiling face. The second attitude, on the other hand, involves a close association between whiteness and the tools of death. This, therefore, explains Antara's wish to kiss the swords that are dripping with his own blood. This bizarre scene pushes the following question to the fore: why does Antara insist on bringing the *whiteness* of the enemies' swords up in this scene when *redness* rather than *whiteness* is worthier and confidently expected in this context, particularly when enemies' swords are dripping of his blood? Antara's love of Abla was merely an attempt to fulfill his social involvement in the white dominant society; he successfully did this through his chivalry traits, but this success was restricted to the war times. Support for this conclusion apparently comes from another poem where he explicitly states that he does not love white women:

(13)

I adore the tall ebony women

However, others adore the white graceful ones

(Sharf Addin, 1997: 222)

It is contextually understood from the above and following portrayed scenes, that the whiteness of the enemies' swords is not worse than the white complexion of his sweetheart and people since both of them have fatally wounded him; the white swords have wounded him physically as stated above while the racial and color discrimination practiced by his people against him and his dark complexion has deeply wounded his soul. The following verses provide a concrete piece of evidence in support of this conclusion.

(14)

And verily the speech of the horsemen,

"Woe to you, 'Antara, advance, and attack the enemy,"

Cured my soul and removed its sickness.

(Sharf Addin, 1997:68)

Thus, the brightness of these swords reminds him with not only the whiteness of his sweetheart, but also with the suffering and social denial incurred by such color.

4. Conclusion

This paper has taken a psycho-pragmatic approach to Antara's use of color. It is evident from the examples cited above that Antara challenged and was perfectly able to shake at the root the long and well-established social stereotypes concerning color. For the purposes posited above, a variety of examples have been examined thoroughly to figure out the underlying themes of both blackness and whiteness depending on the clues and the abstract contexts.

The most notable result is that the poet was able to alleviate the negative connotations clung to blackness by associating it with all natural items that are considered socially precious. Additionally, the poet deliberately belittled the prevailing social values associated with *whiteness* by using it in contexts where blackness outweighs whiteness. Again, the poet succeeded to attract receivers' attention to the fact that judging things based on their appearance is often misleading.

Note: The English translation of some verses of Antara's Suspended Ode cited in this study has been retrieved (on June 29, 2013) from: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/index.htm>

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