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	TITLE OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE  Spiritual language and symbolic expression in Sufi Poetry: semantic transfiguration and the limits of linguistic representation
Manel Berrefas	Dr. Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of Germanic and Russian Languages, University Mohamed Ben Ahmed – Oran2, Oran Algeria E-mail: berrefas.manel@univ-oran2.dz ORCID: 0000-0002-5184-3302
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Keywords	Sufi language; mystical poetry; symbolic expression; ineffability; Rumi; Ibn al-Fāriḍ; shathiyyāt; sign semantics; divine love; Islamic mysticism; semiotic displacement; samāʿ.
Abstract This study examines the role of spiritual language in Sufi poetry as a medium of unveiling rather than representation. It situates mystical poetics within the broader epistemological problem of expressing the ineffable, where language ceases to function merely as a communicative instrument and instead becomes an experiential, revelatory act. The research interrogates how Sufi poets—such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Hallāj, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī—transcend the limitations of rational discourse through a symbolic and emotionally charged lexicon that mirrors the mystic’s inner illumination. Through a hermeneutic and semiotic approach, the paper explores the rhetorical, auditory, and performative devices that enable spiritual articulation: symbolism, metaphor, polysemy, silence, musicality, and repetition. These tools convert poetry into an existential path toward divine union and gnosis. The analysis also contextualizes Sufi language within auditory rituals such as samāʿ, emphasizing the relationship between verbal expression and spiritual hearing. The article concludes that Sufi discourse constitutes an ontological event rather than a linguistic message; its meaning unfolds through dhawq (spiritual taste) and kashf (unveiling) rather than logical interpretation. Consequently, the mystical text functions as a participatory act inviting the reader to transcend cognition through presence, emotion, and symbol.	
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Introduction

Since its inception, Islamic mysticism has formed a deep intellectual and spiritual phenomenon, which has transcended the narrow boundaries of religious practice to turn into a holistic vision of existence and the

relationship between man and his creator. Through their spiritual journey, the Mystics sought to express transcendent inner experiences that the mind or sense could not fully perceive. In this context, language occupied a dual problematic position: on the one hand, it is the only instrument of expression, and on the other hand, by its limited nature, it is incapable of containing mystical experience in its entirety. Hence, the need arose to build a new language that goes beyond the usual declarative dimension, opens up space for symbol and sign, hinting not declarative, tasting not literal understanding.

This study deals with the spiritual language in Sufi poetry, not as a purely linguistic subject, but as a window into the deep structure of mystical experience. It is an attempt to understand how Sufi poets were able to adapt and reshape language to become capable of Revelation, transmission, spiritual transformation, by activating its symbolic, figurative, musical energies.

1- Language as a detection tool, not a transfer

The mysticism's perception of language differs from the ordinary vision, which considers it a means of exchanging information or transmitting facts. The mystical language originates from a deep emotional state, derives its legitimacy not from logic or grammar, but from taste and experience. So we find that the Sufi does not speak words, but pronounces the situation, and writes not to understand, but to taste.[7.P8]

Because language, by its mental nature, cannot simulate a spiritual witnessing experience, the Mystics resorted to language techniques that are out of the ordinary: the use of ambiguity, repetition, displacement, symbolization, silence, and even flatness. In this context, language becomes a spiritual practice in itself, not just a tool. A word like "wine" is only a sign of divine love that intoxicates the heart, and a verse like the saying of Ibn al-fared: "we drank on the memory of the beloved "Madama", we got drunk on it before the generosity was created " is not a ghazal poetry, but an introspection of a state of gastronomic manifestation that exceeds sensory perception. [3.P183]

2- Symbolism and interpretation in Sufi discourse

The use of symbols in Sufi poetry was not only an aesthetic tendency, but a cognitive necessity imposed by the nature of the experience experienced by the knower of God. Direct language could not bear the weight of experience or convey its depth, so the vocabulary of everyday life was reused and recharged with new meanings. The wine is no longer a drink, but a symbol of Transfiguration; the beloved is not a human being, but an image of the divine self; absence does not mean separation, but Annihilation in the presence.

This shift in the semantic function of a word is what is known as «displacement», in which words are transferred from their apparent physical meaning to a mystical indicative meaning. The most prominent practitioner of this style is Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose poems combine the language of the spectrum, travel, flute, fire, and music to form a symbolic universe with an integrated spiritual structure. In his famous verse: "the sound of this flute is fire, not air, let those who do not carry this fire be eliminated from existence, " the flute here carries several connotations, including nostalgia, alienation, divine blowing, and mystical love, so that the meaning cannot be exhausted in one reading. [1.P. 10]

3- Flatness and silence – the boundaries of language and its transgression

When the knower reaches the point of annihilation in the beloved, the boundaries between the self and the subject, between the speaker and the audible, between language and meaning, disappear. At this moment, the language becomes insufficient to carry the experience, and the knower is forced to "flat", or to be silent.

The flatness, in this context, is the linguistic outburst outside the familiar discourse, where the mystic says what is not said, expressed in words that seem to the ordinary listener disbelief or madness, but carry deep symbolic meanings. One of the most famous slashes is the Halaj's saying: "I am right". He did not mean to equate himself with God, but to annihilate himself in God to the extent that he no longer sees himself only as a mirror reflecting the truth. [2.P33]

In contrast to flatness, silence comes as the highest expression of experience. "The wider the vision, the narrower the phrase," Al-Bustami said. Accordingly, the mystical language is built on a paradox: the closer to the truth, the more it needs to be symbolized or silenced.

4- The structure of mystical poetry-music and found

Sufi poetry has a special character that goes beyond meaning to rhythm. Music, in this poetry, is not a decoration but a part of spiritual experience. Poetic weight, intonation, repetition, are used as means of stimulation to the male, meditation, Transfiguration. Poems are also often recited as part of spiritual rituals, such as hearing, and become a means of transit to found situations.

Mantras, weights, and the repetition of God's names or attributes are all tools that operate within the Sufi poetic text to produce internal energy. Rumi spoke about this in his *Diwan Al-muthnawi*, where the poem is mixed with dance, the text with moans, and the words with tears. In this sense, Sufi poetry becomes a laboratory of spiritual taste, a poetic experience that is not read but lived, in which the reader turns into a Salik, and the poem into a Maqam.

5- receiving mystical poetry – from the apparent to the secret

Sufi language is not available to every reader; it requires a special kind of reception, based on faith, purification, esoteric preparation. Sufis distinguish between two levels of reception: the layman reads the text outwardly, the conductor picks up the signal, and the communicator, perceives the secret.[5 .P. 45]

And in this context, reading poetry is not limited to linguistic meaning, it includes the movement of the hand in the manuscript, the distribution of blanks, silent writing and even the manner of recitation. For example, a manuscript such as "Al-tawasin" by Al-Hallaj is not read with the eye of a textual researcher, but with the eye of a knowledgeable person who contemplates spaces as words.

Sufi nooks play an important role in creating a climate of reception, through collective rituals, collective silence, chanting, they are all tools for understanding poetry outside the mind, and within the scope of taste and conscience.

Conclusion

In Sufi poetry, language is an expression, not an intention, and a shadow of truth, not its truth. The Sufis have adapted the language to suit their spiritual needs, making it a tongue for the subconscious, a pulse for the situation, and an instrument of disclosure rather than description. Their goal was not so much to convey meaning as to seek to open the door of taste in the hearts of the recipients.

Ultimately, the Sufi language remains a transcendental spiritual experience, understandable only to those who have walked the path, tasted the Maqam, and prepared with insight. In this way, it represents an invitation to transcend the commonplace in both thinking and language, and to walk towards a Horizon wider than the word: the horizon of tranquility, adoration, and Transfiguration.

As someone said: "he who has not tasted, does not perceive, and he who has not walked, does not open the door to understanding for him " [4 .P125].

Since its inception, Islamic mysticism has developed as a profound intellectual and spiritual system transcending the confines of jurisprudence and theology. Its poets and thinkers sought not only to interpret the world but to transform the human relationship with the Divine. The linguistic expression of this transformation, however, faced a paradox: the Divine Reality resists conceptual articulation. Thus, Sufi authors refashioned language to evoke, rather than to describe, the ecstatic state of proximity to God.

This article explores the epistemological and aesthetic dimensions of such transformation. By examining Sufi poetry as both linguistic innovation and spiritual exercise, it argues that the mystical word becomes an extension of the spiritual path itself—a "language of the heart" that dissolves the boundary between expression and experience.

2. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative hermeneutic-semiotic methodology. Primary sources include canonical Sufi poets—particularly Rumi, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, al-Ḥallāj, and Attar—whose works are analyzed through interpretive reading in the original Arabic and Persian where relevant.

The methodological framework integrates:

- Phenomenological interpretation (based on Husserl and Corbin) to identify the structures of mystical consciousness expressed through language.
- Semiotic analysis (drawing from Barthes and Eco) to examine displacement, metaphor, and symbolic transfiguration.
- Hermeneutics of spiritual reception, emphasizing how the listener/reader participates in meaning-creation through spiritual taste (dhawq).

Textual examples were selected according to thematic recurrence (wine, beloved, annihilation, fire, flute, and silence) that illustrate the shift from literal to transcendental meaning. Comparative insights are drawn from European mystic poets such as Meister Eckhart and Angelus Silesius to underscore cross-spiritual universality in expressing ineffability.

3. Ethical Considerations

All textual materials used are drawn from public domain or academic editions of classical Sufi literature. The research maintains cultural and theological sensitivity toward Islamic traditions and ensures faithful citation of original Arabic and Persian sources. Interpretations avoid sectarian bias and are guided by scholarly standards of respect for religious texts and communities.

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6. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. The content of this article represents the author's independent scholarly position.

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