

CULTURAL SYMBOLISM OF COLORS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK IDIOMS: A KEY TO INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the cultural symbolism of color idioms in English and Uzbek as a means of understanding how languages encode shared and culture-specific values. Idioms with color components mirror collective psychology, national mentality, and cultural perception. Through a comparative linguocultural analysis of selected idioms, the research identifies the semantic, pragmatic, and conceptual functions of color terms. The findings reveal both universal and distinctive symbolic associations that reflect differences in worldview and historical experience. Understanding such idioms contributes to deeper intercultural awareness and effective cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

Color idioms; cultural symbolism; intercultural communication; linguocultural analysis; connotation; comparative linguistics; English idioms; Uzbek idioms; cultural identity; pragmatic meaning; cross-cultural understanding; semantic features; national mentality; language and culture; color perception.

Introduction: Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a fundamental reflection of cultural consciousness. Every linguistic unit embodies the historical experience, worldview, and emotional perception of the people who use it. Among the various linguistic phenomena, idioms occupy a special place as they convey meanings that extend beyond literal interpretation and serve as expressions of cultural memory and collective mentality. Within this category, idioms containing color components are particularly significant because colors are among the most universal and symbolically rich elements of human cognition. The symbolic use of colors in idiomatic expressions reflects the way societies categorize and interpret reality. Colors often represent moral values, emotional states, and social attitudes that are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and historical development. Therefore, studying color idioms provides valuable insight into how linguistic and cultural systems interact to form unique conceptual structures within each language community. English and Uzbek, belonging to

distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds, offer an interesting field for comparative analysis. Both languages use color symbolism to encode a wide range of cultural meanings, yet they differ in their historical, religious, and social associations. Understanding these symbolic variations contributes to broader intercultural competence and helps to prevent miscommunication that may arise from cultural and linguistic differences.

Methods

1. *Research Design.* The research employs a comparative linguoculturological and semantic-pragmatic methodology. This qualitative study focuses on identifying and interpreting cultural meanings embedded in color idioms rather than statistical frequency. The comparative approach allows for the examination of how similar color terms convey different symbolic associations in English and Uzbek.

2. *Data Collection.* A corpus of 100 idioms (50 English and 50 Uzbek) was compiled from various sources: Monolingual and bilingual idiom dictionaries (e.g., Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, O'zbek tili frazeologik lug'ati).

English and Uzbek literary works, folklore, and media texts.

Online corpora and databases for contextual examples.

Color components included: white, black, blue, red, green, yellow, gray, brown, silver, and gold – all of which frequently occur in idiomatic structures.

3. *Analytical Framework.* Each idiom was analyzed based on the following criteria:

1. Literal meaning – the direct sense of the color term.
2. Figurative (idiomatic) meaning – how the idiom is used metaphorically.
3. Cultural symbolism – traditional or historical associations of the color.
4. Pragmatic function – how the idiom operates in communication to express emotion, attitude, or social evaluation.
5. Intercultural comparison – similarities and contrasts between English and Uzbek idioms.

The analysis also used semantic field theory and conceptual metaphor theory to explain how color meanings are structured cognitively and culturally.

4. *Procedure.* Each idiom was placed within its cultural context. For example, the English idiom black sheep (“a family disgrace”) was compared with the Uzbek qora qo'y (“an outsider”), showing partial equivalence but differing emotional tones. The idioms were grouped by color to facilitate cross-cultural comparison. The analysis aimed to discover cultural motivations behind idiomatic meanings, drawing conclusions about cultural worldviews and social values.

Results: The findings reveal both universal and culture-specific symbolic uses of colors in idiomatic language.

1. White (Purity and Moral Goodness)

In both English and Uzbek, “white” conveys positive moral and emotional meanings.

English: white lie (a harmless lie), white knight (a savior or hero).

Uzbek: oq niyat (pure intention), oq yo‘l (good luck), oq yuzli (honest and respected).

In English, “white” often implies innocence or harmlessness; in Uzbek, it represents moral integrity, sincerity, and social respect.

2. Black (Negativity, Misfortune, and Strength)

In English, black idioms mostly carry negative meanings – black mood, blackmail, black day. In Uzbek, while qora also can imply misfortune (qora kun), it occasionally denotes endurance or hard work, e.g., qora mehnat (“honest physical labor”). Thus, while English associates black primarily with darkness and evil, Uzbek also attributes it to humility and diligence.

3. **Blue** (Sadness vs. Spiritual Elevation). English idioms like feeling blue and out of the blue show emotional or unexpected aspects of life. In contrast, Uzbek idioms involving ko‘k (sky/blue) – ko‘kka ko‘tarilmoq (“to be praised highly”) or ko‘k yuz (“sky-blue face,” meaning embarrassed) – connect the color with spirituality, freedom, and nature.

4. **Red** (Passion, Power, and Celebration). Both cultures link red to strong emotions. English idioms such as see red (get angry) or paint the town red (celebrate wildly) emphasize passion and excitement. Uzbek idioms like qizil gullar (joy and love) and qizil yuzli (healthy, energetic) highlight vitality, celebration, and beauty.

5. **Green** (Growth and Permission). In English, green light (approval) and green thumb (skill in gardening) indicate success and positivity. In Uzbek, yashil dunyo (green world) and yashillik (life, renewal) emphasize fertility and harmony with nature. Overall, the results show that color idioms function as cultural symbols that encode emotional attitudes, moral values, and worldview. Shared meanings (like purity for white or vitality for red) indicate universal human experiences, whereas unique connotations reflect national mentality.

Discussion: The findings support the hypothesis that color idioms are powerful linguistic indicators of cultural perception and value orientation. They reveal how two nations – English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking – conceptualize morality, emotion, and nature through colors.

1. Cultural Context and Symbolic Variation

The symbolic differences often arise from religious and historical backgrounds.

In Western (Christian) culture, white symbolizes purity and holiness (linked to angels, weddings, and peace).

In Uzbek (Islamic-Turkic) tradition, oq is also sacred, representing honesty and divine blessing (oq niyat, oq yo'l).

However, English rarely uses black positively, while Uzbek sometimes values it as a symbol of effort and modesty (qora mehnat).

2. Intercultural Misinterpretation and Pragmatics

Color idioms may lead to misunderstanding if taken literally or translated directly. For example, feeling blue in English would not make sense if translated word-for-word into Uzbek, where ko'k means "sky," not "sadness." Conversely, oq yuzli has no direct English equivalent but conveys cultural notions of respect and integrity. Such examples demonstrate the importance of cultural competence in translation and cross-cultural communication.

3. Linguocultural Function and Identity

Idioms encapsulate collective memory and worldview. Through color idioms, each culture expresses identity:

English emphasizes psychological states and abstract emotions.

Uzbek highlights moral qualities, community values, and harmony with nature.

Hence, studying idioms with color components allows insight into how languages construct and transmit cultural identity.

4. Implications for Intercultural Communication and Education

Understanding color idioms plays a vital role in language teaching, translation, and diplomacy. Familiarity with their figurative and cultural meanings enhances cross-cultural sensitivity and prevents communicative breakdowns. For learners, awareness of such idioms improves both linguistic competence and cultural literacy.

Conclusion: The comparative analysis confirms that color idioms in English and Uzbek reflect deep-rooted cultural symbolism. While certain color associations (like white = purity) are universal, others are uniquely shaped by local traditions, religion, and worldview. Recognizing and understanding these differences enrich linguistic knowledge and foster intercultural empathy. Thus, idioms with color components are not mere phrases but cultural bridges that connect nations through shared human experience.

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