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# NATIONAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF COLOUR-BASED IDIOMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A LINGUOCULTURAL APPROACH

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**Abstract.** The article examines the national and cultural specificity of English and Uzbek idioms containing colour terms. Three groups of units are distinguished: equivalents rooted in universal human experience, equivalents that appeared through borrowing and calquing, and non-equivalent units shaped by religion, history, economic life and the worldview of each people. The results may be used in teaching English, in translation practice and in media discourse.

**Keywords:** colour terms, phraseological unit, idiom, linguoculturology, national and cultural specificity, connotation, English, Uzbek, equivalence.

**Annotatsiya.** Maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi rang komponentli frazeologik birliklarning milliy-madaniy o'ziga xosligi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot natijasida umuminsoniy tajribaga asoslangan ekvivalentlar, o'zlashtirish va kalkalash orqali paydo bo'lgan ekvivalentlar hamda din, tarix, xo'jalik hayoti va dunyoqarash bilan belgilangan ekvivalentsiz birliklar ajratib ko'rsatiladi. Natijalardan ingliz tilini o'qitishda, tarjima amaliyotida va media matnlarida foydalanish mumkin.

**Kalit so'zlar:** rang nomlari, frazeologik birlik, idioma, lingvokulturologiya, milliy-madaniy o'ziga xoslik, konnotatsiya, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, ekvivalentlik.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается национально-культурная специфика фразеологических единиц с компонентом-цветообозначением в английском и узбекском языках. Выделены три группы единиц: эквиваленты, основанные на общечеловеческом опыте, эквиваленты, возникшие в результате заимствования и калькирования, и безэквивалентные единицы, обусловленные религией, историей, хозяйственной жизнью и мировоззрением народа. Результаты могут быть использованы в преподавании английского языка, переводческой практике и медиадискурсе.

**Ключевые слова:** цветообозначение, фразеологическая единица, идиома, лингвокультурология, национально-культурная специфика, коннотация, английский язык, узбекский язык, эквивалентность.

## INTRODUCTION

Colour belongs to those areas of human experience that seem to be shared by everyone. People in London and in Tashkent look at the same sky, the same snow and the same blood, and yet the meanings they attach to these colours in language often do not coincide. This is most clearly visible in phraseology, where a colour word rarely keeps its direct visual meaning and

instead becomes a carrier of evaluation, emotion and cultural memory. When an English speaker says that someone is the black sheep of the family, and an Uzbek speaker says that a person has a white heart (ko'ngli oq), both speakers use colour to judge human character, but the images they choose and the values behind them belong to different traditions. For this reason colour-based idioms provide a convenient window through which the worldview of a nation can be observed.

Linguoculturology, which developed as a separate branch of linguistics at the end of the twentieth century, regards language as a form in which culture is stored and transmitted from one generation to another. V.A. Maslova points out that phraseological units, proverbs and metaphors are the most culturally marked layer of the vocabulary, because they reflect the everyday life, beliefs and moral norms of the people who created them [1, p. 82]. V.N. Teliya, in her turn, introduced the notion of cultural connotation, that is the interpretation of the figurative basis of an idiom in terms of the cultural codes of a given community [2, p. 214]. From this point of view, a colour idiom is not simply a fixed word combination but a compact text that refers to a whole system of symbols. At the same time, the classic study of B. Berlin and P. Kay showed that the inventory of basic colour terms in the languages of the world develops according to universal principles [3]. The tension between the universal nature of colour perception and the culturally specific nature of colour symbolism makes the comparative study of colour idioms both theoretically interesting and practically useful.

## METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The study is theoretical in nature and is based exclusively on the analysis of published scholarly works and lexicographic sources together with the author's own interpretation of the material. The theoretical background of the research can be divided into three groups of works. The first group concerns colour terms as such. The already mentioned book by B. Berlin and P. Kay proposed the idea that languages acquire basic colour terms in a fixed order, beginning with the opposition of dark and light (black and white), followed by red, then green and yellow, and later blue [3]. This hypothesis helps to explain why black, white and red are the most phraseologically productive colours in almost every language, including English and Uzbek. A. Wierzbicka offered a semantic interpretation of colour terms through universal visual prototypes such as fire, blood, the sky, the sun and vegetation [4, p. 103].

The second group of works deals with phraseology and idiomaticity. A.V. Kunin developed a detailed theory of English phraseology, describing the structural and semantic types of phraseological units and their stability, and his classification remains a reference point for many comparative studies in the post-Soviet space [5]. C. Fernando, working within the Western tradition, examined idioms from a functional perspective and stressed that idioms are used not only to name objects but to express attitude and evaluation [6, p. 30]. This observation is relevant to colour idioms, the majority of which are evaluative. Z. Kövecses, analysing conceptual metaphor, showed that metaphors may be universal at the generic level and culturally variable at the specific level [7, p. 67]. Applied to colour, this means that the general link between darkness and something bad may be shared by many cultures, while the concrete expressions built on this link remain national.

The third group consists of works devoted to Uzbek phraseology and to the comparative study of English and Uzbek. The explanatory phraseological dictionary compiled by Sh. Rahmatullayev is the fundamental source of Uzbek idioms, and it contains numerous units with the components oq, qora, qizil, ko'k and sariq [8]. U.K. Yusupov formulated the theoretical principles of contrastive linguistics as applied to English, Russian and Uzbek, emphasising that comparison should proceed from a common basis of meaning rather than from formal similarity [9, p. 21]. Sh.

Safarov introduced the cognitive approach into Uzbek linguistics and argued that linguistic units should be studied in connection with the national picture of the world [10, p. 34]. Together, these works create a sufficient basis for the comparative linguocultural analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the material shows that the colours white and black form the central opposition in both languages, which fully agrees with the universal sequence described by Berlin and Kay [3]. However, the cultural weight of these colours is distributed differently. In Uzbek, white (oq) is one of the most positively marked words of the whole vocabulary. It is associated with purity, honesty, blessing and good wishes, as in oq yo'l (literally "white road", a wish of a safe and successful journey), oq fotiha (a blessing given by elders), yuzi oq (literally "his face is white", a person with a clear conscience), ko'ngli oq (a sincere, kind-hearted person) and oq sut bergan ona (literally "the mother who gave white milk", an expression of deep gratitude to one's mother). In our opinion, the high status of white in Uzbek culture is connected both with the traditional pastoral economy, in which milk was a symbol of abundance and life, and with Islamic values, in which white symbolises purity. In English, white is also mainly positive, but its phraseological activity is lower and its meanings are more varied. The idiom a white lie denotes a harmless lie told out of politeness, and it has no idiomatic equivalent in Uzbek, where combining the idea of lying with the word oq would sound contradictory. The idiom a white elephant, which goes back to a story about the kings of Siam who presented sacred white elephants to courtiers they wished to ruin, means a costly and useless possession, and it can only be translated descriptively.

Black is predominantly negative in both languages, and here the largest number of full or almost full correspondences can be observed. English a black day and Uzbek qora kun both denote a day of misfortune, and the Uzbek expression qora kunga asramoq (to save for a black day) corresponds to the English to save for a rainy day, where the image is meteorological rather than chromatic. The negative evaluation of black is also seen in the Uzbek yuzi qora (a disgraced person), ko'ngli qora and qora niyat (an evil-minded person and evil intention), which form a mirror opposition to the "white" idioms mentioned above. In English, black marks social exclusion and illegality: the black sheep of the family, a black market, to blacklist someone. At the same time, English shows an interesting exception that is determined by its economic culture. The expression to be in the black means to have a profit, while to be in the red means to be in debt. These idioms originate in the practice of book-keeping, in which credit and debit were recorded in ink of different colours. Here black is positive, which is impossible in Uzbek phraseology and confirms the idea of Kövecses that a culturally specific domain of experience can override a general metaphorical tendency [7].

Red demonstrates a considerable asymmetry. English is rich in red idioms connected with anger, danger, official procedure and celebration: to see red (to become very angry), to catch somebody red-handed (to catch a person in the act of a crime), red tape (excessive bureaucracy, from the red ribbon once used to tie official documents) and a red-letter day (a special or happy day, from the custom of marking holy days in red in church calendars). Each of these images is rooted in English legal, administrative or religious history, and none of them is represented by a colour idiom in Uzbek. In Uzbek, the word qizil is less productive in phraseology, and its most typical use is connected with the face and the emotion of shame, as in yuzi qizarmoq (to blush with shame). It is worth noting that in Uzbek folk poetry red is associated with beauty and youth, but this association is realised more in poetic epithets than in stable idioms. Consequently, an English text that contains red tape or a red-letter day has to be rendered in Uzbek by descriptive translation or by an idiom based on a different image.

The most complex case is the blue and green zone. In English, blue and green are clearly separated, and each has its own symbolism. Blue is linked with sadness and unexpectedness (to feel blue, out of the blue, once in a blue moon) and with aristocratic origin (blue blood). Green is associated with youth and inexperience (a green hand), permission (to give the green light) and envy (green with envy, the green-eyed monster, an image that became widely known thanks to Shakespeare's Othello). In Uzbek, the word ko'k historically denoted both blue and green and also the sky itself. Therefore Uzbek idioms with ko'k are often connected with height, heaven and greatness, as in ko'kka ko'tarmoq (to praise to the skies). This semantic link can be explained by the ancient Turkic worship of the sky and by the importance of the heavenly world in the worldview of the steppe peoples. The word yashil, which specialised as the name of green, is associated in Uzbek culture with spring, life and Islamic symbolism, but it is rather weakly represented in native idioms. None of the English associations of blue with sadness or green with envy has a direct counterpart in Uzbek, which, from our point of view, is one of the most striking examples of national specificity in the whole material.

Yellow forms another revealing pair. In English, yellow is associated with cowardice (to be yellow, yellow-bellied) and with sensational journalism (yellow press, yellow journalism), the latter going back to the newspaper rivalry in New York at the end of the nineteenth century. In Uzbek, sariq is connected rather with illness, weakness and worthlessness. The idiom sarg'ayib ketmoq describes a person who has grown pale and exhausted through grief or long waiting, and sariq chaqaga arzimaydi (literally "not worth a yellow coin") means that something is worthless, similar to the English not worth a penny. At the same time, the Uzbek expression sariq matbuot (yellow press) exists in modern journalistic discourse, but it is a calque that entered Uzbek through Russian (жёлтая пресса), not an original Uzbek idiom. The same route was followed by qora ro'yxat (blacklist) and yashil chiroq yoqmoq (to give the green light). This observation is especially important for media language, since many colour idioms in contemporary Uzbek journalism are international units that reached the language through Russian mediation.

Summarising the material, the colour idioms of the two languages can be divided into three groups according to the type of correspondence. The first group includes full or partial equivalents based on universal human experience, mainly the perception of darkness as dangerous and of light as safe (black day and qora kun, the negative evaluation of black and the positive evaluation of white). The second group includes equivalents of borrowed origin, which appeared in Uzbek as calques, usually through Russian, in the spheres of politics, economics and the media (qora ro'yxat, sariq matbuot, yashil chiroq). The third and the largest group consists of non-equivalent units whose imagery depends on the specific culture: English idioms connected with book-keeping, church calendars, court procedure and literature, and Uzbek idioms connected with blessing, hospitality, respect for parents and the image of the sky. These results confirm the view of Teliya that the national specificity of an idiom lies not so much in the image itself as in the cultural interpretation of this image [2], and the conclusion of Safarov that linguistic signs reflect the national picture of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this article allows us to draw several conclusions. Colour-based idioms in English and Uzbek reflect both universal and nationally specific features of human perception. The universal basis is seen in the central role of the white and black opposition and in the general positive evaluation of light and negative evaluation of darkness, which agrees with the theory of basic colour terms and with the prototype approach of Wierzbicka. However, the concrete realisation of these tendencies depends on culture. In Uzbek, the symbolism of colour is shaped by the traditional way of life, Islamic values, respect for elders and parents and the ancient

Turkic image of the sky, which explains the high productivity of idioms with oq, qora and ko'k. In English, colour symbolism is closely connected with commerce, law, church tradition and literature, which is why idioms with red, blue and green are so numerous and so difficult to translate. The study also shows that a considerable part of the colour idioms used in modern Uzbek media discourse are calques of international expressions borrowed through Russian. This layer brings Uzbek phraseology closer to English, but it does not remove the deep differences in the native core of the two phraseological systems. From a practical point of view, the results can be applied in teaching English as a foreign language, in courses of translation theory and practice, and in the training of journalists who work with foreign sources.

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