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PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH COLOUR DESIGNATIONS REPRESENTING PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PERSON

Abstract

This article examines English phraseological units containing colour terms that represent psychological characteristics of a person. The study explores how colours function as conceptual metaphors to express emotions, mental states, and personality traits. Using qualitative descriptive and cognitive-semantic analysis, the research identifies major colour-based idioms and classifies them according to psychological meaning. Findings indicate that colours such as black, white, red, blue, and green are systematically associated with emotional and psychological states including sadness, anger, fear, jealousy, and emotional neutrality. The study confirms that colour-based phraseological units are culturally embedded cognitive structures reflecting human emotional perception.

Introduction

Phraseological units (PUs) are stable expressions whose meanings are not directly deducible from their individual components. They are an essential part of figurative language and reflect cultural, cognitive, and psychological aspects of human experience. Among them, idioms containing colour terms are particularly expressive, as colours are strongly linked to human perception and emotional interpretation.

According to cognitive linguistics, language is not only a communication tool but also a system that reflects conceptualization of human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Colour terms in phraseology often serve as metaphors for psychological states. For example, expressions such as “feeling blue” or “seeing red” illustrate how emotional experiences are structured through colour perception.

The classification of colour meanings has been widely discussed in linguistics. Berlin and Kay (1969) demonstrated that basic colour terms exist universally but their symbolic meanings vary across cultures. In phraseology, these meanings become conventionalized and reflect shared cultural knowledge.

The aim of this study is to analyze English phraseological units with colour components and to determine how they represent psychological characteristics of a person.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method supported by cognitive-semantic analysis.

Data Collection

The material includes English phraseological units extracted from:

Oxford Dictionary of Idioms

Cambridge Idioms Dictionary

Phraseological corpora and linguistic databases

Academic literature on idiomatic expressions

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four stages:

1. Identification of idioms containing colour terms

2. Classification according to basic colour categories

3. Interpretation of psychological meaning

4. Grouping based on emotional and personality features

The study is grounded in cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory, which views idioms as mappings between concrete sensory experience (colour) and abstract psychological states (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Results

3.1 Black Colour Phraseological Units

The colour black is strongly associated with negative psychological states such as sadness, fear, and depression.

Examples:

black mood – a state of depression or anger

black despair – deep hopelessness

black outlook – pessimistic perception of life

These idioms reflect cognitive associations between darkness and negative emotional experience.

3.2 White Colour Phraseological Units

White is often associated with purity, innocence, but also fear or emotional shock.

Examples:

white lie – harmless or socially acceptable lie

white as a sheet – extreme fear or shock

white soul – morally pure personality

Psychologically, white represents both positive moral evaluation and physiological fear response.

3.3 Red Colour Phraseological Units

Red is linked to high emotional intensity, particularly anger, embarrassment, and passion.

Examples:

see red – become extremely angry

red with rage – intense anger

red-faced – embarrassment or shame

Red is cognitively associated with physiological arousal, blood, and heat, which explains its emotional meaning (Kövecses, 2000).

3.4 Blue Colour Phraseological Units

Blue is primarily connected with sadness, loneliness, and emotional withdrawal.

Examples:

feel blue – feel sad

blue mood – depression or emotional low state

sing the blues – express sadness or hardship

Blue reflects low-energy emotional states and calm negative feelings.

3.5 Green Colour Phraseological Units

Green is associated with jealousy, envy, and inexperience.

Examples:

green with envy – extreme jealousy

green-eyed monster – destructive jealousy

greenhorn – inexperienced person

This reflects cultural metaphorical mapping between green colour and emotional immaturity or envy.

3.6 Yellow, Grey, and Additional Colours (Brief Overview)

Although less frequent, other colours also carry psychological meanings:

yellow-bellied – cowardly person (fear)

grey mood – emotional dullness or neutrality

These examples show that colour symbolism extends beyond primary colours.

Discussion

The findings confirm that colour-based phraseological units function as cognitive metaphors that map physical perception onto psychological experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but fundamental structures of human thought.

The association between colours and emotions is partially universal and partially culture-specific. For example, red as anger appears in many languages, while other associations such as green for jealousy may vary culturally.

Kövecses (2000) argues that emotions are conceptualized through bodily experience. This is evident in idioms such as “see red,” where physiological reactions (increased blood pressure, heat) are metaphorically expressed through colour.

From a psychological perspective, colour perception influences emotional interpretation. Dark colours such as black are linked to sadness due to low light association, while bright colours like red increase arousal levels.

Furthermore, phraseological units serve communicative efficiency by encoding complex emotional states in compact expressions. They also enhance expressiveness and cultural identity in language use

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that English phraseological units with colour components are significant linguistic tools for representing psychological characteristics. Colours such as black, white, red, blue, and green are systematically associated with specific emotional and personality traits.

The analysis confirms that colour-based idioms are cognitively motivated metaphors rooted in human perception and cultural experience. They reflect how abstract psychological states are conceptualized through sensory experience.

Future research may focus on cross-linguistic comparison between English and Uzbek colour phraseology to identify universal and culture-specific patterns in emotional conceptualization.

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