

NATIONAL-CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS OF COLOR-RELATED PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN.

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Annotation. This article explores the national-cultural semantics of color-based phraseological units in English and Russian. It argues that the study of idioms requires more than structural or lexical analysis; a deeper cultural and symbolic perspective is necessary to understand how colors shape metaphorical meaning. Through a comparative examination of color idioms, this work highlights the role of cultural memory, emotional association, and societal perception embedded in language. While certain symbolic uses of color display universal tendencies, others diverge sharply, revealing unique facets of Russian and English worldviews.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается национально-культурная семантика фразеологических единиц, основанных на обозначении цветов, в английском и русском языках. Автор утверждает, что изучение идиом требует не только структурного или лексического анализа, но и более глубокого культурного и символического подхода, позволяющего понять, как цвета формируют метафорическое значение. Посредством сравнительного анализа цветовых идиом исследование подчеркивает роль культурной памяти, эмоциональных ассоциаций и общественного восприятия, закодированных в языке. Несмотря на наличие универсальных символических значений цветов, многие из них значительно различаются, отражая уникальные черты мировоззрения носителей русского и английского языков.

Keywords: phraseology, color symbolism, cultural connotation, metaphor, English, Russian.

Ключевые слова: фразеология, символика цвета, культурная коннотация, метафора, английский язык, русский язык.

In modern linguistic studies, particularly within the field of phraseology, it is widely recognized that a purely structural or lexical understanding of idiomatic expressions is insufficient. As researchers such as V.N. Teliya argue, phraseological units are not merely fixed word combinations; they are cultural signifiers that embody national thought patterns, ethical values, and symbolic worldviews. Among the many semantic fields explored in phraseology, the concept of color stands out due to its rich semiotic and cultural weight. Color terms in idioms serve as conduits of tradition, emotion, history, and mythology, often acting as coded expressions of collective cultural experience [1996, p. 215].

Color in idiomatic usage is far from arbitrary; it functions as a deep metaphorical system that encodes both universal human emotions and culture-specific meanings. The examination of English and Russian color-based phraseological units reveals both convergence and divergence in how communities interpret and embed color symbolism within their language. These expressions are more than decorative elements; they offer insight into the shared and distinct emotional landscapes of two linguistic cultures.

Color idioms offer a powerful lens through which to examine metaphorical thinking across cultures. Certain colors carry consistent emotional connotations across English and Russian. The color black, for instance, is frequently associated with adversity, danger, or moral ambiguity. Russian idioms such as “чёрный день” (a black day) or “чёрная зависть” (black

envy) represent misfortune and destructive emotions. Similarly, in English, “*black sheep*”, “*black mood*”, and “*black market*” evoke exclusion, emotional distress, and illegality, respectively. These parallels suggest that some color metaphors may stem from archetypal or near-universal cognitive associations.

White, on the other hand, illustrates a more nuanced interplay between shared and divergent cultural meanings. Both English and Russian associate white with purity and clarity. However, in Russian idioms, white can also carry undertones of alienation or emotional distress, as seen in “*белая ворона*” (white crow), used to describe someone who is conspicuously different and often socially isolated. Meanwhile, English retains a largely positive or neutral tone in idioms like “*white lie*” (a harmless untruth), “*white-collar*” (denoting professional workers), and “*as white as a sheet*” (describing fear or shock). The divergence lies not in the basic symbolism but in its emotional range and the contextual layers each culture adds.

Red further complicates the picture. In Russian, “*красный*” (red) has historically symbolized beauty and celebration, seen in expressions like “*красная девица*” (beautiful maiden) and “*красный угол*” (red corner), referencing a place of reverence in traditional Russian homes. In more modern idioms, it also denotes authority or punishment, such as “*красная карточка*” (red card). English red idioms tend to focus on intense emotion, urgency, or wrongdoing, such as “*see red*” (to be furious), “*red-handed*” (caught in the act), or “*red tape*” (bureaucracy). Yet, “*red-letter day*” offers a celebratory counterbalance, suggesting moments of joy and significance. The comparison reveals a difference in emphasis, Russian culture valorizes red’s aesthetic and ceremonial aspects, while English idioms often reflect emotional excess or systemic constraint.

Blue is another color whose symbolic weight crosses cultural boundaries. In both English and Russian, it often reflects melancholy and emotional distance. Russian idioms like “*синий вечер*” (blue evening) evoke quiet, introspective moods, and in colloquial use, “*синий*” can also mean intoxicated, indicating a loss of control or inhibition. English idioms such as “*feeling blue*” or “*blue Monday*” similarly express sadness or lack of energy. Yet English assigns blue other meanings as well: “*blue blood*” signals aristocratic heritage and “*blue-ribbon*” denotes prestige or excellence. Thus, in English, blue encompasses both fragility and nobility an emotional dualism shaped by social history and tradition.

The color green further illustrates the interaction between metaphor and cultural coding. Russian expressions such as “*зелёный змий*” (green serpent) metaphorically refer to alcoholism, while “*зелёный юнец*” (green youth) denotes inexperience, and “*зелёная тоска*” (green melancholy) conveys a deep, undefined emotional anguish. These idioms highlight emotional intensity and existential unease. English idioms using green also link the color with naiveté and envy: “*greenhorn*” (a novice), “*green with envy*”, and “*green light*” (approval to proceed). Modern phrases such as “*go green*” introduce a more positive environmental connotation. While both languages assign green to inexperience and jealousy, Russian idioms retain a more layered emotional and psychological depth.

Yellow and gray are less prominent but still culturally expressive. In English, “*yellow-bellied*” connotes cowardice, and “*yellow journalism*” signals sensationalist reporting. Russian lacks a wide range of yellow idioms but shares the term “*жёлтая пресса*” (yellow press), indicating some cultural overlap in media discourse. Gray, meanwhile, symbolizes ambiguity, conformity, and drabness in both languages. Russian uses expressions like “*серая масса*” (‘gray mass’) and “*серая мышка*” (gray mouse) to describe unremarkable or timid individuals.

English mirrors these themes with idioms such as “gray area” and “gray eminence”, the latter highlighting hidden power.

Gold occupies a consistently positive semantic field. In both English and Russian, it symbolizes value, virtue, and rarity. Russian phrases like “золотое сердце” (golden heart) and “золотые руки” (‘golden hands’) express moral goodness and technical skill. English offers direct equivalents in “heart of gold” and “golden opportunity”, reinforcing shared admiration for generosity and chance. These idioms reflect a culturally universal appreciation for human excellence and favorable circumstances.

The exploration of color-related phraseological units in English and Russian reveals a fascinating intersection of idioms, metaphor, emotion, and cultural identity. Ultimately, color idioms are more than linguistic decorations; they are compact narratives of cultural memory and social psychology. They serve both as mirrors reflecting collective experiences and as maps guiding our understanding of national perspectives and metaphorical thinking. Whether symbolizing beauty, sorrow, alienation, or aspiration, color in phraseology remains a vivid and revealing element of the human linguistic experience.

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