



PAPER

COLOR TERMS IN ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY AND PAREMIOLOGY

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Abstract

Color terms represent an important component of language, reflecting not only physical perception but also cultural, emotional, and symbolic meanings. This article explores the role of color terms in English phraseology and paremiology, focusing on how colors function in idiomatic expressions and proverbs. It analyzes the semantic, stylistic, and cultural aspects of color usage, demonstrating that colors carry metaphorical meanings beyond their literal sense.

Key words: Color terms, phraseology, paremiology, idioms, proverbs, symbolism, metaphor, semantics

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a system of communication but also a reflection of human perception and cultural experience. Among the many elements that enrich language, color terms occupy a special place due to their ability to convey both literal and figurative meanings. Colors are deeply embedded in human cognition and are often used to express emotions, attitudes, and social values.

In English, color terms are widely used in phraseological units and proverbs, forming a rich layer of figurative language. Phraseology, which studies fixed expressions such as idioms

and collocations, and paremiology, which focuses on proverbs and sayings, both demonstrate how language encodes cultural knowledge through metaphor and symbolism. The study of color terms in these areas provides insight into how speakers conceptualize the world and communicate complex ideas through simple expressions. For example, expressions like “black sheep” or “white lie” illustrate how colors are used metaphorically to convey moral judgments and social attitudes.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Literature review

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The study of color terms has attracted significant attention across multiple disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, cognitive science, and cultural studies. One of the foundational works in this field is the research by Berlin and Kay, who investigated the universality and evolution of basic color terms across languages. Their work demonstrated that while all languages categorize colors, the number and organization of color terms vary, reflecting both universal cognitive patterns and language-specific developments.

In linguistic studies, color terms are often examined within the framework of semantics and cognitive linguistics. Scholars such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have emphasized the role of metaphor in shaping language, arguing that abstract concepts are frequently understood through concrete experiences, including visual perception. Within this framework, color terms serve as powerful metaphorical tools that enable speakers to conceptualize emotions, moral values, and social relationships.

Phraseology, as a field of study, provides further insight into the use of color terms in fixed expressions. Researchers such as a. P. Cowie and V. V. Vinogradov have analyzed the structure and classification of phraseological units, highlighting their stability, idiomaticity, and cultural specificity. Their work shows that idioms are not random combinations of words but structured expressions that carry figurative meanings often rooted in historical and cultural contexts.

Paremiology, the study of proverbs, has been extensively developed by scholars such as Wolfgang Mieder. Proverbs are considered repositories of collective wisdom, reflecting the moral, social, and cultural values of a community. The use of color terms in proverbs enhances their expressiveness and memorability, making them effective tools for transmitting knowledge across generations.

Recent studies have also explored the intersection of phraseology and paremiology, emphasizing their shared reliance on metaphor, symbolism, and cultural knowledge. These studies suggest that color terms function as a unifying element in both domains, contributing to the richness and diversity of figurative language.

Moreover, contemporary research highlights the

importance of cultural context in interpreting color symbolism. While certain associations, such as black with darkness or white with light, may appear universal, their connotations can vary significantly across cultures. This has led to increased interest in cross-cultural studies of color terms and their meanings.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that color terms are not merely descriptive elements but complex linguistic units that reflect cognitive processes, cultural values, and communicative strategies. However, there remains a need for integrated studies that examine their role simultaneously in phraseology and paremiology, which this article aims to address.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach to examine the use of color terms in English phraseology and paremiology. The methodology is designed to identify patterns of meaning, usage, and cultural significance associated with color-based expressions.

First, a corpus of idiomatic expressions and proverbs containing color terms was compiled from various sources, including dictionaries of idioms, collections of proverbs, and linguistic studies. The selection focused on commonly used expressions in contemporary English, ensuring that the data reflects actual language use. Particular attention was given to frequently occurring color terms such as black, white, red, blue, green, and yellow. Second, the collected data was analyzed using semantic analysis. This involved identifying the literal meanings of color terms and comparing them with their figurative interpretations in different contexts. The aim was to determine how color terms extend their meanings through metaphorical and symbolic processes.

Third, a structural analysis was conducted to examine how color terms function within phraseological units and proverbs. This included analyzing patterns such as adjective + noun combinations, verb phrases, and complete sentence structures. The analysis aimed to reveal how color terms are integrated into linguistic constructions.

In addition, a cognitive approach was applied to understand how color terms contribute to

conceptualization. By examining metaphorical expressions, the study explores how abstract ideas such as emotions, morality, and social relationships are represented through color imagery.

Finally, a cultural analysis was carried out to investigate the influence of social and historical context on color meanings. This involved comparing different uses of color terms and identifying culturally specific associations. The analysis also considered how globalization and language contact may affect the interpretation of color-based expressions. The combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of color terms from multiple perspectives. By integrating semantic, structural, cognitive, and cultural approaches, the study provides a holistic analysis of their role in English phraseology and paremiology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semantic and symbolic potential of color terms

The analysis demonstrates that color terms in English are not limited to their literal descriptive function but serve as highly productive semantic units with strong symbolic potential. Their meanings are shaped by a combination of perceptual experience, cultural traditions, and historical development. As a result, colors acquire stable metaphorical associations that are widely recognized by speakers of the language.

For instance, the color black is predominantly associated with negative concepts such as evil, secrecy, illegality, or misfortune. This is reflected in expressions like “black market,” “blacklist,” and “black mood.” These meanings can be traced back to the association of darkness with danger and the unknown. However, in certain contexts, black may also represent formality and elegance, as in “black tie event,” demonstrating that color symbolism is not entirely fixed but context-dependent.

The color white, in contrast, is generally associated with purity, innocence, and honesty. Expressions such as “white lie,” “white knight,” and “as white as snow” illustrate its positive connotations. Nevertheless, the use of “white lie” also shows that even positive colors can acquire nuanced meanings, indicating harmless deception rather than absolute truthfulness. Similarly, red

carries a wide range of meanings, including passion, danger, anger, and importance. Idioms like “see red,” “red alert,” and “roll out the red carpet” demonstrate its versatility. The intensity of red as a visual stimulus contributes to its strong emotional associations.

The color blue often expresses emotional states such as sadness or calmness, as seen in “feel blue” or “blue mood.” at the same time, it may also symbolize loyalty and stability, particularly in institutional contexts. This duality reflects the complex nature of color symbolism in language. Overall, the findings confirm that color terms function as culturally embedded symbols that extend beyond physical perception and play a significant role in meaning construction.

Structural and functional role of color terms in Phraseology In English phraseology, color terms are integral components of idiomatic expressions, contributing to both their structure and meaning. Phraseological units are characterized by their stability, fixedness, and figurative nature, and color terms enhance these features by adding vivid imagery and emotional resonance.

A detailed analysis reveals that color-based idioms often follow specific structural patterns. Many consist of adjective + noun combinations (black sheep, green light, red flag), while others appear in more complex verbal phrases (give someone the green light, catch someone red-handed). These patterns demonstrate that color terms are systematically integrated into phraseological structures rather than being randomly inserted.

Functionally, color terms in idioms serve several purposes. First, they intensify meaning by providing a visual dimension to abstract concepts. For example, the idiom “green with envy” conveys jealousy more vividly than a literal expression. Second, they contribute to memorability, making idioms easier to recall and use in communication.

Another important function is evaluative. Color terms often encode judgments about people or situations. For instance, “black sheep” carries a negative evaluation, while “golden opportunity” expresses a positive assessment. This evaluative function reflects the role of language in expressing attitudes and social norms.

Furthermore, the study shows that many color-based idioms are culturally specific and may not have direct equivalents in other languages. This highlights the importance of cultural knowledge in understanding and using phraseological expressions correctly.

The role of color terms in Paremiology (Proverbs)

In paremiology, color terms contribute significantly to the formation and interpretation of proverbs. Proverbs are concise expressions of collective wisdom, and the use of color enhances their metaphorical depth and rhetorical effectiveness.

The analysis indicates that color terms in proverbs often serve as symbolic markers that convey moral or philosophical messages. For example, in the proverb “Every cloud has a silver lining,” the color silver symbolizes hope and optimism, suggesting that positive outcomes can emerge from difficult situations.

Similarly, the proverb “all cats are grey in the dark” uses the color grey to emphasize the idea that distinctions become irrelevant under certain conditions. Here, color serves as a metaphor for perception and judgment. Color terms also contribute to the didactic function of proverbs by making them more vivid and memorable. The use of imagery allows speakers to grasp complex ideas quickly and retain them over time. This is particularly important in oral traditions, where proverbs are transmitted across generations.

In addition, proverbs containing color terms often reflect cultural values and social norms. For instance, the association of white with purity or black with negativity reveals underlying cultural attitudes. These expressions therefore serve as linguistic evidence of shared beliefs and worldview.

Cognitive and cultural dimensions of color terms

The findings highlight the strong connection between color terms and cognitive processes. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, colors function as conceptual tools that help individuals organize and interpret their experiences. They enable speakers to map abstract concepts onto concrete sensory perceptions, facilitating understanding and communication. For example, emotions

such as anger, jealousy, or sadness are often expressed through color metaphors (red with anger, green with envy, feeling blue). These expressions illustrate how the human mind relies on visual and sensory experiences to conceptualize internal states.

At the same time, the meaning of color terms is deeply influenced by cultural context. While some associations may appear universal, many are culture-specific. For instance, the positive connotations of white in English-speaking cultures contrast with its association with mourning in some Eastern cultures. This demonstrates that language is shaped by cultural experience as well as cognitive processes.

The study also shows that globalization and cultural interaction can influence the use and interpretation of color terms. As languages come into contact, new meanings and expressions may emerge, reflecting changing cultural dynamics.

Pragmatic and communicative functions

Beyond their semantic and symbolic roles, color terms also perform important pragmatic functions in communication. They contribute to expressiveness, emphasis, and stylistic variation, allowing speakers to convey attitudes and emotions more effectively.

In everyday communication, color-based expressions often serve as shortcuts for complex ideas. For example, saying “red flag” immediately signals danger or warning without the need for detailed explanation. This efficiency makes color terms valuable tools in both spoken and written discourse.

In addition, color terms can influence tone and register. Some expressions are more formal (golden opportunity), while others are informal or colloquial (feeling blue). This variation allows speakers to adapt their language to different contexts and audiences.

The study also suggests that mastery of color-based expressions is an important aspect of communicative competence. Non-native speakers may find these expressions challenging due to their figurative nature, but understanding them enhances fluency and cultural awareness.

Interrelation between Phraseology and Paremiology

Another important result is the close relationship between phraseology and paremiology in the use of color terms. Both domains rely heavily on metaphor, symbolism, and cultural knowledge, and they often share similar semantic patterns.

For example, the symbolic meanings of colors such as black, white, and red appear consistently in both idioms and proverbs. This consistency suggests that color symbolism forms a stable part of the linguistic system. At the same time, phraseological units tend to be more flexible and context-dependent, while proverbs are more fixed and generalized. Despite these differences, both contribute to the richness and expressiveness of language. This interrelation demonstrates that the study of color terms requires an integrated approach that considers both phraseology and paremiology as interconnected fields.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of color terms in English phraseology and paremiology demonstrates their significant role in language and communication. Colors are not merely descriptive elements but powerful symbols that convey emotional, cultural, and social meanings.

Through idioms and proverbs, color terms enrich language by adding depth, imagery, and expressiveness. They also reflect cultural values and shared knowledge, making them an essential part of linguistic heritage.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of understanding both the literal and figurative meanings of color terms, especially in language learning and cross-cultural communication. Mastery of such expressions enhances communicative competence and cultural awareness.

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