

Colour And Human Cognition: A Linguocultural Comparison of English And Uzbek Phraseological Units

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between colour perception, human cognition and cultural identity through a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek phraseological units. Adopting a qualitative approach, ten colour-related expressions are examined using conceptual metaphor theory, cognitive semantics and linguocultural analysis. The findings reveal both shared metaphorical associations and culturally specific interpretations of colours in emotional, social and evaluative contexts. Particular attention is given to the challenges of preserving figurative meaning and cultural connotations in translation. The study highlights the importance of contextual interpretation in understanding how language reflects culturally shaped patterns of human thought.

Keywords: Colour cognition; linguoculturology; phraseology; conceptual metaphor; English; Uzbek; cross-cultural semantics; translation.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings perceive colour through broadly shared visual capacities, yet languages do not merely label wavelengths. When a speaker calls someone a “black sheep” or wishes a traveller “oq yo‘l”, a visible quality becomes a resource for evaluating behaviour or performing a social action. The expression simultaneously activates sensory knowledge, conventional metaphor and a cultural situation. This contrast between common perception and conventional meaning is the central issue of the present article.

Earlier discussions sometimes treat colour symbolism as fixed—white is “good”, black is “bad”, and green is “hope”. Such summaries overlook the fact that the same colour component can acquire opposite, neutral or domain-specific meanings. In English, a white lie is a socially motivated untruth, whereas Uzbek oq ko‘ngil characterises a good-hearted person. Both contain a word for white, but the complete expressions do different cognitive and interpersonal work. Conversely, English black market and

Uzbek qora bozor are closely aligned in meaning. The comparative task is therefore to explain when a colour term remains salient, when it is idiomatically bleached, and when translation should prioritise the utterance’s function.

The article addresses three questions: (1) Which conceptual associations recur across English and Uzbek colour-containing expressions? (2) Which differences arise from phraseological conventionalisation and cultural practices? (3) What do these differences imply for the explanation and translation of such expressions? Its contribution is a transparent, small-scale interpretive typology rather than a claim of statistically representative linguistic variation.

METHODS

The theoretical framework joins three approaches. Berlin and Kay (1969) establish a foundational cross-linguistic debate about basic colour categories; their account concerns naming patterns and does not, by itself, predict

idiomatic meanings. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe metaphor as a feature of conceptual organisation rather than mere decoration. Kövecses (2005) demonstrates why metaphorical patterns may be simultaneously embodied and culturally variable. In Uzbek phraseology, Mamatov (2022) discusses phraseological units from the perspective of the language–culture relationship and the concept as a unit of linguistic-cultural analysis. Rahmatullayev’s explanatory phraseological dictionary (1978) provides a major lexicographic foundation for treating Uzbek fixed expressions as semantic wholes rather than arbitrary strings. These sources support the analytical lens; none is misrepresented as an English-Uzbek colour-translation experiment.

The data consist of ten illustrative expression pairs or contrastive clusters selected for their semantic diversity, not by random sampling. English examples are checked against Cambridge Dictionary’s published explanations of colour idioms (Woodford, 2020a, 2020b). Uzbek expressions are analysed as common linguistic examples in relation to the broader lexicographic and linguocultural tradition; an individual entry and page number in Rahmatullayev (1978) are not asserted unless directly confirmed. Some English–Uzbek combinations below are deliberately non-equivalent: they are placed together to expose the risk of component-by-component translation. Invented contextual sentences, where used, are analytical illustrations rather than quotations from fiction or corpus attestations.

Each item is interpreted across four criteria: literal colour reference (L), conceptual or emotional mapping (C), locally conventional phraseological meaning (F) and speech-act/translation function (T). A source expression is classified as (i) close functional correspondence, (ii) partial conceptual overlap or (iii) culture-sensitive non-correspondence. Because no participant interviews, frequency counts or model outputs were collected, the results are limited to qualitative explanatory observations.

RESULTS

1. White/oq: positive evaluation does not imply idiomatic equivalence

In Uzbek, oq ko‘ngil (“white-hearted”) positively evaluates generosity, sincerity or lack of malice. The noun ko‘ngil evokes a culturally familiar interior domain of disposition and feeling. Translating oq ko‘ngil as “white

heart” preserves its components but is not an established everyday English equivalent; “kind-hearted” or “good-hearted” conveys the evaluative force more reliably. By contrast, the English white lie denotes an untruth told to avoid offence or distress (Woodford, 2020b). Here whiteness qualifies a socially mitigating motive, not the moral transparency of the person. The expressions share an abstract preference for benign evaluation yet differ in target concept—character in one case, a minor communicative deception in the other.

Oq yo‘l is even more revealing. Literally “white road”, it functions as a conventional farewell or blessing addressed to someone leaving. The English “Have a safe journey” usually transmits the social act; “white road” might create an unintended image of a snow-covered road. The important relation is therefore not COLOUR→COLOUR but BENEVOLENT SYMBOL→WELL-WISHING SPEECH ACT. This is a situated cultural meaning, not evidence that all Uzbek uses of oq are auspicious.

2. Black/qora: convergence and the danger of moral simplification

English black market and Uzbek qora bozor designate illicit or unofficial trading and provide a relatively direct case of conceptual and lexical convergence. In English, however, black sheep refers to a disapproved-of family or group member (Woodford, 2020b); the literal calque qora qo‘y does not automatically reproduce this established evaluation in Uzbek. A translation such as “the family’s disgraced member” or a more context-sensitive paraphrase may be justified. Uzbek qora kun refers to a period of hardship; English “dark days” can preserve the evaluative imagery more naturally than a rigid “black day” in many contexts. These contrasts show that negative valuation is only a broad cue: collocation and discourse context determine the phraseological interpretation.

3. Blue/ko‘k: one perceptual range, divergent conceptual networks

English feel blue conventionally communicates sadness. The Uzbek ko‘ngli xira (“one’s heart/mood is dim”) or kayfiyati tushkun (“one’s mood is low”) captures the state more naturally than ko‘k his qilmoq. A further asymmetry is lexical: ko‘k in Uzbek is used in expressions concerning the sky and certain vegetation, and ko‘k choy is conventionally rendered “green tea”, not “blue tea”. The discrepancy demonstrates that even the referential domain

of a colour lexeme is not transferred by a one-to-one English label. English once in a blue moon means “very rarely” (Woodford, 2020a), while an Uzbek functional translation may be juda kamdan-kam, without retaining any colour term.

4. Red/qizil and green/yashil: embodied signals versus conventional idioms

Red/qizil can evoke visible blushing, heat or intense feeling in both languages, yet idioms remain language-specific. English see red conventionally denotes sudden anger (Woodford, 2020a); Uzbek jahli chiqmoq or g‘azablanmoq expresses the central meaning more securely than qizilni ko‘rmoq. English red tape refers to bureaucratic procedural obstacles; an Uzbek translation should normally use ortiqcha rasmiyatchilik or byurokratik

to‘siqlar rather than qizil lenta. The colour is historically conventional within the idiom, whereas the communicative point is institutional frustration.

English green with envy expresses pronounced jealousy (Woodford, 2020a). Uzbek hasaddan kuymoq retains the intensity but shifts the image from greenness to burning. Meanwhile green light and yashil chiroq offer a potentially close match in the authorisation sense when relevant to context. The same colour word thus supports both a culturally restricted emotional idiom and a shared modern sign-system metaphor based on traffic signals. Cognitive interpretation must distinguish embodied responses from learned artefactual conventions.

5. A qualitative comparison matrix

Source expression	Functional gloss/translation	Interpretive relationship
oq ko‘ngil	good-hearted	Partial overlap; disposition, not literal white
white lie	zararsiz yolg‘on	Non-correspondence; politeness motive
oq yo‘l	Have a safe journey	Cultural speech act; omit literal colour
black market	qora bozor	Close correspondence; illicit commerce
black sheep	oilada yomon nom chiqargan kishi	Non-correspondence; group disapproval
qora kun	dark days / a difficult time	Partial imagery; hardship
feel blue	ko‘ngli xira / kayfiyati tushkun	Non-correspondence; sadness
once in a blue moon	juda kamdan-kam	Non-correspondence; rarity
see red	jahli chiqmoq	Non-correspondence; anger
green with envy	hasaddan kuymoq	Partial emotional overlap; shifted imagery

The matrix is an interpretive summary of ten selected contrasts, not a frequency distribution or a measurement of population-level linguistic preferences. Its central empirical modesty is deliberate: it identifies meaning relations that can be defended from conventional usage without manufacturing interview responses or corpus counts.

DISCUSSION

The cases suggest a layered relationship between colour perception and thought. The visual category provides a readily accessible source domain, while a phraseological construction selects a culturally conventional target such as benevolence, marginality, anger, rarity or sadness.

Consequently, the meaning of a full expression cannot be calculated by adding its component definitions. This supports a cognitive view of conventional metaphor but also the linguocultural insistence, represented in Mamatov’s (2022) discussion, that phraseological meaning must be interpreted within shared practices and social understandings.

Two interpretive precautions are necessary. First, culture cannot be treated as a sealed national code: idioms may differ across generations, regions, genres and speaker communities, and some seemingly local expressions are borrowed or internationally circulated. Second, semantic resemblance does not prove a historical common origin. The correspondence black market/qora bozor, for instance, warrants separate diachronic investigation before

attributing it to independently identical national thinking. Likewise, neither the positive functions of oq nor negative uses of qora should be generalised to every usage or equated with essential properties of human groups.

For translation, a useful three-stage protocol follows from the comparison. The translator first identifies whether a colour element is literal or idiomatic; next, establishes the phrase's evaluative and pragmatic function in its sentence; finally, chooses an equivalent idiom, semantic paraphrase or culture-specific explanation in the target language. In literary passages where a recurring colour constitutes deliberate symbolism, preserving the image may deserve priority even if additional context is needed. In routine dialogue, a natural functionally equivalent expression is usually more effective. Automated translation tools can assist with candidate generation but should not be evaluated by lexical colour preservation alone.

Limitations. This article does not constitute a balanced bilingual corpus study, a sociolinguistic survey or an AI translation benchmark. The Uzbek dictionary was verified bibliographically, but the full text was not available for entry-by-entry page verification during this preparation. Future work should document edition-specific entry pages, gather matched contexts from published corpora, obtain blinded assessments from expert bilingual translators and test whether proposed categories generalise beyond the selected phrases.

CONCLUSION

Colour expressions reveal an important relationship between human perception and culture-shaped cognition: a shared sensory vocabulary can support different conventional mappings, and comparable emotional judgments may be encoded in different images. The contrastive evidence from English and Uzbek shows three recurrent patterns-close functional correspondence, partial conceptual overlap and culture-sensitive non-correspondence. Rahmatullayev's lexicographic tradition and Mamatov's linguocultural account of phraseology offer a relevant Uzbek scholarly foundation alongside cognitive-metaphor theory. The practical implication is straightforward: interpreting or translating a colour idiom requires attention to the complete phrase, its social function and its situated cultural meaning, not merely to the dictionary equivalent of the colour adjective.

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