

COLOURS FROM CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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The world of English idiomatic expressions is huge and diverse, and every aspect of their study certainly deserves attention. In order to understand the depth of this process, it has been necessary to find out what an 'idiom' is from various perspectives: semantics, structure and culture.

The study stresses the importance of idiomatic translation that is probably one of the most challenging types of translation because there are no expressions for which dictionaries have exact equivalents.

The most important thing to keep in mind is the cultural difference the translator encounters during the translation process as well as understanding all the peculiarities, similarities and differences of the two languages in order to choose the appropriate translation strategies and achieve the same meaning as in the source text. Besides, the translator requires creativity, skills, willingness, and perseverance to search for the best equivalent.

Keywords: *idiomatic expression, semantic relationship, difficulties of translation, target language, source language, origin, challenge.*

Introduction: *“Colours speak all languages”*

Joseph Addison (1672-1719)

Using our eyes, we are able to distinguish a great range of colors that play an important role in our life. Everywhere we look, we see colors and very often, we ask each other “Which is your favorite color?” This shows that daily we interact with words, which denote color. It is important to mention that colors do not only name physical objects but we also give them a meaning and a certain connotation, which is different in various cultures.

Humans appeared, were developed and evolved in a chromatic environment; in a coloured physical world. Over the time, the colours

have been studied as a basis for philosophical meditation, for inspiring artistic creations or have played an important role in the spiritual and religious life. From century to century, various people have experienced, learned and innovated designing new shades about colours and their meanings or about the role and influence of certain colours in everyday life. These facts made the colour step by step a fundamental feature of the universe in which we live. The seven colours of the rainbow correspond to the seven musical notes, the seven heavens, the seven planets, the seven days of the week, etc.

Results and Discussions:

The colours have become symbols of culture and traditions. Thus, the intention of reproducing some component parts of a particular culture of a country, using a specific colour is essential. The significance of colours throughout history are very different from one culture to another, and the rules of the past explain largely, why certain colours are preferred today for some occasions and considered unsuitable for others.

Nevertheless, all cultures see and describe the world differently. Due to this fact, a single colour may have different meaning in different cultures. Another unpleasant moment regarding this topic is that not all concepts can be expressed in some languages, i.e. a certain country may not have at all a certain colour, because the language barrier can affect one's perception of colour.

However, any colour across the globe can be read as a word, or interpreted as a signal, a sign, or a symbol. The 'reading' of colour can be subjective, individual, collective, and common to large social groups or cultural and historical regions.

According to Cirlot, there is a superficial classification of colours suggested by optics and experimental psychology. The first group embraces warm 'advancing' colours, corresponding to processes of assimilation, activity and intensity (red, orange, yellow and, by extension, white), and the second covers cold, 'retreating' colours, corresponding to processes of dissimilation, passivity and debilitation (blue, purple and, by extension, black), green being an intermediate, transitional colour spanning the two groups [2, p. 52].

However, what about nations? What do these colors symbolize for them? In which area does one color have a specific meaning? Let us take

each color apart in order to see what they mean for different cultures.

Further, we are going to dwell upon each colour in details, being based on two dictionaries of colours and symbolism. The first dictionary belongs to I. Patterson and is called the “Dictionary of Colours”. The second is related to symbolism of Romanian’s beliefs and traditions.

1. Red. The colour of blood. ‘Red’ derives from the Indo-European root *r(e)udh*, meaning ruddy and perhaps from the more immediate Sanskrit word *rudhira* meaning ‘blood’ [5, p. 325].

According to Patterson’s dictionary, red is “the colour of revolution and communism; of tomatoes, strawberries, fire appliances, stop lights and London buses. Red is one of the three additive primary colours. An indicator of danger and a symbol of courage as well as revenge; associated in medieval times with the Zodiac signs Aries and Scorpio and with the planet Mars – the red planet” [5, p. 325]. In English folklore, red represents good luck, health and happiness although it is also associated with the devil and blood and as an evil omen.

According to Antonescu, it has similar meaning in the Moldavan culture: “it is the magical colour of folklore, a symbol of blood, life, purifying fire, of the sun, love, joy and life [1, p. 575]. Another impressive feature of this colour from the religious point of view is that the Easter Eggs are painted in red because they symbolize the God’s blood.

According to W. B. Yeats, (1865-1939) red is the colour ‘of magic in almost every country’. Whereas to write to someone in red ink is regarded by some as insulting (writing in blood), in India, red is the colour of many official documents and of personal greeting cards [5, p. 325].

2. Orange combines the energy of red and the happiness of yellow. It is associated with joy, sunshine, and the tropics. Orange represents enthusiasm, fascination, happiness, creativity, determination, attraction, success, encouragement, and stimulation [3].

In England it is the colour of William (III) of Orange and of the Ulster Orangemen; the colour of goldfish and of Penguin Books from 1935 [5, p. 280]. Republic of Moldova, as well as, its neighbours, considers orange, as the colour of fall and harvest, while in American culture, orange is the colour of advertisements and fast food restaurants.

Certain countries also associate orange with wealth. In the Netherlands, for example, it is the national colour and represents the Dutch Royal

family, but in many Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, orange is associated with mourning.

In Japanese and Chinese cultures, orange signifies courage, happiness, love, and good health. In Indian cultures, it is the symbol of fire. The orange-coloured spice and saffron are considered lucky and sacred. Buddhist monks' robes are often orange [6].

3. Yellow is the colour of sunshine. It is associated with joy, happiness, intellect, and energy. Yellow produces a warming effect, arouses cheerfulness, stimulates mental activity, and generates muscle energy. Yellow is often associated with food. Bright, pure yellow is an attention getter, which is the reason taxicabs are painted this colour [3]. Yellow is seen before other colours when placed against black; this combination is often used to issue a warning.

In the United Kingdom, it is the colour of the daffodil, egg yolk and the rind of ripened lemons. When Her Majesty the Queen visited Brunei in July 1998, she apparently avoided wearing yellow – a colour reserved for the Sultan. In electrical wiring, the colour designates the earth. The favourite colour of the artist J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and his hallmark [5, p. 424].

In China, yellow was the colour used by the emperor but in the West it has pejorative connotations. It is a slang term for cowardly, hence *yellow-bellied* (laş), and slang for jealous. The colour represents jealousy, cowardice and adultery in symbolism. The colour of the medieval fool [5, p. 425].

4. White is the colour of snow. A colour associated with peace and purity and formerly with wealth – it were only the rich who could afford to wear clothes made from white cloth, since they needed such frequent washing.

In English folklore, the white colour is associated with innocence although it also symbolises death and bad luck. According to superstition, it is unlucky to give white flowers (particularly with red flowers) to someone who is ill. The colour of the outer ring in archery. In printing, any space on paper, which has no print. The albumen of the egg. Having no hue; light in colour; as regards tea or coffee, having milk added [5, p. 411].

In the Moldovan culture, white is the privileged colour of the rites of passage, which marks the mutations of the being, according to the classical scheme of any initiation: death and rebirth. The white of the

sunrise and the white matter of death, which absorbs the being and brings it into the cold, lonely world, leads it to absence, to the night vision, to the disappearance of consciousness and diurnal colours [1, p. 4]. It is associated with angels, good health, new beginning, and at the same time with coolness and cleanliness because it is the colour of snow.

In Western cultures, white symbolizes purity, elegance, peace, and cleanliness; brides traditionally wear white dresses at their weddings, but in China, Korea, and some other Asian countries, white represents death, mourning, and bad luck, and is traditionally worn at funerals.

5. Blue. The colour of the sky or of the sea. One of the three primary colours (but not until the 16th century). In some languages, there is no name for the colour and it was not regarded by the ancients as a primary colour. It has been confused linguistically with the yellow colour – *flavus* being both the root of ‘blue’ and Latin for yellow. In the Russian language there is no one word for blue, but two words one meaning dark blue and the other light blue, which are regarded as different colours [5, p. 57].

It symbolizes trust, loyalty, wisdom, confidence, intelligence, faith, truth, and heaven. However, it can also represent depression, loneliness, and sadness (hence having “the blues”). A symbol of piety; associated in medieval times with the Zodiac signs Pisces and Sagittarius, with the planet Jupiter, and with darkness [4, p. 34].

In English folklore blue represents loyalty, is the colour for baby boys and is supposed to bring good luck to brides who heed the superstition to wear on their wedding day ‘something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue’. Blue is the colour of the ring second from the centre in archery. Conservative – in relation to the Tory Party in the UK [5, p. 59].

Blue eye-shaped amulets, believed to protect against the evil eye, are common sights in Turkey. In Hinduism blue is strongly associated with Krishna, who embodies love and divine joy [7].

6. Purple. A mixture of red and blue, a symbol of rank and the colour of the robes of emperors kings and nobility, because it was extracted from sea snails. Associated in medieval times with the Zodiac signs Virgo and Gemini and with the planet Mercury [5, p. 316].

Just as black is the traditional colour for death and grieving in many cultures, purple shares the same meaning in some European nations, including the United Kingdom and Italy, as well as Brazil, Thailand,

India, and among many Catholics [6]. In the Moldovan culture, on the one hand, purple symbolizes self-control, patience, trust in truth, but on the other hand, coffins are frequently decorated with purple colours.

However, in the United States, purple - the symbol for honour and courage - is represented by the Purple Heart, the military's highest award given to soldiers, sailors, marines, and aviators for their acts of bravery [6].

7. Green. The colour of growing grass. From the Old English 'gréne' and the Old Teutonic root 'grô' from which we derive 'grass' and 'to grow'. A symbol of hope; associated in medieval times with the Zodiac signs Libra and Taurus and with the planet Venus. It is the holy colour of Islam and used on the flags of many Muslim countries. Associated once with fertility and springtime and now with environmentalism [5, p. 186].

In English folklore green is widely supposed to be unlucky especially as regards items of clothing – 'wear green and you will soon wear black' [5, p. 186].

The Republic of Moldova, as well as the most Eastern cultures relates green with spring, new and eternal life, new beginnings, fertility, youth, health, and prosperity. As red, green is found in its national clothes and decorating elements for house. However in the Moldovan culture, green has also negative connotation as it is the colour of bile disease, and people tend to avoid green eyed gypsies, because it is said that the might hypnotise one.

8. Black having the colour of coal; the blackest looking object will be one which reflects the least light; the absence of any light; dark; enveloped in darkness; lacking in hue; the opposite of white. The colour of mourning. White, however, is the colour of mourning in China, India and parts of the Far East. A symbol of penitence; associated in medieval times with the Zodiac signs Capricorn and Aquarius and with the planet Saturn. The colour of the ring, the second from the outer ring in archery [5, p. 43].

Technically, black is not a colour, but the absence of all colours. Although black traditionally represents death, evil and gloom it also represents good luck in English folklore – chimney-sweeps, black cats and coal are all supposed to bring good fortune.

Thus, due to the respective cultural background and tradition, some phrases containing color words have far surpassed their original meanings, forming different connotations in cultures.

Conclusions:

Colour symbolism remains one of the powers of the chromatic universe. According to our research the symbolic significance of the colours contains universal-human elements, and at the same time distinctive features, cultural-religious connotations. The power of colour symbolization encompasses a very wide area, as colours can be associated, in different parts of the world, with primordial elements, with the space-time dimension.

The background knowledge of such cultural differences of the meaning of a particular colour is very important in the process of translation, because the lack of this knowledge can lead to stranding of the final translation result and the risk of offending the entire target audience.

By knowing the symbolism of different colours around the world, the translator will be able to render the information to the audience in a way that is both culturally appropriate and effective.

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