

GENERAL MEANINGS OF COLORS IN MODERN ENGLISH**NAYIMOVA MARJONA ULUG'BEK QIZI**

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The article examines the general meanings and cultural connotations of basic colour terms in Modern English. Drawing on findings from cognitive semantics, lexicology, and cultural linguistics, the study analyses the symbolic associations of the principal colours — red, white, black, green, blue, yellow — as well as several secondary terms such as purple, pink, grey, and brown. Particular attention is given to idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and stable collocations in which colour words reveal layered cultural meaning. The research demonstrates that colour vocabulary in English operates simultaneously on literal and figurative levels, reflecting historical experience, social values, and emotional categorisation. The findings may be useful for students of English philology, translators, and teachers of English as a foreign language.

Keywords:

colour terms, semantics, connotation, symbolism, English idioms, cultural linguistics, figurative meaning, lexicology.

Introduction

Colour terms in Modern English form a rich semantic field that extends far beyond mere physical description. Each colour carries cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations that have been shaped by literature, religion, folklore, and everyday usage over many centuries. Understanding the connotations of colour words is essential for learners of English, since these meanings frequently appear in idioms, metaphors, and stylistic devices.

Red

Red is among the most emotionally charged colours in English. It traditionally symbolises love, passion, and romance, as evidenced by the long-standing convention of red roses and red hearts on Saint Valentine's Day. At the same time, red is associated with danger, warning, and prohibition — hence red traffic lights, red alerts, and the expression to see red, meaning to become suddenly furious. In economic contexts, to be in the red signifies financial loss or debt, contrasting with being in the black.¹

White

White in English culture denotes purity, innocence, and cleanliness. It is the traditional colour of bridal gowns, religious garments, and symbols of peace, such as the white dove and the white flag of surrender. White is also linked with truthfulness and honesty, as reflected in the idiom a white lie, which refers to a harmless or well-intentioned falsehood. However, white may carry negative shades of meaning as well: to be white as a sheet describes a person pale with fear or illness.²

Black

Black is traditionally the colour of mourning, sorrow, and death in Western cultures, including the English-speaking world. It is worn at funerals and used in expressions such as a

¹ Wierzbicka, A. The Semantics of Colour: A New Paradigm. In: Pitchford, N. J., Biggam, C. P. (eds.) Progress in Colour Studies. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006, pp. 1–24.

² Berlin, B., Kay, P. Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 14–17.

black day or black news, indicating misfortune. Black further conveys evil and illegality, as in the terms blackmail, black market, and blacklist. Despite these negative associations, black also signifies elegance and formality, illustrated by the dress code known as black tie, which calls for formal evening attire.³

Green

Green is primarily linked to nature, freshness, and growth, and by extension to ecological awareness, as in the green movement and green technology. It also denotes inexperience or naivety, as in the idiom a greenhorn, used for a beginner unfamiliar with a task. Furthermore, green is the colour of envy and jealousy, captured in Shakespeare's well-known phrase the green-eyed monster from the tragedy *Othello*. In American English, green additionally evokes money, since United States dollar bills are predominantly green.⁴

Blue

Blue, the colour of the sky and the sea, is generally associated with calmness, stability, and trustworthiness, which partly explains its frequent use in corporate logos and uniforms. Paradoxically, blue is also the dominant colour of sadness in English: to feel blue means to be melancholic, and the musical genre called the blues developed from this very association. The phrase out of the blue describes something unexpected, while a blue-collar worker refers to a person engaged in manual labour.⁵

Yellow

Yellow occupies an ambivalent position in English. On the one hand, it represents sunshine, brightness, and optimism, evoking warmth and cheerful energy. On the other hand, yellow has long been linked with cowardice — to be yellow or to have a yellow streak means to lack courage. The expression yellow press refers to sensationalist journalism that prioritises scandal over factual reporting, a usage which originated in late nineteenth-century American newspapers.⁶

Other Colours: Purple, Pink, Grey, and Brown

Secondary colour terms also carry distinctive meanings. Purple, historically derived from a rare and expensive dye, signifies royalty, nobility, and luxury, preserved in expressions such as born to the purple. Pink suggests tenderness, femininity, and good health, as in the phrase in the pink, meaning in excellent condition. Grey conveys ambiguity, dullness, and old age, while a grey area refers to a situation in which clear rules do not apply. Brown, finally, is associated with the earth, simplicity, and reliability, though it may also imply plainness, as in the colloquial phrase brown-bag lunch.⁷

Conclusion

The colour vocabulary of Modern English thus functions as a mirror of cultural experience. Each colour term operates on two levels simultaneously: the literal designation of a visual property and the figurative communication of an emotion, value, or social judgment. Mastery of these connotations enables both fluent comprehension of idiomatic speech and a deeper appreciation of English literary tradition, since writers from Shakespeare to contemporary novelists have continually exploited the symbolic potential of colour.⁸

³ Allan, K. The Connotations of English Colour Terms: Colour-Based X-phemisms. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2009, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 626–637.

⁴ Steinvall, A. *English Colour Terms in Context*. Umeå: Umeå University Press, 2002, pp. 142–155.

⁵ Niemeier, S. From Blue Stockings to Blue Movies: Color Words as Cultural Markers in English. In: MacLaury, R. E. (ed.) *Anthropology of Color*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007, pp. 141–154.

⁶ Philip, G. *Colouring Meaning: Collocation and Connotation in Figurative Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011, pp. 88–95.

⁷ Kay, P., Maffi, L. Colour Appearance and the Emergence and Evolution of Basic Colour Lexicons. *American Anthropologist*, 1999, Vol. 101, No. 4, pp. 743–760.

⁸ Biggam, C. P. *The Semantics of Colour: A Historical Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 201–215.

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