

**CROSS-CULTURAL SEMANTICS OF COLOR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH WHITE AND BLACK COLOR IN ENGLISH
AND UKRAINIAN**

**МІЖКУЛЬТУРНА СЕМАНТИКА КОЛЬОРУ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ
ФРАЗЕОЛОГІЧНИХ ОДИНИЦЬ З КОМПОНЕНТОМ КОЛЬОРУ 'БІЛИЙ'
ТА 'ЧОРНИЙ' В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ ТА УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ МОВАХ**

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This article delves into the linguistic and extralinguistic aspects of color names, focusing on the universal elements of color symbolism and their representation in phraseological units. The study draws on the works of renowned linguists and researchers, exploring the historical and cultural dimensions of color perception. The research aims to compare and establish symbolic meanings of the achromatic colors 'black' and 'white' in English and Ukrainian, shedding light on the linguistic intricacies within phraseological units. Employing theoretical analysis and comparative research methods, the study uncovers the cultural nuances and variations in interpreting these color terms, offering insights into the diverse ways different societies conceptualize and express meanings through language. The research emphasizes the linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of color names, striving to identify similarities and differences in the symbolic meanings of black and white in the two languages. As of today, linguistics lacks a systematic approach to lexical units with color names. However, a consensus among many scholars suggests that phraseological unit with color name is inherently emotionally charged; it not only denotes a color but also seeks to express our attitude towards it. The analysis of the examined material indicates that color can be explicitly expressed (through direct naming of the color or an attribute associated with the color) and implicitly (by naming an object whose color characteristic is embedded in daily life or culture as a tradition). The designation of color in the contemporary linguistic worldview is influenced by various factors: cultural-historical, socio-political, individual-psychophysiological, and artistic-expressive. The representation of color is conditioned by the traditions of the language-speaking community. This comprehensive study significantly contributes to the broader discourse on color semantics, enriching our comprehension of the subtle intricacies embedded in linguistic expressions related to color symbolism. Prospects for further research are aimed at the analysis of lexemes in phraseological units, which have a color name, and to reveal the connection between the units.

Key words: semantics, color symbolism, phraseological units, comparative analysis, cultural nuances, linguistic intricacies.

Стаття розглядає лінгвістичні та позалінгвістичні аспекти найменувань кольорів, акцентуючи увагу на універсальних елементах символіки кольору та їхньому вираженні у фразеологічних одиницях. Дослідження ґрунтується на творах визнаних лінгвістів та вчених, які розглядають історичні та культурні аспекти сприйняття кольорів. Метою дослідження є порівняння та встановлення символічних значень ахроматичних кольорів 'чорний' та 'білий' в англійській та українській мовах, розкриваючи мовні тонкощі фразеологічних одиниць. Використовуючи теоретичний аналіз та методи порівняльного дослідження, дослідження виявляє культурні відмінності та варіації у тлумаченні цих кольорових термінів, надаючи інсайти в різноманітні способи концептуалізації та вираження значень різними суспільствами через мову. Дослідження акцентує лінгвістичні та позалінгвістичні аспекти найменувань кольорів, спрямовуючи зусилля на виявлення схожостей та відмінностей у символічних значеннях чорного та білого в обох мовах. На сьогоднішній день в лінгвістиці відсутня системна концепція щодо лексичних одиниць із назвами кольорів. Проте спільною для багатьох вчених є думка про те, що фразеологічна одиниця з назвою кольору відзначається внутрішньо емоційним забарвленням; вона не лише позначає колір, але й намагається виразити наше ставлення до нього. Аналіз досліджуваного матеріалу свідчить про те, що колір може бути виражений експліцитно (шляхом прямого називання кольору чи ознаки, пов'язаної з кольором) та імпліцитно (шляхом назви об'єкта, чие кольорове визначення закріплене в повсякденному житті чи культурі на рівні традицій). Найменування кольору у сучасному мовному світогляді умовлено багатьма факторами: культурно-історичними, соціально-політичними, індивідуально-

психофізіологічними та художньо виражальними. Це дослідження внесе суттєвий внесок у широкий дискурс про семантику кольору, збагачуючи наше розуміння тонких аспектів, вбудованих у мовні вирази, пов'язані з символікою кольору. Перспективи подальших досліджень спрямовані на аналіз лексем у фразеологічних одиниць, в яких є кольороназва та виявити зв'язок одиниць між собою.

Ключові слова: семантика, символіка кольору, фразеологічні одиниці, порівняльний аналіз, культурні відтінки, мовні тонкощі.

Problem setting. The category of color is an objective quality of the material world, and linguistic signs embodying this concept encode diverse information. Colors and their names, which represent them, are universal elements of a color symbolic system consisting of various subsystems, each with its structure and function. Color designations as carriers of information about the surrounding world provide material for cognitive, psycholinguistic, linguocultural, and other scientific studies.

The relevance of the chosen topic is driven by the fact that color vocabulary has often been the subject of experimentation in various linguistic theories. However, the usage of color terms within phraseological units has been insufficiently explored. On the other hand, the study of color names helps recreate a comprehensive picture of the world, identify values characterizing a particular ethnicity, and serve as indicative material for linguistic research. Colors and color names exist in people's consciousness as sensory images of color and lexical units. The symbolization of color designations is a continuous dynamic process of accumulating categorized information reflecting the peculiarities of national mentality. Understanding the symbols of language helps comprehend the laws of language, understand the thinking of a people, and provide a key to understanding various linguistic and philosophical categories. The color symbol and its corresponding color designation, maintaining their object-related correlation, over time, form a new semantic structure, acquiring paradigmatic characteristics. The study of word semantics is a relevant issue in modern linguistics, with many fundamental studies conducted by both Ukrainian and foreign linguists. The lexicon related to color is continually under investigation in linguistics and language studies, exploring various aspects. The research on color names in linguistics has a long tradition, and the challenges arising during the consideration of the semantic field of color terms are inexhaustible. The reflection of color perception in language has been studied since the time of Aristotle and continues in various linguistic fields, including etymology, history of color names, word formation, linguostatistics, and psycholinguistics.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The attention of researchers to color designations as lexical units in different languages extends

to phraseological units with a color component. Foreign linguists such as T. Bennett, B. Berlin, F. Birren, P. Kay, S. Kertulla as well as Ukrainian linguists O. Bashmanivskyi, I. Deieva, I. Kovalska, M. Kocherhan, I. Torbenska have studied the phraseology of the English language.

Setting objectives. The goal of this work is to study various linguistic and extralinguistic research dedicated to color names, compare and establish the symbolic meanings of color in English and Ukrainian, and identify similarities and differences in the interpretation of achromatic colors 'black' and 'white' in the two languages.

The object of the study is phraseological units of modern English and Ukrainian with color names black and white. *The subject of the study* is the semantics of color names within phraseological units. The research methodology involves theoretical analysis, comparative, and descriptive research methods, as well as semantic analysis.

Main material. One of the primary functions of language is to convey visual information resulting from the perception of the surrounding world by the sensory organs. It is well-known that approximately 90% of the information about the world is acquired by humans through visual sensations and observation [3]. The ability of humans to distinguish colors sets them apart from most living beings. It has been proven that the human eye can discern around 120 colors, shades, and combinations in the spectrum of white color [1]. Therefore, there is a logical need to identify methods for highlighting and forming a system of color designations. When assigning a name to color perception, according to Berlin's definition, a person associates the general characteristics of an object or phenomenon, accumulated through communication with the external world [2]. While perceiving the world, humans reproduce it through verbal means, reflecting it rather than copying it.

Colors, from the perspective of their physical nature, are divided into achromatic (black, white, gray) and chromatic (red, yellow, orange, green, blue, cyan, violet) [9]. Achromatic colors differ in brightness, while chromatic ones differ in brightness, saturation, and hue. As a physical phenomenon, color is given to humans in visual sensations. The perception of color and its interpretation varies among different cultures. Therefore, the richness of colors in the

surrounding world is uniquely reflected in different languages. This implies that attitudes towards colors are entirely determined by the cultural-historical traditions and customs of a particular nation, i.e., its history, culture, way of life, etc. Each language, in its way, categorizes and describes objective reality using its specific means. Thus, different languages have a varying number of lexical units for color designation. For instance, in English, there are 6 basic primary colors denoted by lexical units: black, white, red, green, blue, yellow, while in Ukrainian, there are 7: black, white, red, yellow, green, cyan, blue [6].

Color symbolism plays a significant role in mythology, folk rituals, alchemy, art, etc., and it varies depending on the objects being represented, regional characteristics, traditions, and more [5; 6]. Attempts to provide a psychological characterization of colors and shades [3; 5; 10], have resulted in the compilation of encyclopedias and dictionaries of symbols by G. Biederman, J. Foley, and others. In these works, authors sought to determine the specificity of the influence of different colors on physiological and emotional levels. The idea of the existence of specific color meanings was first proposed in ancient India, as evidenced in alchemy, religion, and other works. Color is personified in ritual ceremonies in all religions. The name of a color often serves as a symbol in traditional Eastern medicine, magic, and astrology.

People chose specific colors for coats of arms, flags, and masquerade costumes, and by the color, one could accurately determine their origin. The beginning of the scientific study of the phenomenon of color meaning in modern times can be attributed to Goethe's teachings on color and his ideas about the 'sensory-moral effect of color'. In the symbolism of color, the scholar identifies three main levels:

- the color itself, isolated from other colors and forms – this level is characterized by ambiguity and contradiction;

- the second level of the color symbol is the combination of colors that forms a symbolic whole, the essence of which is not reduced to the sum of the meanings of individual colors;

- the combination of color and form – the symbolism of color forms (both abstract geometric figures and concrete physical objects) [11].

Despite national differences in color symbolism, most 'primary' colors have their symbolic meanings entrenched in religion and culture [12]. Understanding the symbolism of color serves as a stepping stone to comprehending the semantics of color and provides a key to understanding lexical units. Let's consider black and white colors.

Black color symbolizes night, death, repentance, sin, silence, and emptiness. Since black absorbs all other colors, it also expresses denial and despair, serving as a contrast to white and signifying a negative element. In Christian tradition, black symbolizes grief, mourning, and sorrow. The tradition of wearing black as a sign of mourning and at funerals originated from superstitions. People believed that the spirit of the deceased would not recognize them, preventing any harm. Wearing a black veil on the face was intended to ward off demons and prevent them from taking another soul to hell. The custom of wearing a black armband on the left sleeve as a sign of mourning dates back to medieval times when a lady would wear a band on a knight's arm to signify his service to her. Later, the armband became a symbol of loyalty to the deceased spouse. In Japan, however, black is considered a color of joy. In British courts, squares of black fabric were torn apart by judges when announcing a death sentence. The term '*Black Death*' refers to the epidemic of bubonic plague in 1348, which claimed approximately 25 million lives in Europe alone.

White is a divine color, symbolizing light, purity, and truth. In many countries (in Europe, China, Egypt), white is the color of mourning, and the deceased's clothing is dedicated to new life with white fabrics. In many other cultures, it is the color of joy and celebration. White is a contradictory symbol, combining light and life on one hand, and old age, blindness, and death on the other. In China, white is associated with both treachery and purity. The Scandinavian goddess of death, Hel, who resides in the icy (pale) world of death, has a dead-white face. A white dove symbolizes peace and the Holy Spirit. White eggs represent creation, the primordial foundation. A white flag signifies surrender and truce. White is the color of purification from sins, baptism, communion, and the holy days of Christmas, Easter, and Ascension. In alchemy, the white color is associated with mercury. It is the color of light, purity, and perfection, a universal symbol of the innocence of the soul. As the opposite of black, it holds a special place in the color spectrum system and expresses an aspect of the universal, associated with the Absolute. White was the color of animals sacrificed. The function of white color, derived from the sun, is associated with mystical enlightenment, a symbol of the East. Hence, sacred horses in Greek, Roman, Celtic, and Germanic traditions were white. Many words with the root 'alb' – Alps, Elba, elf (alb) – recall the light of the otherworld. In Tibetan tradition, white is the color of Mount Meru, located at the center of the world, symbolizing movement

towards enlightenment. White embodies the spiritual principle. These analogies underlie the etymology of some geographical names: Alba Longa, Albion, Albania.

In its negative manifestation, white, like green, is a sign of death. Additionally, white is a symbol of the Moon. This characteristic is utilized in rituals, where women with whitened foreheads perform moonlight dances. During the transfiguration of Christ, his clothing became *'white as light'*. White is the color of the clothing of the Virgin Mary, angels, and priests for the feasts of the Annunciation, Christmas, and Easter, symbolizing spiritual and illuminating principles. White is also the color of attire for wedding ceremonies, initiation rites (as worn by Roman vestal virgins), and funeral rituals (the color of shrouds). As a contrast to red, the color of life, white is considered the color of ghosts. In alchemy, the *'white daughter of the philosophers'* refers to the white elixir—a byproduct of alchemical transformation that yields silver and contributes to longevity. White magic, unlike black magic, deals with establishing connections with angelic forces.

From the idioms dictionary [4], we have identified 45 English idiomatic expressions with the color term «black». Methods of categorization and classification of color are culturally conditioned, although color perception itself is a universal function [7]. The development of cognition in different cultures follows diverse paths, leading to accents and unique divergences in color denominations and interpretations of linguistic phenomena. For instance, oil, which is not extracted in Ukraine but significantly affects commodity prices in the country, is referred to as *'black gold'* in Ukrainian. For the English, coal, perhaps no less valuable, has another name in English – *'black diamond'*. In the phrase *'black flag'* where the lexeme denotes color, it is used in a literal sense, representing a pirate flag. In English, the usage of expressions like *'black clouds'* and *'black darkness'* is common, where the color term, expressed as a qualitative adjective, logically describes the noun. Let's consider another epithet: *'black ingratitude'*. Here, the color designation coincides in both languages. A similar semantic expression is found in the phrase *'black lie'* which denotes a deliberate falsehood.

We noted that the color black symbolizes death, evil, and sadness. To corroborate this, we find idiomatic expressions such as *'in (someone's) black books'* – in disfavor, *'black augury'* – a bad omen, *'things look black'* – things are in a bad state, *'black looks'* – angry glares, and «look black» – to be gloomy. The last two examples demonstrate the broad

semantics of the color term and the primary feature of idioms, where the combined meaning of components does not necessarily equate to the meaning of the whole expression.

In word combinations like *'black day'*, *'black dog'*, *'black despair'*, *'black melancholy'* the adjective is associated with a sad, bitter, gloomy mood. In the phrase *'black bottle'*, it is associated with poison, and in *'black letter day'*, it refers to an ordinary working day. In *'as black as a thunder cloud'*, the degree of adjective expression is not sharply emphasized. The semantic field of the color term 'black' also includes the meaning of 'mystical', reflected in the expression *'to black out'* – to obscure.

In both compared languages, we find the expression *'a black horse'* – a dark horse. Particularly noteworthy is the phrase *'Black Monday'*. In student slang, it denotes the first day of classes after a break. For economists, it has a different meaning: *Black Monday* refers to November 19, 1987, when there was a sharp decline in the stock market, marking the beginning of a financial crash. In the same dictionary article, expressions like *Black Tuesday*, *Black Friday*, *Black Wednesday*, *Black Thursday* are found, all indicating days when there were declines in the stock market. As seen, the color term retains its meaning for conveying speakers' attitudes towards the events. A similar semantic meaning is reflected in Ukrainian phrases like *'чорний список'* (*blacklist*) and *'на чорний день'* (*for a rainy day*).

Among the analyzed idioms containing the color term 'black', a significant number (9) involve comparisons expressed with the structure 'as...as'. Some are direct comparisons used as fixed phrases in English, both in spoken language and works of fiction, such as *'as black as coal'* and *'as black as a crow'*. These English idioms have equivalents in Ukrainian, such as *'чорний, як крук'* (*black as a crow*) and *'чорний, як сажотрус'* (*black as soot*). Phrases like *'as black as a sweep'* and *'as black as a stack of black cats'* are based on metaphor, hyperbole, and mean 'very black/dark'. In the phrase *'black frost'*, which denotes frost without hoarfrost (snow), the nomination is based on the natural color of the earth in winter. There is no equivalent phrase in Ukrainian that characterizes such weather conditions [14]. The color term 'black/чорний' is part of many other terms. Some have the same color term as their base in both languages, for example, *'black box – чорна скринька'*, while others denote the same referent with different color terms, such as *'black eye – синє око, синяк.'*

It might be challenging for non-speakers to understand why the English use the idiom *'black*

dog’ to convey a state of depression or melancholy, although the semantics of this color term contribute to understanding the expression. English veterinarians refer to necrotic hepatitis as ‘*black disease*’ due to the black color acquired by the livers of animals that died from the disease. In contrast, Ukrainians use the term ‘чорна хвороба’ (black disease) to refer to epilepsy.

In English, there are many other terms containing color terms. In Ukrainian, they represent concepts without color terms, for instance, ‘*black character/black letter* – готичний шрифт’ and ‘*black ink* – прибуток, надлишок бюджетних коштів’ [14].

The primary meaning of the color term ‘white’ is goodness, purity, and innocence. For example, the English phrase ‘*white hat*’ refers to a good guy. The symbolism of the white color is also evident in expressions like ‘*white name* – незаплямована репутація’, ‘*to whitewash (somebody/something)* – відмити, відчистити’ and ‘*white sheet* – покайний одяг, *to stand in a white sheet* — публічно каятися’. The term ‘*white lie*’ refers to a lie for the greater good, symbolizing the innocence of the lie. Such an epithet is not found in the Ukrainian language.

In its literal meaning, the adjective ‘white’ is used in comparative turns in both English and Ukrainian. The analysis of such comparative phrases indicates that in both languages, this color can be associated with the same denotatum, for example: ‘*as white as a sheet* – білий (блідий), мов полотно’, and ‘*snow-white* – білосніжний’ are expressions in which the color term ‘white’ is used straightforwardly, indicating paleness and pure whiteness. However, the phrase ‘*turn as white as a ghost*’ carries additional connotations and translates to ‘побіліти від страху’ in Ukrainian, meaning to turn pale with fear. The number of such comparative expressions in English is significantly less than the number of expressions with the anchor component ‘black’. An interesting example of the development of the meaning of the color term can be seen in the use of the phrase ‘*white man*’ in both its literal and metaphorical senses. In its literal meaning, ‘*white man*’ refers to a representative of the white race. From this, we have the expression in English ‘*the white man’s grave*’, referring to Equatorial Africa due to its unfavorable climate, detrimental to non-native inhabitants. Other established phrases with the color term in this sense include ‘*white backlash*’ – a reactionary response by white racists to the activism of African Americans for civil rights in the 1960s. In a metaphorical sense, the same expression is used in English to denote a respected, noble person. Here, we can trace the influence of sociocultural factors on the use of color

terms in speech. In the imagination of Americans who asserted the superiority of their race over others (black man, red man), only individuals of the white race are considered honorable and deserving of respect.

White color is used in both Ukrainian and English with the meaning of ‘clean’. In Ukrainian, a ‘білоручка’ refers to a person who fears or avoids dirty work. In English, the term ‘*white collar*’ is used to describe someone who works in an office. In Ukrainian, this meaning is conveyed descriptively without the use of a color term. A derivative of this expression is the term ‘*white-collar crime*’ in English, referring to crimes committed by ‘white-collar’ workers, directly related to their professional knowledge and skills, such as securities fraud, embezzlement, and so on.

The analysis of the semantics of color terms in phrases once again confirms the ambiguity of the symbolic meaning of color. For example, in the phrase ‘*white day*’, the color term ‘white’ is synonymous with adjectives like propitious, auspicious, fortunate, and happy, indicating a positive emotional coloring. On the contrary, the color term in the phrase ‘*white fury*’ takes on an opposite connotation, signifying intense anger and wild hatred.

The color term ‘white’, when combined with different lexemes, is used in some idioms to denote cowardice or timidity, such as ‘*white liver*’ (cowardice), ‘*white feather*’ (cowardice), and ‘*to show the white feather*’ (to show fear or cowardice). The component ‘white’, isolated from these phrases, does not have an independent semantic meaning and acquires content only through the interaction of two or more lexemes.

In phrases like ‘*white frost*’ (frost without snow) and ‘*white squall*’ (squall without rain), the mechanism of meaning development is similar. However, the semantics of the color term are not transparent and may require the use of a bilingual or explanatory English dictionary to understand the meaning of the phrase. The significant influence of the cultural factor on the understanding of the semantics of phrases with color terms can be observed through the comparison of meanings where the same words are used as proper or common names. For instance:

‘*White Christmas*’ – the title of a traditional Christmas song; ‘*white Christmas*’ – referring to a Christmas when there is snow on the ground, which is rare even in the northern states of the USA. ‘*White Book*’ – a standard for compact disc recordings; ‘*white book*’ – an official government document on a particular issue.

Sometimes, the use of the color term may seem entirely arbitrary, as in the case of *'white box'* – a custom-built computer, essentially an *'anonymous'* computer. In the economic terms dictionary, the phrase *'in the white'* means 'unfinished, incomplete, semi-finished'.

Conclusions. Thus, the main meanings of the color term 'white' in English and Ukrainian are analogous, which is evidently explained by the universality of symbolic meanings of this color in global and national cultures. However, both languages also have culturally specific meanings that have developed under the influence of the traditions and histories of the English and Ukrainian peoples.

A characteristic feature of the black color is that, for all nations, it symbolizes negativity: sorrow, melancholy, humiliation, and destruction. In Ukrainian culture, the black color signifies a negative aspect, contrasting with white and symbolizing evil, sadness, and distress. In the analyzed phraseological units where color is a key component, the color term helps create vivid visual images from simple abstractions, making the speech emotionally

saturated. Just as the adjectives 'black' and 'white' represent polar opposite characteristics and concepts, the symbolism of these color terms also differs drastically. Black symbolizes death, sin, misfortune, hostility, and illness; it symbolizes darkness and mystery. On the other hand, white symbolizes purity, innocence, joy, happiness, the absence of light, and hope for salvation. In specific cases, these color terms may have other semantic nuances, but these meanings are on the periphery of the lexical-semantic field of color terms.

There is a relationship between language, culture, and color symbolism, specifically within phraseological units in English and Ukrainian. The analysis reveals the diverse and nuanced meanings attached to the colors 'black' and 'white' in linguistic expressions, emphasizing the cultural influences on color perception. Color symbolism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by cultural, historical, and psychological factors. The research significantly contributes to the ongoing discourse on color semantics, offering insights into the intricate interplay between language and cultural perceptions of color.

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