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COLORONYMS IN ENGLISH IDIOMS AS VERBALIZERS OF CONCEPTUAL AND CULTURAL MEANINGS

The article investigates coloronyms in English idioms as verbalizers of conceptual and cultural meanings. The study examines how color terms function within idiomatic expressions and analyzes their role in shaping and interpreting abstract meaning. The relevance of the research is determined by the growing interest in cognitive and linguacultural approaches to language analysis, as well as by the need to examine idiomatic expressions as carriers of structured and culturally conditioned meanings in contemporary linguistic studies. The research identifies key semantic patterns of color usage in idioms and demonstrates that coloronyms operate as conventionalized elements of conceptualization. It is shown that color terms activate stable associative links that structure the interpretation of experience through linguistically established patterns, enabling the representation of abstract concepts in a compact and accessible form and ensuring their consistent interpretation within idiomatic usage. The analysis further demonstrates that coloronyms play a significant role in the expression of emotional states and evaluative meanings. Idiomatic expressions with color components encode affective and attitudinal meanings, allowing speakers to convey complex emotional responses and evaluative judgments in a condensed and recognizable way, which increases the expressive potential of language. Particular attention is given to the cultural dimension of coloronyms. The study reveals that idioms involving color reflect culturally embedded knowledge, social practices, and shared models of interpretation that shape meaning beyond literal reference. Their interpretation is based on collective experience and culturally established associations, which determine the stability and recognizability of such expressions. The findings indicate that coloronyms function as integrative semantic elements that combine conceptual, emotional, evaluative, and cultural dimensions within idiomatic meaning. Their role is shown to be structurally significant in the organization and transmission of meaning in English idioms, confirming their importance as a productive linguistic mechanism within phraseological systems and idiomatic discourse.

Key words: coloronyms, idioms, conceptualization, cultural semantics, verbalizer, linguacultural approach.

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КОЛЬОРОНИМИ В АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ ІДІОМАХ ЯК ВЕРБАЛІЗАТОРИ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНИХ ТА КУЛЬТУРНИХ ЗНАЧЕНЬ

У статті досліджено кольороніми в англійських ідіомах як вербалізатори концептуальних і культурних значень. Розглянуто функціонування кольороназв у складі ідіоматичних одиниць та проаналізовано їхню роль у формуванні й інтерпретації абстрактного змісту. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням інтересу до когнітивних і лінгвокультурних підходів у мовознавстві, а також необхідністю вивчення розглянутих одиниць як носіїв структурованих і культурно зумовлених значень у сучасних лінгвістичних студіях. У результаті дослідження визначено основні семантичні моделі вживання кольороназв в ідіомах та доведено, що кольороніми функціонують як конвенціоналізовані елементи концептуалізації. Встановлено, що кольороназви активують стійкі асоціативні зв'язки, які структурують інтерпретацію досвіду через мовно закріплені моделі, забезпечуючи репрезентацію абстрактних понять у компактній і доступній формі та їх послідовне тлумачення в ідіоматичному мовленні. З'ясовано, що кольороніми відіграють важливу роль у вираженні емоційних станів та оцінних значень. Ідіоматичні вирази з колірним компонентом кодують афективні й оцінні смисли, що дає змогу передавати складні емоційні реакції та оцінні судження у стислій і впізнаваній формі, підвищуючи експресивний потенціал мови. Окрему увагу приділено культурному виміру кольоронімів. Репрезентовано, що ідіоми з колірним компонентом відображають культурно зумовлені знання, соціальні практики та спільні моделі інтерпретації, які формують значення поза межами буквального тлумачення. Їх інтерпретація ґрунтується на колективному досвіді та культурно

усталених асоціаціях, що забезпечує їхню стабільність і впізнаваність. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що кольороніми функціують як інтегративні семантичні елементи, які поєднують концептуальний, емоційний, оцінний і культурний виміри в межах ідіоматичного значення. Їхню роль визначено як структурно значущу для організації та передачі смислу в англійських ідіомах. Цей факт підтверджує важливість кольоронімів як особливих конститuentів у лексичній системі та ідіоматичному дискурсі.

Ключові слова: кольороніми, ідіоми, концептуалізація, культурна семантика, вербалізатор, лінгвокультурний підхід.

Problem Statement. In recent linguistic studies, idiomatic expressions are increasingly approached not simply as fixed language units, but as structures that reflect both cognitive processes and culturally shaped meanings. Within this perspective, coloronyms in English idioms deserve particular attention, since they function beyond their direct denotative meaning and participate in the verbalization of more abstract conceptual and cultural content.

From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, meaning is largely organized through conceptual metaphor, which allows abstract notions to be interpreted via more concrete domains. As noted in recent research, “conceptual metaphor (CM) refers to comprehending one thought or abstract concept in terms of another” (Xia Zhao, Yi Zheng, Xincheng Zhao, 2023: 2). Importantly, metaphor is not limited to isolated expressions but permeates everyday language use, as it “infuses our language, daily lives, and actions” (Xia Zhao, Yi Zheng, Xincheng Zhao, 2023: 2).

At the same time, current research increasingly questions the purely perceptual nature of color meaning. It has been shown that color associations are, to a considerable extent, shaped through language: “many color associations ... are likely learned through language” (Liu, van Paridon, Lupyan, 2025: 1). This suggests that coloronyms should be viewed not as neutral descriptors, but as carriers of linguistically mediated and culturally grounded meanings. In this respect, idiomatic expressions appear to be a particularly revealing domain, since metaphor and idiom comprehension are closely interconnected (Xia Zhao, Yi Zheng, Xincheng Zhao, 2023: 2).

Analysis of recent research and publications. The study of coloronyms in idiomatic expressions has developed at the intersection of several research areas, including cognitive linguistics, phraseology, and cultural semantics. In recent years, particular attention has been paid to the relationship between color and conceptual meaning. For instance, K. Schloss argues that color is systematically associated not only with physical objects but also with abstract concepts, emphasizing that color – concept relations are “highly flexible and context dependent” (Schloss, 2023). This approach highlights the cognitive dimension of color meaning and its variability across contexts.

At the same time, recent studies in phraseology specifically address idioms containing color components. A. Jalilzada, analyzing English color idioms, demonstrates that such expressions systematically encode emotional and conceptual meanings through stable metaphorical patterns, for example linking red with anger, blue with sadness, and green with envy (Jalilzada, 2025). This confirms that coloronyms function as structured semantic markers rather than arbitrary components of idioms.

A number of recent comparative and intercultural studies further demonstrate that color-based idioms reflect both universal and culture-specific meanings. Thus, research on English and Uzbek phraseology shows that color components simultaneously encode shared cognitive patterns (e.g., white as purity, black as negativity) and culturally specific interpretations shaped by historical and social contexts (Jumaniyazova, 2026). Similar conclusions are reached in studies focusing on cross-linguistic idiom comprehension, where color idioms are treated as carriers of implicit cultural meaning (Yusifova, 2021).

In addition, recent work in cognitive phraseology emphasizes that idioms should not be treated as purely fixed expressions but as dynamic units grounded in conceptual structures. Studies show that idioms are closely related to conceptual metaphor theory, although their interpretation may involve multiple cognitive mechanisms beyond metaphor alone (Kovaliuk, 2022). This perspective broadens the analytical framework for studying idioms with coloronyms.

Despite these advances, existing research tends to address either the semantic structure of color idioms, their cognitive basis, or their cultural specificity separately. There remains a lack of integrated analysis that would consider coloronyms in English idioms specifically as verbalizers of conceptual and cultural meanings, supported by a systematic and practice-oriented examination of diverse idiomatic material. This gap determines the relevance of the present study.

The aim of the article is to examine the role of color terms in English idioms in encoding abstract meanings shaped by cognitive and cultural factors. Particular attention is given to identifying semantic patterns of color usage and illustrating them through the analysis of idiomatic expressions.

Analysis and Discussion. In English idioms, color terms function not as literal descriptors but as condensed carriers of conceptual meaning. They enable the structuring of abstract experience through stable associative patterns, which are largely grounded in conceptual metaphor. As noted, “conceptual metaphor (CM) refers to comprehending one thought or abstract concept in terms of another” (Xia Zhao, Yi Zheng, Xincheng Zhao, 2023: 2).

At the level of idiomatic usage, these mappings appear as recurrent links between specific colors and conceptual domains. The color **red**, for instance, is regularly associated with heightened emotional intensity or loss of control, as in *to see red*, *a red rag to a bull*, and *to be in the red*. Similarly, **black** encodes a range of negative or undesirable states, which can be observed in expressions such as *black mood*, *black day*, *black spot*, and *to blackball someone*. By contrast, **white** tends to signal mitigation or moral reinterpretation, as in *white lie*, *white magic*, and *to wave the white flag*.

These patterns demonstrate that coloronyms do not function randomly within idioms but activate established conceptual schemas. This is particularly evident in the case of **green**, which extends beyond its basic perceptual meaning to encode several conceptual domains. In expressions such as *to give the green light*, *green shoots*, *green economy*, and *greenhorn*, the color term is associated with permission, renewal, environmental orientation, and inexperience respectively. Such variability reflects the fact that “many color associations ... are likely learned through language” (Liu, van Paridon, Lupyan, 2025: 1).

A similar mechanism can be observed in idioms with **blue**, where the color term activates a network of related conceptual meanings. Expressions such as *feel blue*, *out of the blue*, *blue Monday*, and *blue-eyed boy* illustrate how a single color can structure different aspects of experience, including emotional state, unexpectedness, and social evaluation. In the case of **grey**, idioms such as *a grey area*, *grey market*, and *grey matter* reflect the conceptualization of ambiguity, hybridity, and intellectual capacity.

Taken together, these examples show that coloronyms in English idioms function as structured semantic markers that encode and stabilize conceptual knowledge. Their recurring use across idiomatic expressions confirms that they play a systematic role in organizing how abstract meanings are linguistically represented.

However, the role of coloronyms is not confined to conceptual structuring alone. In idiomatic usage, they become especially productive in conveying emotional states and evaluative meanings, where the color

component functions as a direct marker of affect and speaker attitude.

Color terms are deeply embedded in emotional expression, as “color is a powerful tool for conveying emotion across cultures” (Ananthram, Winn, Muresan, 2023: 176). This connection is clearly reflected in a wide range of idiomatic expressions where color encodes specific emotional states. For instance, *to be tickled pink* denotes strong pleasure, *to look green* signals physical discomfort or nausea, *to be as white as a sheet* indicates fear or shock, while *to go purple with rage* intensifies the representation of anger. Particularly stable are metaphorical patterns such as *feel blue* and *green with envy*, which confirm that “metaphoric language frequently uses color as a vehicle for emotion” (Ananthram, Winn, Muresan, 2023: 176).

The effectiveness of such idioms is determined by the very nature of emotion as a linguistic phenomenon. Emotion is understood as a category that “expresses, evaluates, and portrays various emotional waves... such as love and hate, anger and pleasure” (Pansat, Khalikova, 2023: 86). This dual function explains why coloronyms simultaneously encode both emotional states and evaluative meanings.

In evaluative contexts, coloronyms operate as compact markers of judgment. Negative evaluation is conveyed through idioms such as *black sheep*, *black mark*, *to be in someone’s black books*, *a grey character*, and *a black look*, all of which signal disapproval, exclusion. In contrast, positive evaluation is expressed in idioms like *golden opportunity*, *golden handshake*, *silver lining*, *to be in the pink*, and *a rosy outlook*, where color contributes to meanings of success, optimism, or well-being.

A particularly productive group of idioms integrates emotional and evaluative meanings within a single structure. Expressions such as *to have a yellow streak*, *to paint a rosy picture*, *to give someone a black eye* (to damage reputation), *to see things in black and white*, and *to catch someone red-handed* illustrate how coloronyms reinforce both emotional intensity and evaluative stance. In such cases, color functions as a cognitive shorthand that condenses perception, attitude, and interpretation into a single linguistic unit.

The communicative relevance of coloronyms is further supported by the observation that “people also take advantage of color terms to strengthen their messages and convey emotions in natural interactions” (Volkova, Dolan, Wilson, 2012: 306). Moreover, color is not only expressive but also constitutive of emotional experience itself, since “colors are both indicative of and have an effect on our feelings and emotions” (Volkova, Dolan, Wilson, 2012: 306).

This explains the stability and recognizability of color-based idioms across speakers and contexts.

Beyond their role in structuring concepts and expressing emotion, coloronyms in English idioms function as carriers of culturally embedded meanings. In such cases, the interpretation of color is shaped not only by cognition but also by historically and socially conditioned symbolic associations.

The cultural dimension of color semantics becomes particularly evident in idioms whose meanings cannot be derived from perception alone. For instance, *blue blood* denotes aristocratic origin, *white elephant* refers to something costly but useless, and *red tape* signals excessive bureaucracy. Similarly, *pink-collar job* reflects gendered labor divisions, while *black tie* encodes formal social conventions. These meanings emerge from cultural practices rather than inherent properties of color.

The variability of such associations is well documented in linguistic research, which emphasizes that “some color-concept associations vary by culture and are influenced by the traditions and beliefs of a society” (Volkova, Dolan, Wilson, 2012: 307). This explains why idioms like *red letter day* (a significant or memorable occasion), *white Christmas* (a culturally idealized holiday), or *black Friday* (a major shopping event) are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts.

At the same time, certain color-based meanings demonstrate a degree of cross-cultural stability. As noted, “some expressions involving colors share the same meaning across many languages” (Volkova, Dolan, Wilson, 2012: 307). This is reflected in widely recognizable patterns such as *red flag* (warning sign), *green light* (permission), and *black market* (illegal trade), where the symbolic meaning of color has become conventionalized across linguistic communities.

Coloronyms also encode culturally specific models of experience through idiomatic imagery. Expressions such as *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*, *to roll out the red carpet*, and *to give someone the green light* illustrate how color interacts with social norms, values, and practices. In these cases, idioms function as condensed representations of culturally shared knowledge.

Importantly, phraseological units with color components are inherently expressive and evaluative, as they “express the speaker's point of view about humanity and phenomena” (Pansat, Khalikova, 2023: 91). This highlights the role of idioms as vehicles of cultural interpretation, where color serves as a key element in shaping meaning.

Furthermore, the symbolic function of color is closely linked to emotional perception, since “the use of color is a potent means of expressing emotions that are universally understood across different cultures” (Pansat, Khalikova, 2023: 87). This dual nature – cultural and emotional – explains the stability of coloronyms in idiomatic language.

Conclusions. The analysis has shown that coloronyms in English idioms function as conventionalized meaning-forming elements that extend beyond their literal reference to color. Within idiomatic structures, they activate stable associative patterns that allow speakers to interpret abstract, emotional, and socially relevant experience in a linguistically economical and cognitively accessible way.

The findings indicate that color terms play a significant role in shaping both emotional expression and evaluative perspective. In idiomatic usage, they serve as reliable markers of affective states and speaker attitude, enabling the condensation of complex meanings into compact and recognizable forms. These meanings are not inherent to color itself but emerge through repeated use within the language system, where they become established as part of shared linguistic knowledge.

The analysis also highlights the cultural dimension of coloronyms, which function as carriers of socially embedded meanings. Idioms involving color reflect collective experience, historical practices, and culturally specific models of interpretation, making their understanding dependent on shared background knowledge. This confirms that idiomatic meaning is shaped not only by cognitive processes but also by cultural context.

From a functional perspective, coloronyms demonstrate a high degree of semantic versatility. They contribute to meaning specification, structure interpretation, signal evaluation, and facilitate cognitive processing by condensing complex meanings into easily retrievable units. Their ability to integrate these functions within a single lexical component accounts for their stability and productivity in English idiomatic usage.

Overall, coloronyms can be regarded as integrative semantic elements that mediate between conceptualization, emotional experience, and cultural interpretation. Their systematic presence in idiomatic expressions underscores their importance as a linguistic mechanism for organizing and transmitting meaning.

The results of the study open up new perspectives for further research into the interaction between color semantics and phraseology, particularly in cross-cultural and comparative contexts, where variation in color-based associations may reveal deeper differences in linguistic and cultural conceptualization.

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