

COLOR SYMBOLISM AND EMOTIONAL COGNITION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RED AND YELLOW IDIOMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract: *This study explores how red and yellow idioms express emotions in English and Uzbek using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It finds both universal similarities and cultural differences: English links red to anger and danger, and yellow to cowardice, while Uzbek connects red with joy and vitality, and yellow with warmth and prosperity. The study shows how language reflects both human perception and cultural values.*

Keywords: *color symbolism, emotional cognition, idioms, red, yellow, English, Uzbek, conceptual metaphor, cross-cultural linguistics, phraseology*

Introduction: Colors represent one of the most powerful symbolic systems in human language and culture. Beyond describing visual perception, color terms function as cognitive tools for expressing abstract concepts, especially emotions. Idioms containing color elements are particularly important, as they reflect both cultural knowledge and underlying conceptual metaphors that shape emotional understanding. Among colors, red and yellow hold strong symbolic meanings across languages. Red is commonly associated with blood, fire, and intensity, while yellow relates to sunlight, warmth, and natural cycles. However, the emotional meanings attached to these colors vary across cultures.

This study provides a comparative analysis of red and yellow idioms in English and Uzbek. It aims to identify both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific interpretations of emotions. The findings contribute to research in cognitive linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication by demonstrating how language encodes the relationship between perception, emotion, and culture.

Main Body: The comparative analysis of color-based idioms in English and Uzbek demonstrates that while both languages rely on shared human experience, they diverge significantly in how emotional meanings are conceptualized and linguistically encoded. To begin with, red idioms in English predominantly express negative and high-intensity emotional states, especially anger, danger, and aggression. For instance, the idiom “see red” denotes a sudden outburst of anger, while “red with rage” intensifies this emotional state. Similarly, “red flag” functions as a warning sign, and “in the red” indicates financial loss or danger. These expressions are strongly grounded in human physiology: during anger or emotional stress, increased blood flow causes visible redness in the face. This supports the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS RED, where external bodily reactions shape linguistic expression.

In addition, English also uses red in slightly positive or neutral contexts, though less frequently. For example, “paint the town red” means to celebrate wildly, and “red-blooded” refers to a passionate or energetic person. However, even in these cases, the

underlying semantic field still emphasizes intensity and emotional extremity rather than calm or harmony.

In contrast, Uzbek idioms containing “qizil” (red) reveal a markedly different semantic orientation. While the language does encode anger, as in “ko‘ziga qon to‘lmoq” (to become extremely angry), the dominant associations of red are positive. Expressions such as “qizil yuzli” describe a healthy, lively individual, and “qizil gullar” symbolize love, beauty, and happiness. Furthermore, “qizil rangga burkanmoq” is used to describe festive or celebratory environments, especially in weddings and cultural events. An important distinction lies in the conceptual mechanism: Uzbek often employs metonymy through “qon” (blood) rather than directly using the color red. This suggests a more internalized model of emotional expression, where physiological substances represent emotional states. Thus, while English focuses on visible external changes (red face), Uzbek emphasizes internal bodily processes (blood filling the eyes), reflecting different cognitive pathways.

Turning to yellow idioms, the contrast between the two languages becomes even more pronounced. In English, yellow carries predominantly negative connotations. Idioms such as “yellow-bellied” and “yellow streak” describe cowardice and lack of courage. Similarly, “yellow with fear” indicates extreme fear, and “yellow journalism” refers to unethical or sensationalist media. These expressions illustrate the conceptual metaphor FEAR/WEAKNESS IS YELLOW, which is culturally constructed rather than strongly grounded in universal physiological experience.

Historically, the association of yellow with cowardice appears to be specific to English-speaking cultures and does not have a direct equivalent in many other languages. This highlights the role of cultural narratives and historical developments in shaping linguistic meaning. In Uzbek, however, idioms with “sariq” (yellow) predominantly convey positive and life-affirming meanings. For example, “sariq quyosh” symbolizes warmth, life, and energy, while “sariq oltin” (gold) represents wealth, prosperity, and value. Similarly, “sariq don” refers to wheat and agricultural abundance, which is culturally significant in Central Asian societies. These idioms reflect a strong connection between color symbolism and the natural environment, particularly sunlight and harvest cycles.

A notable exception is the idiom “zardasi qaynamoq”, which expresses anger through the metaphor of “boiling bile.” Here, yellow is indirectly involved, as bile is associated with a yellowish color. This idiom illustrates the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT, combined with a metonymic reference to internal bodily fluids. Unlike English, where anger is externalized (red face), Uzbek again emphasizes internal physiological processes. From a comparative perspective, several key patterns emerge. First, both languages share certain universal metaphors, such as linking red with anger and heat. However, the degree of prominence differs: in English, this association is dominant, whereas in Uzbek it is secondary to positive meanings like vitality and celebration. Second, the emotional valence of yellow is almost completely reversed: negative in English but positive in Uzbek. This demonstrates how cultural context can reshape even basic sensory-based concepts.

Furthermore, English tends to conceptualize emotions through external, observable changes, while Uzbek frequently relies on internal, bodily experiences. This distinction reflects broader cultural differences in expressing and interpreting emotions.

English idioms often highlight visible reactions and social signals, whereas Uzbek idioms draw attention to inner states and natural-symbolic associations.

Overall, the analysis confirms that color idioms are not merely linguistic decorations but deeply embedded cognitive and cultural constructs. They reveal how different societies interpret emotional experience through shared yet culturally modified perceptual frameworks.

Conclusion: This study has demonstrated that color-based idioms in English and Uzbek serve as powerful linguistic tools for expressing emotional cognition, revealing both universal and culture-specific patterns. By analyzing red and yellow idioms through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it becomes evident that human emotions are often grounded in shared physiological experiences, yet their linguistic representations are significantly shaped by cultural context.

The findings show that in English, red is primarily associated with negative emotions such as anger, danger, and aggression, while yellow is linked to cowardice, fear, and moral weakness. In contrast, Uzbek idioms present a more positive emotional framework: red is connected with vitality, joy, beauty, and celebration, whereas yellow symbolizes warmth, prosperity, and spiritual richness. These differences highlight how cultural values and historical traditions influence the semantic development of color symbolism. At the same time, certain universal tendencies can be observed. Both languages associate red with intense emotional states, particularly anger, reflecting a shared physiological basis such as increased blood circulation. However, the ways in which these emotions are conceptualized differ: English tends to externalize emotions through visible changes, while Uzbek often internalizes them through references to bodily substances like blood and bile. The study contributes to the fields of cognitive linguistics, phraseology, and intercultural communication by emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness in understanding and translating idiomatic expressions. It also suggests that further research involving additional languages and color categories could provide deeper insights into the universal and variable aspects of emotional cognition.

References:

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