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Структурно-семантичнi особливостi iдiом з колiрними компонентами в англomовному дiловому дискурсi

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Анотацiя

У статтi проаналiзовано структурно-семантичнi особливостi iдiом з колiрними компонентами, що вживаються в англomовному дiловому дискурсi. Виокремлено їхнi основнi ознаки. Визначено частотнiсть уживання фразеологiчних одиниць iз колiрним компонентом. З'ясовано, що найчисельнiшу групу становлять iдiоми з компонентами на позначення синього (17%), чорного (15%), червоного та бiлого (по 13%) кольорiв. Найменш уживаними виявилися iдiоми iз жовтим компонентом (їхня частка становить лише 2% вiд виявлених iдiом). Проаналiзовано синтаксичнi особливостi iдiом кольору. Спостережено, що в англomовному дiловому дискурсi домiнують субстантивнi (iменниковi) iдiоми (80%), а частка вербальних (дiєслiвних), прикметникових та прислiвникових iдiом є незначною.

Ключовi слова: колiрнi iдiоми, дiловий дискурс, семантичний аналiз, символiка кольору, структурний аналiз

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Structural and semantic features of colour idioms in English business discourse

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Abstract

In recent years, the study of language has evolved to explore the intricate nuances that shape our communication. One fascinating aspect of language is the use of idioms, which enable speakers to convey emotions indirectly through metaphorical expression. Although idioms enrich language and enhance its expressiveness and vividness, they often cause difficulties for people learning English. Among the myriad of idioms, those related to colours stand out as vibrant and captivating elements of linguistic diversity. Colour is an objective quality of the material world, encoded by language signs into a diverse array of information. Colour schemes and their designations are universal elements of the larger colour symbolic system, composed of multiple subsystems each with their own function and structure. As carriers of information about the surrounding world, colour designations are meaningful topics for cognitive, psycholinguistic, linguistic, and cultural studies. Understanding the structural and semantic features of colour idioms is essential for unravelling the intricate threads that make up effective communication, especially in the context of business discourse. The **purpose** of this paper is to delve into the semantic and structural features of colour idioms used in English business discourse. General **methods** (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, classification), theoretical methods (system analysis), graphical, as well as methods of logical, system-structural analysis and connections, comparative and dialectical approaches have been used. **Results.** Colour symbolism, like any other, is based on the peculiarities of the human psyche, on various associations, which are based on everyday human experience, fed by mythological, religious and aesthetic views. Examining business idioms with the colour component we can say that the semantics of this component often differ from the semantics of the same colour name in free use. The meanings of different colours in business idioms were scrutinized. A detailed analysis was also carried out and a certain proportion of idioms was determined by structures and colours, and the corresponding diagrams were given. The study shows the prevalence of the blue colour (17%), followed by black (15%), red and white (13% each). The yellow colour appears to be less utilized, constituting only 2% of the analysed idioms. The analysis of the syntactic characteristics of colour idioms has shown the dominance of nominal idioms (80%), followed by verbal idioms (10%) with adjectival making up 6% and the adverbial being represented by 1 lexical unit (4%). The **originality** of this article lies in the study of the symbolism of colours in terms of their use in business phraseological units, and a detailed structural and semantic analysis of colour idioms used in business discourse. **Conclusion.** The study underscores the significance of colour idioms within the business vocabulary, emphasizing their relevance. Proficiency in these expressions not only enriches one's linguistic repertoire but also enhances communication skills. Business idioms are an important segment in the business vocabulary. Colour idioms occupy a large share in business phraseology, the study of which requires further research.

Keywords: colour idioms, business discourse, semantic analysis, colour symbolism, structural analysis

Introduction. In recent years, the study of language has evolved to explore the intricate nuances that shape our communication. One fascinating aspect of language is the use of idioms, which enable speakers to convey emotions indirectly through metaphorical expression. Although idioms enrich language and enhance its expressiveness and vividness, they often cause difficulties for people learning English. Among the myriad of idioms, those related to colours stand out as vibrant and captivating elements of linguistic diversity.

Colour is an objective quality of the material world, encoded by language signs into a diverse array of information. Colour schemes and their designations are universal elements of the larger colour symbolic system, composed of multiple subsystems each with their own function and structure. As carriers of information about the surrounding world, colour designations are meaningful topics for cognitive, psycholinguistic, linguistic, and cultural studies. Understanding the structural and semantic features of colour idioms is essential for unravelling the intricate threads that make up effective communication, especially in the context of business discourse.

Objective of the paper. The purpose of this paper is to delve into the semantic and structural features of colour idioms used in English business discourse.

Review of recent publications. The role, meaning and functions of colour have always attracted the attention of linguists, in particular, such researchers as B. Berlin and P. Kay, who conducted a thorough investigation of the introduction of colour names in languages and studied the etymology of colours; H. Cerrato (Cerrato, 2012), who scrutinized the meaning of colours in business context; T. Gibson and B. Conway (Gibson & Conway, 2017), who examined colour through the lens of its usefulness for cultures; A. Steinvall (Steinvall, 2007), who recognizes the importance of considering various factors when investigating the meaning of colour idioms and notes that there is a colour base that is universal; V. Waite (Waite, 2019), who studied the connection of colours and idiomatic expressions of colour with the perception of the human mind and their correct interpretation. Among Ukrainians researchers S. Hasanova (Hasanova, 2014) considered the problems of using complete idioms with colours in English and Ukrainian languages.

Despite the numerous linguistic studies, there is still a need to further investigate colour idioms used

in business discourse, which determines the relevance of the paper. The subject of the study is colour idioms used in English business discourse, with the object being their structural and semantic features. The material under study is represented by about 36 selected colour idioms from Oxford dictionary of modern idiomatic English and Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs.

Results of research. Colour represents a complex concept that requires the capability to establish connections between seemingly disparate entities. Many words denominating colour names in English initially were used to name something other than colour, with 'black' serving as a prominent illustration of this phenomenon. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the modern English name of this colour originated as a word containing a Proto-Indo-European root *bhleg- meaning "to shine, flash, burn," also "shining white" and forming words for bright colours (source also of Greek phlegein "to burn, scorch," Latin flagrare "to blaze, glow, burn") (OED).

To enhance comprehension of the true meaning of colour idioms, it is expedient to understand the meaning of colours used in them as well as the associations they evoke. According to the study conducted on the relationship between colours and emotions in the English language by a Swedish linguist A. Steinvall, English speakers uphold a preference system wherein they establish connections between colours and emotions (Steinvall, 2007).

Each language has its own colours associated with the history, culture, lifestyle and traditions of its people. In a study conducted in 2017, Professor of Cognitive Science at MIT T. Gibson and Investigator at the National Eye Institute's Sensation, Cognition, Action Unit, NIH B. Conway proposed that variations in colour categorization across languages stem from differences in the overall usefulness of colour for efficient communication within a culture (Gibson & Conway, 2017). At the same time, analysis of the lexical-semantic meanings of colour names shows that despite the differences in the symbolism of colour schemes, many colour criteria are similar in different cultures. This can be explained by the fact that languages reflect the same social experience, which is especially true for such colours as black, white and red, which, according to B. Berlin and P. Kay, are predictable by the number of colour terms the culture has. The authors claim that all cultures have terms for black/dark and white/bright and if a culture has

three colour terms, the third is red (Berlin & Kay, 1969).

Colour symbolism, like any other, is based on the peculiarities of the human psyche, on various associations, which are based on everyday human experience, fed by mythological, religious and aesthetic views. It is present in various spheres of life, such as religion, sports, national symbols. The diversity and significance of ordinary colour perception are remarkable. Colour finds wide application in business, advertising, scientific inquiry, and medical practice to communicate information about products or brands. Moreover, colour appears to evoke a spectrum of feelings and emotions, such as liking, disliking, enthusiasm, and melancholy.

In the realm of business discourse, colourful idioms play a pivotal role, injecting vitality and depth into communication. These expressions, often rooted in culture and tradition, serve as powerful tools for conveying complex ideas succinctly and engagingly. In professional settings colour idioms evoke imagery and emotion, facilitating clearer understanding and fostering rapport among colleagues and clients alike.

According to V. Waite, colour idioms extend their meanings beyond literal interpretation. Human perception of colours begins early in life, with individuals associating them with a range of emotions, sensations, and experiences. Owing to the capacity of human mind to retain colour associations throughout life, all characteristic ideas, emotions, and connotations are attributed to colours (Waite, 2019). In other words, the combination of colour elements with other constituents within idiomatic expressions often results in the loss of their original meaning thus forming a new one, which is preserved in language for a long time and serves as a repository for metaphoric reinterpretations of emotions and conditions.

As idioms represent indirect forms of naming, their connotative significance holds particular significance. Within the structure of connotation, two vital macro-components can be identified: objective evaluative (rational), pertinent to language users, reflecting an element of the associative verbal network, and emotional evaluative, indicating an emotional stance towards the denoted reality (Hasanova, 2014). Examining business idioms with the component "colour" shows that the semantics of this component often differ from the semantics of the same colour name in free use. A word that is part of a free

phrase (in this case – colour) is an independent lexical unit, while a word that is part of an idiom partially loses its former semantic properties.

The formation of colour idioms has its own logic: each colour has its own meaning and is used to characterize those events that fit this meaning. In each field, in each culture, the description of colours can be different.

Black/dark is a classic colour associated with power, status, mystery, luxury and elegance. This is a serious colour that is often used in various areas of life. In business, black also means status, strength, power, control, success, safety and stability, for example, in the black – profitable, producing positive earnings after accounting for all expenses; the new black – any colour or item that is extremely popular or fashionable at the moment. Sometimes this colour carries a negative connotation, hiding something important, meaning a depressive state or something illegal (Cerrato, 2012), e.g. dark horse – a person about whom little is known or who unexpectedly wins; black spot – a place, time, or part of a situation that it is particularly bad or likely to cause problems; black market – an illegal trade in goods or money; blackball someone – to vote against allowing someone to be a member of an organization or group. An interesting transformation of the meaning of "black" is observed in the idiom Black Friday, which symbolizes the situation when retailers, traditionally operating "in the red", finally moved "in the black" (Hromohlasova).

White is the colour that signifies cleanliness, calmness, sterility and safety. A direct association with an object of this colour is someone that does not pose a threat to life, admits defeat or shows their desire to stop fighting or arguing, e.g. to wave a white flag – to show that you accept defeat. In business discourse, "white" denotes mental labour in comparison with hard and "black" manual labour and idioms with this colour denote things related to the office, e.g. white-collar worker – a person who works in an office, doing work that needs mental rather than physical effort; white-collar crime – a nonviolent crime characterized by deceit to obtain or avoid losing money, or to gain a personal or business advantage. The latter idiom means that crime (often the one in which an office worker or someone in business illegally takes money from their employer or the people they deal with in their business) is committed by a person who works in an office or a similar place, usually by a professional person. The white colour can

also be associated with something expensive but unnecessary, unwanted by the owner, e.g. white elephant – something that is expensive, or that costs much money to keep in good condition, but that has no useful purpose and is no longer wanted. In the idiom white goods – large electrical goods for homes such as refrigerators, freezers, washer/dryer sets, etc. (Oz Vitez), which came from the white porcelain colour of early appliances, “white” means sterility, coldness and cleanliness (CI) associated with these goods, although they may be produced in other colours. “Black” and “white” when used together mean something that has been written or printed (in black ink on white paper) rather than said, e.g. in black and white – in writing or print.

Red usually indicates something dangerous that poses a risk to life. This colour attracts attention, calls to action, e.g. red herring – a fact, idea, or subject that takes people’s attention away from the central point being considered. Products that are on sale or on a good offer are often marked in red, e.g. red tag – a tag or other marker coloured red and used to categorize something for a special purpose. In addition to attracting attention, red plays the role of a majestic and respectful colour: the red carpet – special treatment that is given to an important person when they go somewhere. “Red” can indicate a complex process associated with delays and difficulties, for instance, in the red – loss-making; owing money or having a negative account (EIE); to get out of the red – to no longer have a debt owed to other people, corporations, banks, etc; red tape – official rules and bureaucratic paperwork that prevent things from being done quickly.

Blue signifies confidence, reassurance, reliability, loyalty. Mostly, this colour is used in administrative institutions, medicine. Sometimes blue represents a typical work uniform or clothing often used in industrial, physical or manual work (CCDPV, 2020), e.g. blue-collar worker – a person who does physical work rather than mental work, and who usually does not work in an office. “Blue” can be used to denote a person’s creative, innovative and unfettered concept or approach, for example, blue-sky thinking – ways of thinking about a subject or dealing with a problem that are new and original. This colour is often used in accounting, insurance companies, banking, and stock exchange meaning stability and profitability, for example: blue chips company – a company or investment that can be trusted and is not likely to fail; blue-sky laws – laws that prevent people

from trading shares on the stock market in a dishonest way (US). “Blue” can also mean leadership, superiority over others, e.g. blue ribbon – of outstanding excellence, the highest award or distinction. Sometimes, it symbolises modifying or removing, e.g. blue pencil – deletion, alteration, or censorship. This is due to the fact that editors once used a blue pencil for editing and warning authors about necessary changes in the text (OED). “Blue” can mean lack of seriousness, e.g. to blue money – to spend money with poor management or accountability. Blue is used to express a lot of effort that does not lead to the desired result or does not change the opinion or behaviour of another person, like in the idiom blue in the face – trying unsuccessfully to do something for a very long time (EIE).

Yellow means joy, optimism and friendliness, and is often used in the logos of various brands. However, “yellow” may be associated with contempt, for example, yellow-dog contract – an agreement between an employer and an employee in which the employee agrees not to join a union during the course of their employment. In this idiom, “yellow dog” came to be associated with something or someone considered despicable or contemptible, and such contracts were often seen as oppressive and unfair.

Pink is a rather warm colour, meaning femininity, innocence, love, tenderness, in business, this colour is regarded as offensive and discriminating, e.g. pink-collar worker – someone working in the care-oriented career field or in fields historically considered to be women’s work; pink slip – a notice of dismissal given to an employee. The latter term has links to the early years of the Ford Motor Company which practiced issuing either a white or pink piece of paper. A white slip of paper meant that the employee was wanted at work the next day, a pink slip meant that their services were no longer required.

Green is a symbol of nature, environmental friendliness, purity, renewal, for example, green marketing – the practice of developing and advertising products based on their real or perceived environmental sustainability. In some idioms, “green” symbolizes a lack of experience, e.g. greenhorn – a person who is new to or inexperienced at a particular activity. This colour is also associated with money, wealth, growth, stability, for example, Green Monday – the last Monday before Christmas when many shoppers rush to purchase last-minute holiday gifts and take advantage of deals. In this idiom “green” can be associated with dollars or online shopping which

is regarded as environmentally green. Sometimes, “green” means permission to start or continue something (such as a project) (MWD), e.g. give somebody the green light – give somebody permission to do something.

Grey symbolizes something unfinished, unclear or open to interpretation, e.g. grey area – an area or situation in which it is difficult to judge what is right and what is wrong; grey power – the political, financial, or social influence of elderly people; grey knight – a possible buyer of a company who takes advantage of problems between the company and another possible buyer in order to take control of the company. This concept originated from an Australian political group. The group was designed to represent the elderly vote, advocating issues dealing with aged care and a mature perspective on national policy; hence the name “grey power”. “Grey” means goods sold outside the authorized channel of the manufacturer, i.e. sold illegally for example, grey goods – products that are bought in a foreign country and sold more cheaply than in the manufacturer’s usual distribution system. “Grey” is also used in retailing denoting the early morning hours when shops opened, e.g. Gray Thursday – Thanksgiving holidays (from Thursday to Sunday) when big-box stores open early to maximize profits.

Gold is the colour of wealth, prestige, luxury, high quality. Often the colour signifies victory, generosity (Cerrato, 2012), e.g. golden opportunity – a

chance to do something that is likely to be successful and rewarding (CI); golden handshake – a large sum of money that a company gives to an employee when he or she leaves, as a reward for long service or good work; golden parachute – a large payment or other financial compensation guaranteed to a company executive if they should be dismissed as a result of a merger or takeover. Moreover, this colour has a negative connotation meaning something/someone that looks valuable but in fact, is worthless, e.g. goldbricker – an individual who gets paid a wage or salary for work that isn’t done, despite the appearance of being industrious.

Brown is mostly positively perceived by men because it is not a feminine colour. “Brown” is also often associated with the colours of a paper bag, which is typically brown: brown-bag session – an informal training session or meeting to which attendees bring their own food; brown-bag lunch – food that you take to work with you to eat for your meal in the middle of the day. Shades of brown can also symbolize stability and preservation, as they are associated with materials that can stand the test of time: brown goods – small electrical goods, such as televisions, radios, phones, and computers (Oz Vitez).

We used the method of quantitative analysis to identify the frequency of colours used in English business idioms (Fig. 1).

As is seen from the chart, the lion’s share of colour idioms are expressions with blue (22%). The

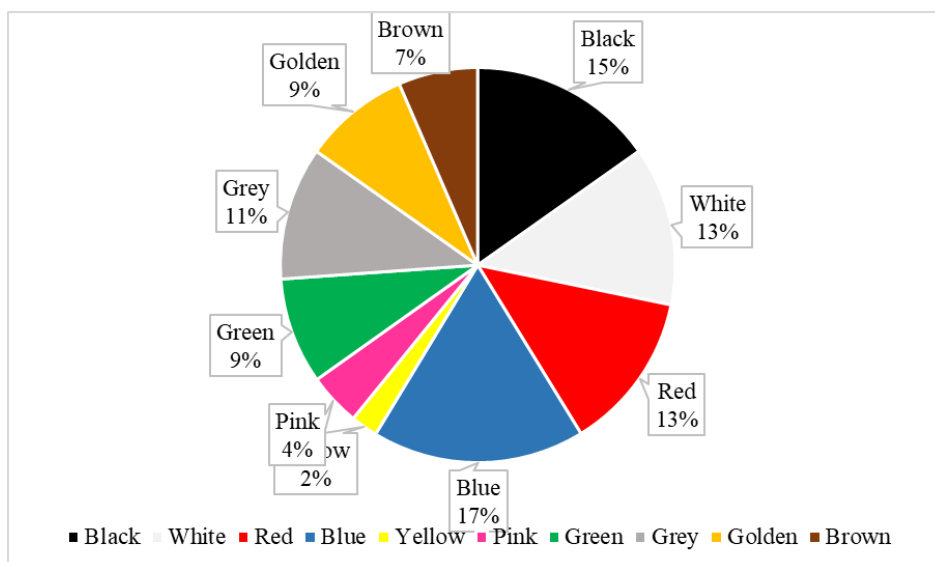


Fig. 1. Frequency of colour idioms used in English business discourse

share of red colour is 14%. White and black colours account for 13% each of the total number of colour idioms, with green constituting 11%. Idioms with grey and gold colour components make up 8% each, and pink – 5%. Idioms with brown and yellow colours make up the smallest share (3% each).

At the next stage, we conducted a thorough study of the grammatical structures of the idioms under consideration. According to P. Kvetko, idiomatic expressions can be divided into sentence and

phrasal idioms with the latter being further subdivided into verbal (semi-clause idioms) and non-verbal idioms. As the name suggests, non-verbal idioms have a syntagmatic structure without a verb. These include nominal, adjectival, or adverbial idioms (Kvetko, 2009). The structural-semantic (morphological) features of English-language business idioms are taken as a basis with further consideration of examples of their occurrence (table 1).

Table 1. Structural models of colour idioms used in business discourse

Type of idioms	Grammatical patterns	Examples	Number of occurrences
Nominal	Adj + N	Dark horse; white elephant; white goods; red herring; blue pencil; yellow-dog contract; pink slip; greenhorn; red carpet, etc.	37
Verbal	Verb + N / Pron	to blackball someone; to blue money	5
	Verb + Det + Adj + N	to wave a white flag	
	V + prep + N	to get out of the red	
	V + N / Pron + Det + Adj + N	to give somebody the green light	
Adjectival	Prep + Det + N	in the black; in the red	3
	Adj + Prep + Det + N	blue in the face	
Adverbial	Prep + Adj + conj + Adj	in black and white	1

The chart below shows the frequency of different types of colour idioms used in English business discourse (Fig. 2).

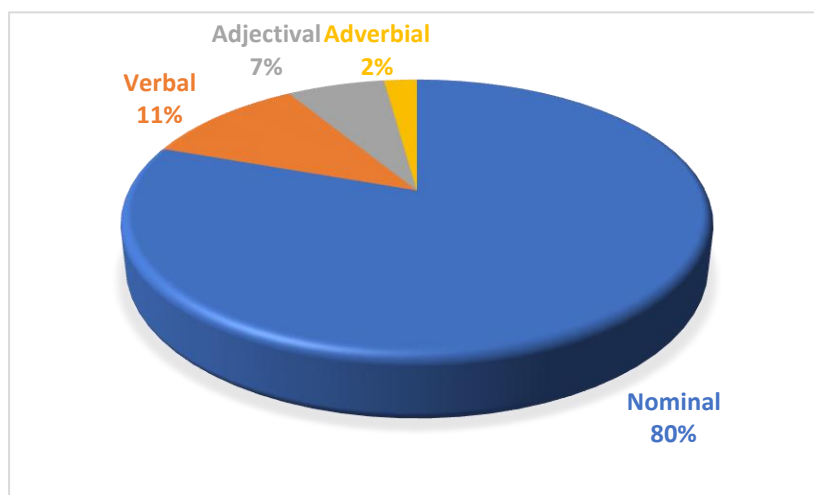


Fig. 2. Distribution of colour idioms used in English business discourse based on their syntactic features

The pie chart shows that nominal colour idioms used in business English dominate (80%). They are followed by verbal idioms (10%), adjectival (6%), and adverbial (4%).

Conclusion. In addition to the findings mentioned, the study underscores the significance of colour idioms within the business vocabulary, emphasizing their relevance. Proficiency in these expressions not only enriches one's linguistic repertoire but also enhances communication skills. The prevalence of colour idioms is evident in the data, with blue being the most frequently employed colour (17%), followed by black (15%), and red and white (13%). Conversely, the yellow colour appears to be less used,

constituting only 2% of the analysed idioms. The study shows that nominal idioms occupy the largest share of the vocabulary under analysis, constituting a substantial 80.4% of the overall distribution, with verbal idioms contributing 10.9% to the distribution. Adjectival idioms account for 6.5% and adverbial idioms constitute the smallest share, comprising a mere 2.2% of the overall classification.

Colour idioms being an important segment in business vocabulary, there is a scope for further profound exploration of extra-linguistic factors of their origin and methods of translating them into Ukrainian, which might be useful for linguistics and translation science.

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