

## **Colour-Based Phrases in Romanian, Russian and English**

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**Abstract:** The use of phrases is a linguistic as well as a cognitive act. Phrases contribute to structuring discourse, thus aiding, at a general level, in the conceptualization of essential parts of the world surrounding us. At a more specific level, they play a vital role in understanding the moral and mental behavior of a particular linguistic community and could, therefore, be investigated from the point of view of cognitive linguistics. In this paper, in an attempt to validate this point of view, we will analyze a small corpus of colour-based idiomatic/metaphorical phrases in Romanian, Russian and English.

**Keywords:** idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases, conceptual metaphor, colour-terms, Russian, English, Romanian

### **1. Introduction. Idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases: a linguistic reflection of extralinguistic reality**

Various key concepts of our cultural and social life, both at an individual level and at an inter-individual one – *the truth, faith, consciousness, existence, morality, religion, society, time, life, death*, etc. – may be defined and illustrated with the help of idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases. Life event and socio-cultural preoccupations are reflected in lexical units of the kind, which thus become expressions of attitudes and manifestations of experiences gone through. The process of generalization, of linguistic transformation to the point that phrases are born aims at converting subjective individual interpretations and projecting them onto a generally human plan that is very

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stable from the point of view of the values it represents. This generally human plan is arrived at on the basis of mental representations of concepts such as the above that are often, though not always, shared between a number of cultures.

How idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases, as reflections of specific mental representations, take shape in various languages is a matter that should not be approached within the limits of linguistics only and that may be better and more deeply understood if elements of logic, philosophy, psychology, gnoseology, etc. are brought into discussion as well. Thus, it is evident that, in order to obtain a broader and more relevant picture of these lexical units, they should be looked at through an inter- and multidisciplinary lens.

One of the areas that may be fruitfully investigated in this sense is, for example, folklore, as, in the history of every community, no matter its degree of civilization, one can easily identify written or oral folk literature that contains an inventory of idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases. This type of literature, especially in its oral form, accessible to every community member irrespective of his/ her educational background, is one of the key factors that has led to the sedimentation of phrases in the mind of the many. The lexical units under discussion demonstrate the extraordinary capacity of some non-professional, anonymous authors to get to the essence of things, to understand various aspects of life and to transpose them into words, at the same time.

The way in which idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases have come into being, i.e. via verbalization of life experience, cultural stereotypes and community-specific attitudes, stands proof for the dynamic connection between reality, the linguistic, cognitive and affective systems. Phrases, among other types of multi-word lexical units, define and illustrate what is traditional in a certain community from a linguistic, cognitive, cultural, historic, social, etc. point of view. Consequently, if the key to their meaning is found, access to what values, principles and attitudes are fundamental in that community is facilitated. For instance, in English, the fact that stupidity may be referred to by using a multitude of “politically correct” idiomatic phrases may signal a certain general desire not to be overtly offensive towards people who are less gifted intellectually on the one hand, and, judging by the form they take, hidden irony, on the other: *not the brightest bulb in the Christmas tree, not the brightest light in the harbour, not firing on all cylinders, whose belt doesn't go through all the loops, missing a few buttons on his/ her remote control, whose cheese has slipped off his/ her cracker, who has room temperature IQ, who has a few bricks short of a wall*, etc.

Often, phrases say a lot not only about the way in which a certain community positions itself towards its own members, values, principles and attitudes, but also about what stand it takes towards what they perceive as being specific to other communities. To refer to English again, a phrase like *drink like a Dutchman* may be suggestive of how the English sanction what they perceive to be a negative characteristic of the Dutch – the fact that they are, in the Englishmen's view, too fond of the bottle. In Romanian, too, a comparative phrase like *a fuma ca un turc* (‘to smoke like a Turk’) is used to point out that a person is a heavy-smoker and, between the

lines, that this is seen as considered a bad habit. It is true that phrases such as this contain allusive, ironical nuances given by, say, certain individuals' lack of elegance at a given time. However, the need of communities to penalize or just to mock at others' flaws or weaknesses does not repeal the essence of long observed facts that have been transposed into language.

Thus, the way in which the meaning of phrases is decoded may, or rather, should aid in investigating and understanding the anthropolinguistic, ethnolinguistic, sociolinguistic, etc. phenomena specific of a particular community/ society. In particular, what should attract our attention are not those phrases that encapsulate universal behaviour, but rather those that stand out as peculiar, less known or even out of the mainstream, those that stand proof for the reactions, intentions, and manifestations of a given people, under certain circumstances. Understanding this latter category of lexical units would open the gate towards shedding light on what is otherwise not easy to understand culture- and behaviour-wise and therefore, it would even help in solving potential conflicts that may arise as a consequence of cultural and behavioural incongruences.

Phrases containing colour-words are no exception. They will be discussed in what follows.

## **2. Colour–terms based phrases**

One of the most often quoted and influential studies on colour words is Berlin and Kay's (1969). What the authors suggested and is still widely accepted today is that colours have a universal signification which means, that, if necessary, any linguistic and cultural community can understand the meaning of colour-based phrases by resorting to intercultural and interlinguistic equivalence. However, as broadly embraced as Berlin and Kay's perspective may be, it is not unanimously accepted. There are also voices, such as Wierzbicka's (1990, 1996, 2006), that acknowledge the fact that there are situations in which certain colours some communities are familiar with are not conceptualized in other communities and therefore, in the latter, there are no words available to talk about them. In between the two opposing positions, there is a third, which highlights the fact that, although a certain colour may be known to several communities, the number of words and phrases used to refer to it and its nuances may differ greatly.

Without favouring either the universal or the non-universal character of colours and colour-words (both positions are backed up by strong arguments), we find it worth mentioning that the two perspectives meet on some common ground: very often, languages resort to associations with objects and phenomena in the world around us when it comes to the semantics of colours. Thus, for example, it is based on observing the colour of objects that Romanian has come to have colour terms such as *vișiniu* (the colour of sour cherries), *trandafiriu* (the “traditional” red colour of roses imprinted in the Romanian speakers' minds, though roses may also be white, yellow,

pink, etc.) or that English (like many other languages) has the comparison *as green as grass*.

Though a certain degree of universality is present in the semantics of colours based on associations with elements of the surrounding reality (see, for example, *negru ca smoala* in Romanian whose perfect English equivalent is *pitch black*, the Romanian *verde ca iarba* which literally translates into English as *as green as grass* or the Romanian *albastru ca cerul*, whose word-for-word English equivalent is *as blue as the sky*), it is evident that, in establishing correspondences between colours and objects, specific “experiential worlds” (Wierzbicka 2006: 4) play a significant role. Since reality is not the same everywhere, it comes as no surprise that thinking mechanisms and ways of filtering reality differ and this, in its turn, brings about variety in linguistic and conceptual forms across languages: in English, for example, if one has a very pale skin at some point, that person is *as white as a sheet*, while in Romanian, the same person would be described as *alb ca varul* (‘as white as lime’). Similarly, if a person is very suntanned, in English, s/he is *as brown as a berry*, while in Romanian, a different colour is used as the basis of the idiomatic comparison: *negru ca taciunele* (‘as black as coal’). Still, as language encodes actions, feelings, opinions, attitudes, perceptions, etc. that are specifically human, there should be instruments that could help in translating/ transferring any linguistic situation referring to these from one language into another, no matter how peculiar this situation is. After all, a non-unitary vision of a linguistic fact offers the premises of a more nuanced research that would hopefully uncover the mechanisms that govern various mental and linguistic worlds.

We consider, alongside other researchers (e.g. Evseev 1983, 1999, 2001), that, for the languages and cultures under scrutiny in this study, like for many others, colours are symbol-lexemes and therefore signs having peculiar characteristics and carrying a substantial experiential load, inscribed, *sine qua non*, in them themselves.

In order to illustrate the complexity of symbols, we have extracted their characteristics as they were suggested by Evseev (1983 : 35-50, our translation; these characteristics were presented in Gheltofan, 2012, as well): symbols are semantically dense; they are heavily loaded from a semantic point of view; they may be polysemantic and ambivalent in context; they may be associated with an image, a drawing, an emblem; they exist in a verbal, semiotic form; they reproduce and mould reality; they are signs that are connected to the “fundamental sides of existence”; they presuppose the presence of some stages of cognition; they are “oriented towards reality, towards the world of objects”; they are “the product of a consciousness that gives birth to them and of a consciousness that records them”; they are the expression of “an attitude, of some ethic and aesthetic valorization”; they are “active and paradigmatic”, carry a “strong emotional load” and “equally address sense and sensibility, consciousness and unconsciousness”; symbols have both an objective and a subjective side; they “refer to the human being” and represent “the harmonization of the opposites”; they are “a ‘micromodel’ of the surrounding world”, “a blend of the general and the particular, [...], of thinking and feeling”; symbols transcend temporal, geographical and cultural limits and they are “a projection of human thinking”; they

are often rendered linguistically in phrases and proverbs and are associated with metaphors; symbols are “engrams or matrixes present in the collective subconsciousness of people”.

This repertoire of characteristics of symbols represent pieces of information that may prove helpful in understanding *conceptual metaphor*, as it is talked about in western cognitive linguistics and *concepts*, as they are approached in Russian cognitive linguistics (see, for example, Boldyrev 2004, Kubryakova and Dem’yankov 2007, Popova and Sternin 2007, etc.).

Phrases based on colour terms will, then, have a key symbolic dimension. Chromatic symbolism has been the focus of countless studies and dictionaries of symbols so, even if our discussion in what follows will indirectly hint at it, we are not going to make it the aim of our analysis.

### **2.1. Romanian, Russian and English colour-terms based phrases**

Following the line of thought suggested by the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Kövecses 2002, 2006, 2008, 2015, etc.), in which conceptual metaphor is perceived as a kind of association between what is very well known to us and what is less known that stands proof of how reality is made sense of both at an individual and at a collective level, we are going to see how idiomatic/metaphorical phrases based on colour terms “talk” about a certain mental and behavioural universe. In our attempt to do so, we are going to tackle phrases that are recurrent in everyday discourse or that are part of the contemporary paradigm of conventions.

The corpus analyzed contains a number of phrases based on the colour lexemes: *white, black, red, blue, green, yellow* (that Berlin and Kay (1969) consider basic colour terms), *grey* and *pink*.

Before proceeding, let us say once again that, in the languages and cultures taken into consideration here, colour lexemes bear meanings that can be deciphered intra- and interculturally, as they are comparable to lexemes of the same kind in other languages (within the same language family or not).

We have to make it clear, from the very beginning, that idiomatic/metaphorical phrases in general are constructs that have an experiential basis (one of a cultural type included). One can identify, in the three cultures targeted, a natural need of individuals to associate colours with various activities, feelings, states – it is this kind of associations that gives birth to a series of “chromatic” conceptual metaphors. In fact, individuals, as members of specific communities, delineate fragments of reality with the help of chromatic phrases, important information about the culture and civilization of these communities being stored in these lexical units.

Dumistrăcel (2011: 108), for example, follows this track in suggesting that idiomatic phrases are “copies of reality”. This is not to be questioned – they are indeed copies of a shared way of interpreting and categorizing the reality of a given community, they are key-phrases representing a certain vision of the extra-linguistic

reality (“keys to understanding culture”, as Alefirenko (2009: 38) calls them) that embody “general mental representations and behaviours that characterize the human race” (Dumistrăcel 2009: 71, our translation).

When phrases, those base on conceptual metaphors and those having an idiomatic dimension included, are contextualized, i.e. used in a particular context, they are retrieved from the speaker’s mental lexicon, are already interpreted and included in a hierarchy by the person who uses them as his/ her preferred way of talking about reality. An individual speaker’s use of a phrase may not totally correspond to the use of the same phrase by the majority, s/he may choose to disregard it and employ the phrase with a different (conceptual) meaning. In this case, we may talk about deviation from the well-established sense.

In what follows, we will investigate phrases with a connotative, often metaphoric dimension, based on colour terms in Romanian, Russian and English, in an attempt to discover whether there are cultural stereotypes or divergences that would help us understand fragments of the specific mental constructs of the cultures that these languages represent. In the area of colour-based phrases, like in the case of phrases of other types, both mental conceptualization and its rendering into language often rely on metaphor, metonymy, comparison, synecdoche and litotes that enrich and give dynamism to verbal patterns: e.g. “white death” – a euphemistic metaphor referring to tuberculosis, especially when it causes many death or to Simo Häyhä, a Finnish sniper in the Winter War, nicknamed so by the Soviet army due to his killing of apparently more than five hundred Red Army soldiers; “the blue helmets” – a metonymy that presupposes the use of an article of clothing for the person who wears it and refers to the UN peace keeping mission in which soldiers wearing blue helmets, unarmed or bearing only light weapons, intervene between two armed forces to negotiate and restore peace; “as white as milk” – a comparison emphasizing extreme fairness of somebody’s complexion.

The last example offered above is only one of many other phrases that have an indirect, metaphorical/ idiomatic meaning and that rely on (idiomatic comparisons with) colours to render characteristics of human beings (often, though not always, there is the suggestion that people possess these characteristics or experience a certain emotion at top level):

1. idiomatic comparisons/ metaphorical phrases containing the colour-term *white*, that refer to characteristics of humans or objects:

*Ro.* alb ca laptele [white as milk]/ ca spuma laptelui [as milk foam]/ ca neaua [as snow]/ ca zăpada [as snow]/ ca varul [as lime]/ ca peretele [as the wall]/ ca creta [as chalk]

*Ru.* белый как молоко [white as milk]/ как снег [as snow]/ как стена [as the wall]/ как полотно [as canvas]/ как лён [as linen]/ как сахар/ [as sugar]/ как мрамор [as marble]/ как мел/ [as chalk]

*Eng.* as *white as snow*/ as a sheet/ as chalk

2. idiomatic comparisons/ metaphorical phrases containing the colour-term *black*, that refer to characteristics of humans or objects:

*Ro.* negru ca corbul [black as a raven]/ ca pana corbului [as the crow's feather]/ ca dracul [as the devil]/ ca taciunele [as coal]/ ca cioara [as a crow]/ ca țiganul [as a gipsy], negru în cerul gurii [black on the roof of one's mouth], negru de murdar [black with dirty]

*Ru.* чёрный как сажа [black as soot]/ как смоль [as pitch]/ как ночь [as the night]/ как ворон [as a raven]/ как уголь [as coal]/ как жук [as a bug]/ как цыган [as a gipsy]

*Eng.* black as hell/ as my hat/ as ink/ as night/ as coal, black and blue

3. idiomatic comparisons/ metaphorical phrases containing the colour-term *red*, that refer to characteristics of humans or objects or to emotions:

*Ro.* roșu ca cocoșul [red as a rooster]/ ca racul [as a crab]/ ca sfecla [as beetroot]/ ca macul [as poppy]

*Ru.* красный как крак [red as a crab]/ как вишня [a cherry]/ как свекла [as beetroot], покраснеть как маков цвет [to become red as a poppy], покраснеть до самых ушей [to become red up to one's ears], покраснеть до корней волос [to become red up to one's hair roots]

*Eng.* as red as a beetroot/ a cherry/ a rose/ a turkey/ a lobster; to get/have a red face, red in the face, to blush/go red, to become red in face

4. metaphorical phrases containing the colour-term *blue*, that refer to human characteristics:

*Ro.* cu sânge albastru [with blue blood]

*Ru.* голубая кровь [blue blood]

*Eng.* blue blood

Metaphorical associations with colours are also resorted to when referring to very young or inexperienced people. In this case, it seems that *green* and *yellow* are the two most often used – a choice obviously motivated by direct experience with the surrounding reality, especially life in nature:

5. metaphorical phrases containing the colour-terms *green* and *yellow* that refer to inexperienced/ young people (the conceptual metaphor NON-EXPERIENCE IS GREEN/ YELLOW lies at the basis of the associations quoted below):

*Ro.* e (cam) verde [s/he is rather green]

*Ru.* зелёный юнец [a green young guy]; желторотый птенец [a chicken with a yellow beak]

*Eng.* green horn, green hand, as green as grass

The opposite – reference to experienced, old people – is also sometimes made with the help of colour-based phrases. The examples in 6. below illustrate this option:

6. metaphorical phrases containing the colour-terms *white* and *grey*, that refer to experienced/ old people:

*Ro.* cu păr alb [with white hair], a scoate peri albi [to make somebody grow white hair]  
*Ru.* сединка ума даѐт [grey hair brings along mind], седина в бороду - ум в голову  
[grey hair in the beard - mind in the head]  
*Eng.* grey hairs, to turn grey, a greybeard

Colour-based phrases may be an option to refer to other antonymic elements apart from youth – old age and experience – lack of experience. Health vs. sickness is one such pair. The former is conceptually associated with bright colours (of objects) such as *green, red, pink* (see 7. below), while the latter seems to call to mind the colour (or, rather, lack of colour) *white* (see 8, below):

7. idiomatic comparisons/metaphorical phrases containing the colour-terms *green, red* and *pink*, that refer to health:

*Ro.* verde ca bradul [green as a fir tree], roşu ca cocoşul [red as a rooster]  
*Ru.* красный молодец [un tanar rosu]  
*Eng.* keep the bones green; in the pink (of health)

8. idiomatic comparisons/ metaphorical phrases containing the colour-term *white*, that refer to lack of health:

*Ro.* alb ca varul [white as lime]/ ca peretele [as the wall]  
*Ru.* белый как стена [white as the wall]/ как полотно [as canvas]/ как смерть [as death]  
*Eng.* to be/ look white as a sheet/ a ghost, death

Conceptual mapping in cases 5. to 8. above reveal a dialectic/ antagonistic/ oppositional/ binary/ dual organization that may be explained primarily through the fact that it represents a direct reflection of operations based on opposite senses that the human mind often makes.

Colours are also components of phrases that express an attitude, a feeling, a mood, a reaction to something, etc., whether it is positive or negative.

Thus, in phrases bearing a negative connotation, in the sense that they refer to unpleasant situations, it is usually either cold colours or “loud” ones that are present, as the examples in 9. demonstrate:

9. metaphorical phrases containing colour terms, that refer to negative feelings, attitudes (e.g. sadness, melancholy, fear, etc.):

*Ro.* de inimă albastră [of blue heart], situație albastră [blue situation], a avea inimă neagră [to have a black heart], negru de supărare [black with sadness]  
*Ru.* чёрное сердце [black heart], чёрная меланхолия [deep melancholy], чёрная тоска [black sadness], чёрные мысли [dark thoughts]  
*Eng.* to get/have the blues, blue period

*Ro.* a vedea roşu în fața ochilor [to see red before one's eyes], ai se face verde înaintea ochilor [to see green before one's eyes], a se face negru la față [to turn black in the face]



*Ru.* красный цвет на быка действовать [like a red rag to a bull]  
*Eng.* to turn purple with rage, like a red rag to a bull, to see red, red with anger

*Ro.* a se face alb/ galben de spaimă [to turn white/ yellow with fear]  
*Ru.* белый как стена [white as a wall]/ как полотно [as canvas]  
*Eng.* to be/ look white as a sheet/ ghost/ death, to have a yellow streak

*Ro.* verde de invidie [green with envy], negru de ciudă [black with envy]  
*Ru.* позеленеть от злости [to became green with so much meanness], позеленеть от зависти [to became green with envy], чёрная зависть [black with envy]  
*Eng.* green with envy, green-eyed

*Ro.* a vedea totul/ lucrurile în negru [to see everything/ things in black], a fi într-o gaură neagră [to be in a black hole]  
*Ru.* видеть все в черном цвете [to see everything in black], видеть все в черных тонах [to see everything in shades of black], в чёрном свете [in black light]  
*Eng.* to be in a black hole

*Ro.* vânăt de frig [blue with cold]  
*Ru.* посинеть от холода [to turn blue with cold]  
*Eng.* blue with cold/ blue from the cold

A certain tendency of semantic polarization manifests itself at the conceptual level, so that the category of negative connotation phrases has a positive counterpart. A possible explanation for this, as far as colour-based phrases are concerned, may be that colour terms are symbols in their great majority and symbols are characterized by ambivalence, among other things, as we explained earlier. Thus, if there are lexical formulas that rely on colours to convey what communities generally and traditionally perceive as negative, there are also colour-based phrases whose meaning is positive. Unlike in the case of what may be counted on the negative side and builds on dark, cold, or loud colours, phrases with a positive meaning contain terms that designate soft, warm colours:

9. metaphorical phrases containing colour terms, that refer to positive feelings, attitudes, experiences (e.g. optimism):

*Ro.* a vedea lucrurile/ totul în roz [to see things/ everything in pink], a avea zile albe [to have white days], a trăi lumea albă [to live a white world]  
*Ru.* смотреть сквозь розовые очки [to look through rose-coloured glasses]  
*Eng.* look at smth. through rose-coloured glasses

LEGALITY IS WHITE and ILEGALITY IS BLACK are two opposing conceptual metaphors that constitute the scaffolding on which idiomatic/ metaphorical phrases such as those in 10. and 11. build:

10. metaphorical phrases containing the colour term *white*, that refer to what is legal:

*Ro.* bani albi [white money]

*Ru.* белая зарплата [white money]

*Eng.* white money

11. metaphorical phrases containing the colour-terms *black* and *grey*, that refer to what is illegal or morally wrong:

*Ro.* bani negri [black money], piață neagră [black market], preț negru [black price], (tranzacție) la negru [(transaction) in black]

*Ru.* чёрный рынок [black market], чёрная работа [black labour], чёрная биржа [illegal exchange], чёрная экономика [black economy]

*Eng.* black money, black/ grey market, black economy

Sometimes, the colour term is used to “soften” what is otherwise considered negative, unethical or immoral. A *white lie*, for example is a harmless and trivial lie, often told with good intentions, so as not to hurt somebody’s feelings; *white magic* is well-intended and what may seem like unexplainable in its case can actually be demonstrated on scientific grounds. The phrases have been transferred into Romanian as well, where they have taken the form of lexical and semantic calques – *minciună albă* and *magie albă*, respectively. On the contrary, what is meant as a *white*-based euphemism may sometimes function as a dysphemism actually: *white terror* is still terror, despite the attempt at linguistically disguising it into something less serious. It is a kind of blood shedding repression that many countries in the world experienced at some point in their history: France, as a movement against the French Revolution, Russia, as mass violence carried out by opponents of the Soviet Government during the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, Spain, as atrocities committed by the Nationalist movement during the Spanish Civil War and during Franco’s dictatorship, etc. (mentioned on wikipedia.org). Along the same lines, *the pink dollar* or *the pink pound*, i.e. money spent by gay people as a group, seems rather derogatory than neutral.

If white is not always what we know white is so to say, black is also not always black either, i.e. it may also bear positive connotations, contrary to the general expectation that it should be associated with something negative. *Negru ca abanosul* (‘black as ebony’), if said about hair in Romanian, for example, connotes extraordinary beauty and shyness. Similarly, *ochi negri ca noaptea* (‘eyes as black as the night’) are eyes that are immensely beautiful and mysterious and somebody who possesses a *black belt* (or is one) is someone who has achieved the highest level of skill in a martial art – the term is universally accepted, so that Romanian and Russian have it, too (as *centura neagră* and *чёрный пояс*, respectively). Stable lexical structures that contain the element *black* and that refer to various objects may also bear positive connotations, almost without variation across the three languages considered here: *чёрная икра/ icre negre/ black caviar*, *чёрный ящик/ cutia neagră/ black box*, *чёрный алмаз/ diamant negru/ black diamond*, *чёрный галстук/ black tie*, etc. “Positive” black is associated with elements of nature as well: e.g. *чёрное золото/ aurul negru/ black gold* (‘oil found underground’), *чёрное дерево* (‘ebony’), etc.

*White* and *black*, the only two colours that are perceived as the members of an antonymic pair, function as such in phrases that contain both of them simultaneously and that thus bring the idea of oppositeness very clearly to the fore. See, in this respect, the examples in 12. below:

12. metaphorical phrases that contain the colour-terms *white* and *black*, that highlight the idea of opposition:

*Ro.* a strange bani albi pentru zile negre [to save white money for black days]; ba e albă, ba e neagră [now it's white, now it's black]; a vedea lucrurile numai în alb și negru [to see things in white and black only], a face albul negru [to turn white into black]

*Ru.* называть белое чёрным [to call white black], написать чёрным по белому [to put down in black and white], белая денга про чёрный день [to save white money for black days]

*Eng.* in black and white

### 3. Conclusion

Although our analysis has covered only a small number of idiomatic/metaphorical phrases containing colour-terms, we hope that we have managed to at least hint at the fact that very often, either exactly the same colour-term or one that is of the same type (i.e. referring to a warm, bright, cold, etc. colour) functions as the source domain of conceptual configuration reflected in all three languages considered here. This brings about easiness in establishing equivalence and, at the same time, a correct perception of the situation or reality spoken about. Thus, in very many cases, though not all, similar extralinguistic facts are rendered by (approximately) the same linguistic means in the Russian, English and Romanian cultures, which may be considered proof of shared values, attitudes and principles of living. Further, similarities in this respect facilitate communication not only between the members of the same linguistic and cultural community, but also cross-linguistically and cross-culturally.

Semantic transparency is complemented by conceptual transparency. After all, the almost identical projection of reality into words in the languages considered may be explained through the very symbolism that colour-terms have, on the one hand, and through the extensive circulation of the phrases containing them, on the other.

The domains in which conceptualization is poured into colour-based phrases are also often almost equally diverse. Moreover, we have noticed the fact that, as various as the target domains may be, they are pretty much the same in the three languages, where they represent rather common, everyday than narrow, less frequent life contexts.

Our small-scale investigation presented here has certainly covered only a very small portion of the whole inventory of colour-based phrases in the three languages. However, our glance at the matter hopefully brings its contribution to highlighting the

worthiness of further analyzing this type of lexical items, so long as they speak loads about the mentality and culture of obviously anthropocentric communities.

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