

# A SEMANTIC-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF COLOR-RELATED PROVERBS IN ENGLISH, KAZAKH, AND UZBEK

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## Abstract

This paper explores the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of color-related proverbs in English, Kazakh, and Uzbek. As repositories of collective wisdom, proverbs are shaped by cultural experience and worldview, often embedding symbolic elements such as color. By analyzing selected proverbs, the study highlights how similar colors convey divergent meanings and perform various pragmatic functions across languages. The analysis reveals both cross-linguistic parallels and culturally specific interpretations.

**Keywords:** Color symbolism, cross-cultural pragmatics, proverbs, semantics, English, Kazakh, Uzbek, language and culture.

## Introduction

Proverbs are linguistic units that compress centuries of cultural experience and observation into a few words. Their brevity is compensated by rich semantic and pragmatic layers. Among the figurative elements in proverbs, colors serve as powerful cognitive and emotional triggers. The interpretation of colors varies not only across languages but also within different sociocultural contexts.



In English, for instance, *black* often symbolizes negativity or secrecy (e.g., “*blackmail*”, “*black sheep*”) (Allan, 2009), whereas in Central Asian cultures, *black* may symbolize resilience or suffering. Similarly, *white* in Western contexts typically implies purity or surrender (“*white wedding*”, “*wave the white flag*”), while in Uzbek and Kazakh languages it connotes nobility or good fortune.

This paper aims to analyze the semantic and pragmatic meanings of color-related proverbs across English, Kazakh, and Uzbek, shedding light on their symbolic roles and communicative functions.

#### Methods.

This study employed a **contrastive qualitative approach** to examine proverbs containing core color terms such as black, white, red, blue, yellow, and green in English, Kazakh, and Uzbek. The data were collected from a variety of reliable sources, including bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, academic linguistic publications, and curated folklore anthologies. The selected proverbs were analyzed at two interconnected levels to reveal both their underlying meanings and communicative functions.

At the **semantic level**, the analysis focused on identifying both denotative meanings—the literal reference of the color term—and connotative meanings, which reflect cultural associations and emotional undertones. This step aimed to uncover how specific colors function symbolically within each language tradition.

At the **pragmatic level**, the investigation explored the contextual usage of the proverbs, considering how speakers employ them in real-life discourse to convey intentions, express attitudes, or influence social interaction. Attention was given to the sociocultural background, speaker-hearer relationships, and typical communicative scenarios in which the proverbs are used.

This dual-layered method enabled a nuanced comparison of how color symbolism operates across different linguistic and cultural contexts, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, thought, and culture.

#### Results and Discussion

Black and White are the Symbolism of Duality. In English, the contrast between black and white often conveys a strong moral or emotional polarity. The proverb “The pot calls the kettle black” reflects the idea of hypocrisy, particularly when someone criticizes another for a fault they also possess (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2010). “Black day” evokes a sense of tragedy or personal misfortune, while “white lie” refers to a harmless deception, typically told to avoid causing offense. These uses illustrate how black and white are not only visual opposites but also symbolic representations of good and bad, truth and falsehood, or concealment and clarity. In Uzbek, the duality of black and white carries different cultural and emotional connotations. The saying “Qora kunlar o'tadi” reflects a collective resilience and belief in overcoming adversity, presenting black as a temporary challenge rather than an evil force. Conversely, “Oq niyat” embodies the concept of sincerity and pure intention, showing how white represents inner goodness and moral clarity.



Similarly, in Kazakh, color symbolism permeates cultural expressions and blessings. The phrase “Қара жол” indicates life’s difficult paths, highlighting black as a metaphor for sorrow or hardship. On the other hand, “Ақ жол” is a widely used phrase to wish someone success, safety, and a positive outcome, which reflects the uplifting and respectful tone associated with white in Turkic cultural traditions. These examples reveal that while the black-and-white binary is common across the three languages, its pragmatic application varies significantly. English tends to use white metaphorically to soften or justify actions, while Uzbek and Kazakh employ white in expressions of moral strength, blessings, and encouragement.

Red symbolizes Passion, Danger, and Celebration. In English, red often conveys intense emotional states, warnings, or criminal actions. The expression “Caught red-handed” implies being discovered in the act of wrongdoing, linking the color red to guilt and exposure. “Red flag” serves as a metaphor for danger or a signal of caution in both personal and professional contexts. Meanwhile, “Paint the town red” transforms red into a symbol of energetic celebration and wild enjoyment, suggesting an association between the color and unrestrained passion.

In contrast, in Uzbek culture, red tends to reflect beauty and individuality, as seen in the proverb “Qizil gul emasman, hammaga yoqay,” which conveys the idea that one cannot please everyone. Here, the red flower symbolizes uniqueness and the inherent subjectivity of taste. In this case, red serves not as a warning or danger signal, but as a positive assertion of identity and independence.

The Kazakh language includes vivid figurative use of red in expressions such as “ҚЫЗЫЛ сөз – ҚЫЗЫЛ от,” which translates to “Red words are red fire.” This phrase underscores the idea that speech can be powerful and potentially dangerous, comparing emotionally charged or provocative language to fire. These examples demonstrate that while red is emotionally charged in all three languages, its semantic field is broader in Uzbek and Kazakh, encompassing ideas of beauty, truth, and power in addition to risk or danger. The pragmatic effect of using red in speech varies from emotional exaggeration in English to philosophical reflection and social commentary in Kazakh and Uzbek contexts.

Blue and Green are considered as a symbol for Nature and Emotion. In English, blue is commonly associated with sadness or emotional distress. The expression “Feeling blue” is widely recognized as a metaphor for melancholy or depression. In contrast, green typically symbolizes jealousy, as seen in “Green with envy,” which paints a vivid image of emotional turbulence driven by desire or comparison.

In Uzbek, blue conveys a sense of elevation and happiness rather than sadness. The phrase “Ko‘k osmonda uchmoq” refers to experiencing extreme joy or being in an almost euphoric state, with the blue sky symbolizing freedom and boundless happiness. The expression “Yashil chiroq yoqildi” illustrates the metaphorical extension of green into social communication, where it is used to signify approval or the granting of permission, much like its function in traffic systems but adapted into broader idiomatic use.

Kazakh offers a similar semantic scope for blue and green, but with additional cultural depth. “Көк аспан ашық болсын” is a common blessing that translates as “May your blue sky be clear,” representing peace, safety, and prosperity. In this context, blue carries spiritual and



communal significance, rather than individual emotional expression. Green is also associated with growth and good health, though less prominent in traditional proverbs, it appears in modern language and is appreciated for its connection to nature and life.

The semantic divergence between the three languages is evident in these color metaphors. While English uses blue and green to reflect internal, often negative emotions, Uzbek and Kazakh use them to express collective hopes, joy, and well-being. The pragmatic role of these colors, therefore, differs significantly, with English favoring individualistic emotional expression and Turkic languages emphasizing social harmony and blessings.

Yellow means Ambiguous Connotations. Yellow is less frequently used in proverbs across all three languages, but it still carries symbolic weight. In English, “yellow-bellied” is a derogatory term meaning cowardly, implying that yellow is a color of weakness or fear. This expression reinforces the idea that certain colors can be used pejoratively to judge character or behavior. In Uzbek and Kazakh, yellow (sariq) is not commonly employed in proverbs but has symbolic associations in poetic language and seasonal references. It often denotes aging, autumn, or decline, and occasionally conveys nostalgia or a sense of the past. While these meanings are culturally significant, they have not become widely established in fixed proverbial expressions. Nonetheless, the color yellow maintains an emotional and temporal function in the figurative language of Central Asia.

The limited use of yellow suggests that its symbolic potential is recognized but not deeply embedded in pragmatic expressions like proverbs. This contrasts with more dominant colors such as black, white, or red, which have gained greater metaphorical and communicative traction across languages

Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Observations			
Color	English	Uzbek	Kazakh
Black	Negativity, hypocrisy	Suffering, hardship	Misfortune, sorrow
White	Purity, peace	Blessing, good intention	Nobility, blessing
Red	Emotion, crime	Beauty, truth	Fire, provocation
Blue	Sadness	Joy, dreams	Peace, spirituality
Green	Envy	Growth, permission	Growth, health

Proverbs reflect not just **linguistic patterns**, but the **cultural metaphors** and **pragmatic norms** of a speech community. For example, English uses color terms in individualistic contexts (e.g., emotions), while Uzbek and Kazakh often tie them to **collective wisdom or fate**. As Wierzbicka (1992) notes, “lexical universals are embedded in culture-specific scripts”, which is evident in how color metaphors are pragmatically employed across languages.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that while certain color associations (e.g., black=negative, white=positive) are shared across English, Kazakh, and Uzbek, their **semantic range** and **pragmatic functions** differ significantly. Color-related proverbs are cultural artifacts that not



only encode values but also guide social interaction. Recognizing these differences is crucial for linguists, translators, and language educators working in multilingual and multicultural settings. Further studies may explore how modern influences reshape traditional color symbolism in contemporary speech.

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