



MEANINGS OF COLOR ACROSS THE CULTURE

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Nowadays scholars do not argue about the fact that language is a specific element representing a particular culture. As idioms are a significant part of a linguistic system they must reflect culture and be characterized as culture specific. As the evidence for that may be numerous articles about the idiom translation problems as the idiom may suit one culture perfectly, whereas it may lose its figurativeness in the other culture.

Referring to Boers (2008) idioms correspond to our schemas in our brain and usually may be associated with cognitive linguistics as he is sure that idioms derive from our physical experiences. Whereas each culture (even each individual!) experiences the same phenomena in a different way idiom comprehension may vary from one culture to another. Boers (2008) also stresses that there are basic physical experiences which humanity experiences in the same manner, therefore comprehension of some idioms may appear not as a challenging task.

According to Yang (2010: 148) the geographical location of a culture plays a crucial role in idiom formation. People use language to speak about their daily life, Yang elaborates on the eating habits and hence he stresses that the representatives of western cultures tend to consume food which is rich in calories and is nutritious to keep the level of energy and make people feel warm, whereas those who represent eastern cultures consume more light food and that is reflected in the linguistic system.

Differently from the linguists mentioned above Guineng (2012:108) argues the view it is essential to focus on the differences among cultures, he claims that all cultures have a common ground and that analysis of idioms as representatives of culture-specific elements should start with the analysis of similarities across the





cultures.

Guineng (2012:109) also focuses on the factors which influence cultural differences. Geographical location, historical background and religion are the main elements to consider idioms as culture specific elements. Specifying on geographical location the type of the country plays an important role, whether the country is famous for sailing, agriculture or manufacture the more idioms related to the phenomenon will appear in the dictionaries and users' lexicons. The historical events the author means the customs of a particular culture, the presence of royal family will influence the language to reflect it in the idiomatic use, the type of country government will be reflected in the language. The people of former Soviet Union are familiar with such a phenomenon as such an epoch provided a numerous examples of the idioms which even have a special name – sovietisms. Coming back to Guineng (2012:111) religious views of a culture tend also to appear in phraseological units and as there is none such a religion which would suit all of the cultures misunderstandings will be present.

The importance of theory on conceptual metaphor is extremely important while talking about idioms and their relationship with the culture. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2006) state that each culture comprehends the same phenomenon in a different manner. They carried out an analysis of number perception in the English and German languages. The same phenomenon was brought out by the means of a different number, even though the cultures are not so extremely diverse. Scholars suggest the idea that all the idioms were based on one conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP, however the number were chosen differently as different numbers have a historical significance in different cultures, for instance number seven is more characteristic to Western cultures, whereas number nine is common to North-Europeans.

Bespontovaja (2010) stresses the fact that idioms not only reflect the culture but also determine it. She provides a clear example of a borrowed idiom from the Spanish language. The scholar speaks, that previously idiom which belonged only





to Spanish culture found its place in the Russian. La sangre azul which has a meaning of a blue blood is accepted in the Russian language and culture, moreover, the idiom determines the value of having a type of royal blood, which would distinguish a person from other people.

Idioms as culture specific elements cause numerous problems not only in intercultural communication but also in translation. Language acquisition is usually related to the acquisition of foreign culture as in many cases it helps to perceive the linguistic system in a better way. Even though each language possesses its individual traits, all languages have common elements, thus, idioms as culture specific elements could be perceived in an easier way if the acquisition starts from common and comes to specific.

For a long time, it was set that culture should be related to a particular area. The definition of culture used to focus on people belonging to a particular culture if they shared a land together today the concept of culture is understood in a broader sense. Anthropologists put a lot of effort to define culture, yet new studies still add new features which would help to identify what is a culture? Referring to Mead (2002) a clear picture the term culture was provided, she refers to it as a complex of behavior which was developed by the generation and successfully put into the following generations. Birukou, Blanzieri, Georgini and Giunchiglia (n. d.) collected a number of definitions of culture and provided their own; they conclude that culture must include such entities as behavior specific to a particular group of people, knowledge facts, ideas, believes and norms. Segall, Campbell and Herskovit (1996:1) concluded that social scientists no longer doubt whether human perception is a culturally specific element. Relying on that it could be claimed that cultures perceive various phenomena in a different manner.

Element of color could be considered as part of visual perception, hence relying on Segall, Campbell and Herskovits (1996) it could be presupposed that representatives of different cultures perceive colors differently. The current study focuses on two languages: the English language and the Uzbek language. The





culture of Western world is addressed through the English language, whereas relying on the geographical location the Uzbek language may belongs to the Eastern culture.

King (2005) looks at the color perception from a different angle, he tries to explain the perception of a visual spectrum referring back to the genetics, presupposing that with the development of human race the perception of color had changed. Speaking of a culture, he stresses the importance of going back to the times of ancestors when the distinction of colors was comparatively small in numbers. However, referring to Turner (n.d.) the color distinction represented by human ancestors cannot be related to culture. He specifies that color perception of human beings could be grouped into three classes: those which come from our ancestors, culture-specific perception of color and location/time-specific perception.

The evidence that color is a culture-specific element could be supported by simple explanation of the same color across different geographical locations. Turner (n.d.) in the study focused on non-European understanding of a color, he described the meanings the colors possess in the Middle East, including Pacific Rim countries and India. Dunn (n.d.) elaborated on the topic and provided a full picture of color perception comparing various cultures. Both scholars provide the explanation of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and brown. Dunn (n.d.) also speaks of black and white colors. Moreover, speaking of the colors it is impossible to illuminate color perception from the psychology point of view. Hence, the explanation provides not only the meanings of color perception from cultural point of view but also includes a psychological explanation provided by Wright (2004).

Both Turner and Dunn agree that red color in most of the cultures is associated with positive emotions such as love, luck, triumph, success or passion. However, it is impossible to argue that the cultures of South Africa relate red to mourning for Jews red may be related not only to the positive phenomena such as sacrifice but red is usually led by the meaning of sin. Red also serves as a warning





in Western cultures. Taking a look at description provided by Wright it comes clear that red color could be characterized from both angles. The positive side includes courage, strength, warmth, energy or survival. Whereas, the negative features the color may bring are related to defiance, aggression and strain.

According to Dunn (n.d.) orange, in Europe is usually associated with harvest and creativity, it may also be a specific color of a religion, just like it is in Ireland. Turner (n.d.) stresses that orange is also related to the religious movements in Asia as many monks prefer this color for their robes. In the Middle East orange is associated to the positive phenomena mostly to happiness, health or even immortality. In psychology, orange is associated with all type of comfort. However, if the color is used in many details it may be related to frustration, immaturity and deprivation. (Wright, 2004: 4).

Dunn and Turner stress that yellow is mostly a positive color. It may denote joy, royalty, courage and wisdom, but at the same time it is associated with weakness in European cultures, in Egypt the color is related to mourning. Wright (2004:3) refers to yellow color as an emotional color. The description provided by the psychologist includes such positive phenomena as optimism, self-esteem, emotional strength and friendliness. The scholar also stresses the fact that yellow color is considered to be the strongest color psychologically. However, it should be mentioned that it may also be related to fear, depression and even suicide.

Green described by Dunn (n.d.) in most of the cultures represents positive concepts. It may be related to life, hope, virtue, new birth and money. However, it should be noted that green in China sometimes could be associated with a betrayal. In China men who were caught cheating on their wives were obliged to wear green hats. Wright (2004:4) has own opinion on the meanings green color may possess. She stresses that at first it is a color of balance. It brings harmony, refreshment and peace. On the other hand, it is a color of blindness, boredom and stagnation.

An interesting fact provided by Turner (n.d.) about the blue color. He indicates that the word for blue entered the language later than for the other colors.





He also stresses that in India blue is linked to heaven, mercy, mystery and love. Referring to Dunn (n.d.) the color has a universal meaning and worldwide is understood as a safe color, however, the meaning of it varies from culture to culture. In Europe it may have a meaning of depression, in Iran it is related to mourning. For the representatives of Judaism the color means holiness, for the Middle East – protection. Wright (2004:3) categorizes the color as intellectual. In psychology it is associated with communication, trust, calm or duty. Most probably, this meaning could be related to the one accepted worldwide the meaning of safety, as it includes all the features related to blue color in psychology. Wright (2004:3) also indicates that blue is the most favorite color of the world, yet it may be linked to unfriendliness, coldness and lack of emotion.

Purple in regard to the religion is related to death or mourning. Most prominently it is represented in Catholicism and in the religions spread in Thailand, there purple is also associated with the color widows should wear while mourning (Dunn, n.d.). However, according to Dunn (n.d.) in Europe the color is related to royalty, Turner (n.d.) indicates that the same could be observed in Japan and China. In psychology according to Wright (2004:4) purple is also addressed as violet. It is related to luxury, quality, vision, truth and spiritual awareness. However, it may also be related to something cheap and nasty as well as decadence, suppression and inferiority.

Turner (n.d) indicates that brown in European cultures was viewed as drab, whereas in Japan it is linked to a particular beauty. In Arabic languages brown is related to coffee, as it has the same root. Wright (2004:5) relates brown seriousness, reliability and support. She indicates that it may also refer to lack of humor, sophistication as well as to heaviness.

According to Dunn (n.d.) white color is always related to the purity. It denotes marriage, angels and peace. However, this description is applicable to the Western cultures mostly. If we refer to the Eastern white acquires a new meaning, the meaning of death, funerals, unhappiness and mourning. In psychology white as





well as black color is believed to be an extreme, hence psychologists do not tend to describe them either in a positive or in a negative manner. Wright (2004:5) stresses that white refers to purity and hence, the concept of sterility may be negative as it is cold, unfriendly and independent.

Finally, speaking of a black color, it is another extreme. In European cultures it is always related to death, mourning, loss. However, it is not only European cultures which see black as a negative color, people of Thailand and representatives of Judaism associate it with bad luck, evil and unhappiness. Wright (2004:5) stresses that in psychology black has a meaning of glamour, sophistication, security. Even though in the culture perception of black it is possible to observe mostly negative phenomena in psychology it is not truly so. Black may refer to depression, coldness and heaviness.

All the colors mentioned above are chosen for the analysis by many scholars. However, the choice is not random. The researchers base their findings on the classification provided by Berlin and Kay (1969) as they indicated the presence of basic color terms. Generally, there are 11 basic color terms, pink and grey are illuminated from the description above. Berlin and Kay identified the characteristics the color term should possess in order to be named as a color term. They stressed the importance of

- 1) The meaning, as it should be easily recoverable from the meaning of its par (e.g. grayish);
- 2) the absence of signification in any other color term;
- 3) the term could be applied to an unlimited number of objects;
- 4) it must be psychologically easy recognizable.

Taking into account all the features the same color terms possess it is possible to draw a conclusion that the same color denotes a different phenomenon across different cultures, hence term culture should include not only traditions but also a geographical location as well as religious representation.

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