

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN IDIOMS WITH  
THE COLOR BLACK

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**Annotation;** *This article reviews idiomatic expressions in English and Russian that contain the colour term black. The paper has an overview character and is based on observations of examples presented in linguistic literature and monolingual dictionaries. It describes the semantic, cultural, and connotative features of such expressions and provides a brief comparison of their usage in the two languages. Particular attention is given to the symbolism of the colour black, which in idioms is often associated with meanings such as negativity, secrecy, and danger, and in some cases with elegance and authority. The observations presented in the article may be useful for translation studies, intercultural communication, foreign language teaching, and lexicography.*

**Keywords:** *black, idioms, English, Russian, contrastive analysis, semantics, culture.*

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**Аннотация:** *В данной статье рассматриваются фразеологические единицы английского и русского языков, содержащие цветовой компонент black («черный»). Работа носит обзорный характер и основана на изучении примеров, представленных в лингвистической литературе и одноязычных словарях. В статье описываются семантические, культурные и коннотативные особенности таких выражений, а также приводится краткое сопоставительное описание их употребления в двух языках. Особое внимание уделяется символике цвета черный, который в идиомах часто связан с такими значениями, как негативность, тайна, опасность, а также в отдельных случаях — с элегантностью и авторитетом. Рассматриваемые наблюдения могут представлять интерес для переводоведения, межкультурной коммуникации, преподавания иностранных языков и лексикографии.*

**Ключевые слова:** *черный цвет, идиомы, английский язык, русский язык, сопоставление, семантика, культура*

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Color idioms reflect deeply rooted relationships between language, culture, and cognition. Researchers note that colour terms play an important role in shaping the linguistic worldview and cultural symbolism of different societies (Brent Berlin & Paul Kay, 1969). Among colour metaphors, black is one of the most frequently used elements in idiomatic expressions in both English and Russian. It often carries a wide range of emotional meanings including moral, social, and aesthetic associations. Previous studies in cultural linguistics also emphasize that colour symbolism reflects cultural perception and social values (Svetlana Ter-Minasova, 2000). This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the semantic, cultural, and connotative features of black idioms in English and Russian,

identifying patterns of equivalence and divergence, and exploring their relevance for translation, intercultural communication, and language teaching.

Color idioms reflect deeply rooted relationships between language, culture, and cognition. Linguists emphasize that colour terms play an important role in the linguistic representation of cultural experience and human perception of the world (Berlin & Kay, 1969). In many languages, colour words are used not only in their literal meaning but also as metaphorical elements that express emotional, moral, and social evaluations.

Among the various colour metaphors, black occupies a particularly prominent position in both English and Russian idiomatic systems. The colour black is often associated with a wide range of symbolic meanings including danger, evil, secrecy, misfortune, and mourning, but in some contexts it may also express neutral or positive meanings such as financial stability or everyday activities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These meanings are formed through metaphorical thinking and cultural associations that develop within each linguistic community.

Despite the considerable interest in colour semantics and metaphorical language, studies specifically devoted to contrastive analysis of black idioms remain relatively limited. Comparative research of this type is particularly important for fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and foreign language teaching, since idioms often reflect culturally specific meanings that may not have direct equivalents in another language (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

In Russian and English phraseology, idioms containing the colour black represent an important part of the figurative vocabulary and reflect cultural perceptions of negative social phenomena.

Special attention was paid to idioms where black denotes negative phenomena (e.g., evil, mourning, misfortune, illegality) as well as those with neutral or positive associations (e.g., black coffee, being in the black).

This approach allowed a systematic analysis of black as a culturally significant focal color and its role in shaping idiomatic worldviews in English and Russian.

**Results and Discussion** The analysis of idioms containing the component black in English and Russian shows that black is predominantly associated with negative connotations in both languages, reflecting cultural perceptions of evil, misfortune, and danger. In Russian idioms, black frequently denotes: Negative emotional states and traits: черная душа (black soul) – an ungrateful person; черные мысли (black thoughts) – morbid or pessimistic thinking. Illegality and secretive actions: черный рынок (black market); черная доска (blacklist). Illness and misfortune: черная смерть (Black Death); черная немочь (falling sickness – epilepsy). Social or professional status: черное духовенство (black clergy) – regular monks; черная кость (black bone) – commoner, non-nobility. Difficult life events and tragic phenomena: черные страницы (black pages) – dark periods of life. In English idioms, black carries similar negative associations: Illegality and secretive activities: black market, black PR, blackmail. Danger, misfortune, and evil: Black Death; black magic; black widow. Sadness and mourning: black-robed, black day. Negative

evaluation: to paint something in black colours – to portray negatively; to blacken someone’s reputation.

Some idioms in both languages show neutral or positive connotations, often linked to practical or financial contexts: English: to be in the black – to be profitable; black coffee – coffee without milk. Russian: black bread (черный хлеб) – whole rye bread; черное золото (black gold) – oil. Cross-linguistic comparisons reveal several groups of idioms: Similar meaning and form: black market / черный рынок; black box / черный ящик; black widow / черная вдова. Similar meaning, different form: black and blue (English) – covered in bruises; in Russian, an equivalent expresses bruising differently. Unique idioms: Many idioms are culture-specific and have no direct analogues in the other language, reflecting historical, social, or cultural contexts.

Overall, black as a focal color consistently represents negativity, danger, secrecy, and misfortune across English and Russian idioms. Its semantic field is wide, including social status, profession, emotional states, illness, and tragic or illegal phenomena. The study confirms that black is central in the idiomatic worldview, with both universal and language-specific connotations. The study of idioms containing the component black in English and Russian demonstrates that black is a focal color with strong cultural and figurative significance. Across both languages, black predominantly conveys negative connotations, including evil, misfortune, secrecy, danger, and difficult life events. It is widely used to describe emotional states, social status, professions, illnesses, and unlawful or tragic phenomena. Cross-linguistic analysis reveals three main patterns: idioms with similar meaning and form, idioms with similar meaning but different form, and unique idioms reflecting culture-specific contexts. Some idioms carry neutral or positive connotations, particularly in financial or practical domains, yet these are less common.

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