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Factors Stimulating the Scientific Study of Color Lexemes in The Chinese And Uzbek Languages

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Abstract: This article examines the formation, development, and scientific investigation of the lexeme color, which occupies a significant place in the cultural heritage of every nation. Through a comparative analysis of the Chinese and Uzbek languages, the study explores the historical development of the concept of color, its definitions in explanatory dictionaries, and the major linguistic, cultural, and philosophical factors that have stimulated its scholarly investigation.

The article also highlights the similarities and distinctive features of color terminology in the two languages, thereby contributing to comparative linguistic and linguocultural research.

Keywords: Color, basic color terms, The Book of Songs, Five Elements, Five Directions, connotative layer, Yin and Yang.

Introduction: Color terms constitute one of the oldest, most stable, and simultaneously the most semantically active layers of a language's lexicon. As humans perceive the surrounding world primarily through vision, they distinguish and identify not only the shape, size, and movement of objects but also their colors. Consequently, although color-denoting units are grammatically classified as adjectives, semantically they form a complex lexical-semantic system closely associated with human cognition, sensory experience, evaluative judgment, cultural memory, and social communication.

In the Uzbek language, color terms perform functions far beyond merely describing the external characteristics of objects. They actively convey moral evaluation, emotional states, social relations, religious and aesthetic concepts, cultural traditions, and figurative meanings, thereby playing a significant role in both everyday communication and literary discourse.

The Modern Chinese Dictionary (现代汉语词典) defines the term 颜色 (yánsè, «color») as follows:颜色：指物体呈现出的色彩现象，是人们通过视觉感知到的红、黄、蓝、绿、 白、黑等不同色彩特征。 Translated into English, this definition may be rendered as follows: Color refers to the visual characteristic of an object produced through the interaction of light with its surface and perceived by the human visual system. It is manifested in various color categories such as red, yellow, blue, green, white, and black.

In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, the word rang («color») is defined as a borrowing from Persian meaning "hue" or "pigment" and is regarded as one of the principal means of expression and representation in painting.

In Chinese, the word for "color" consists of two syllables and is pronounced 颜色 (yánsè). When referring to a specific color, only the second morpheme 色 (sè) is attached to the corresponding color morpheme. Examples include 黑色 (black), 白色 (white), 红色 (red), and many others.

The history of Chinese color terminology can be traced back more than two thousand years to classical works such as The Book of Songs (诗经 Shījīng), where color expressions were already employed, although they were limited to traditional Chinese color terminology. Subsequently, with the rapid development of the silk industry, the number and diversity of color terms increased considerably. Nevertheless, the systematic scientific study of color terminology did not emerge until 1969, when Brent Berlin and Paul Kay introduced it as an independent field of linguistic research. In their influential work Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution, they established the scientific relationship between language and color laid the theoretical foundations for subsequent cross-linguistic studies.

From the late 1980s through the 1990s, research on color terminology reached its peak. During this period, numerous comparative studies were conducted with the aim of identifying linguistic and cultural differences and promoting intercultural communication. Among the scholars who have made substantial contributions to this field is Professor Yang Yonglin of Tsinghua University, whose systematic and interdisciplinary research has significantly advanced the study of color terminology from sociolinguistic and cognitive perspectives. During the 1990s, Yang Yonglin conducted research focusing on Chinese college students learning English at the university level, with particular emphasis on their cognition and understanding of color codes within the context of English language acquisition. As a result of these studies, he published one monograph and one scholarly article devoted to this subject.

The article, published in 2002, is entitled “A Study on the Cognitive Patterns of Chinese Color Expressions among Chinese Students” (**中国学生**汉语色彩语码认知模式研究). The monograph, published in 2004, is titled “Sociolinguistic Studies: Culture, Color, and Thought” 《(**社会**语言学研究：文化·**色彩**·**思**维篇)》. These publications have made a substantial contribution to the development of research on color terminology from sociolinguistic, cognitive, and intercultural perspectives.

The rich cultural heritage of Chinese civilization has profoundly shaped the semantic and cultural content of color terminology in modern Chinese. This influence is primarily reflected in the system of Basic Color Terms (**基本**颜色词), which is founded upon the Yin–Yang doctrine (**阴阳学**说), representing the complementary and opposing forces of nature, and the Five Elements Theory (**五行**).

The ancient Chinese concepts of the Five Directions (**五方**) and the Five Elements (**五行**) are mutually complementary. The Five Directions refer to the spatial division of the universe into five principal directions: east, west, south, north, and the center. The Five Elements, in turn, comprise wood, metal, fire, water, and earth. Together, these philosophical systems constitute the theoretical foundation of the Basic Color Terms (**基本**颜色词), which include red, white, yellow, black, and green. These colors represent not only visual categories but also embody philosophical, cosmological, and cultural meanings that have significantly influenced the development of Chinese linguistic thought.

In Uzbek linguistics, the concept of basic color terms generally refers to common, simple, independent, and widely used color names. Such lexical units are not intrinsically associated with the names of particular objects, are not restricted to specialized terminological fields, and serve as productive bases for semantic extension within the language. Accordingly, the lexemes oq (white), qora (black), qizil (red), sariq (yellow), ko‘k (blue), and yashil (green) constitute the core of the Uzbek color lexicon. Morphologically, they are primary or near-primary lexical units; semantically, they are highly polysemous; and stylistically, they function actively across neutral, literary, colloquial, and phraseological registers.

When interpreting basic color terms as a lexical system, it is essential to consider not only their individual dictionary meanings but also their systematic interrelationships.

Color terms collectively form a semantic field in which lexical units are interconnected through antonymic oppositions, synonymic series, gradational relationships, figurative meanings, phraseological expressions, and other associative links. For example, white and black represent opposing semantic poles;

light and dark indicate gradational distinctions; qizil, alvon, and qirmizi demonstrate synonymic proximity; while ko‘k, moviy, and zangori illustrate stylistic and semantic differentiation within the same semantic field. Consequently, in the Uzbek language, basic color terms should not be regarded as a mere collection of lexical items but rather as a coherent semantic microsystem characterized by an internally organized structure.

The historical development of color terminology in the Uzbek language is closely associated with the Common Turkic lexical stratum. In ancient Turkic written monuments, oral folklore, and classical literature, color-denoting lexical units expressed not only chromatic characteristics but also such concepts as direction, social status, age, social position, religious belief, joy, mourning, courage, virtue, and evil. Mahmud al-Kashgari’s “Diwan Lughat al-Turk” is one of the most significant sources demonstrating the antiquity of color terminology in the history of the Turkic languages. The lexical material presented in this work reveals that color terms have historically maintained a close semantic relationship with objects, nature, human conditions, and social relations.

The system of basic color terms in Uzbek consists of two interrelated semantic layers. The first is the denotative layer, which directly denotes color. The second is the connotative layer, comprising figurative, symbolic, evaluative, and associative meanings that have developed on the basis of these color terms. For instance, the denotative meaning of white is associated with light-colored objects such as snow, milk, and cotton, whereas its connotative layer encompasses such semantic features as purity, honesty, blessing, prayer, and good intentions. Likewise, the denotative meaning of black is linked to dark-colored objects such as coal, smoke, and night, while its figurative meanings include sorrow, danger, evil, mourning, and, in certain contexts, simplicity and commonality.

In contemporary Standard Uzbek, the evolution of color terminology can be observed in three principal directions. The first is the stabilization of the ancient basic color terms, in which lexical units such as white, black, red, yellow, blue, and green occupy the central position within the color lexicon. The second direction is the semantic expansion of color terms through the development of figurative, metaphorical, symbolic, and evaluative meanings. The third involves the increasing productivity of morphological and lexical derivation. Derived forms such as oqish («whitish»), qizg'ish («reddish»), sarg'ish («yellowish»), ko'kimtir («bluish»), qoramtir («blackish»), oppoq («pure white»), qip-qizil («bright red»), sap-sariq («bright yellow»), ko'mko'k («deep blue»), yam-yashil («vivid green»), as well as compound color terms including kulrang («gray»), havorang («sky blue»), bug'doyrang («wheat-colored»), and tillarang («golden»), contribute to the internal differentiation of the Uzbek color system.

The classification of color-denoting units as adjectives merely reflects their grammatical status. From a semantic perspective, however, these lexical units belong to a broad conceptual domain.

In Uzbek, color terms perform numerous linguistic and cultural functions, including describing objects, portraying human conditions, expressing moral evaluation, conveying emotional states, symbolizing religious and ritual concepts, and aestheticizing representations of nature.

Therefore, the study of color terminology should encompass not only lexical meaning but also its stylistic, phraseological, and linguocultural dimensions. Another distinctive characteristic of the Uzbek color system is the organization of its lexical field into central and peripheral components. The center comprises the widely used, independent, and general basic color terms—white, black, red, yellow, blue, and green.

The periphery consists of lexical items denoting more specific shades or stylistically marked color expressions, including alvon («scarlet»), qirmizi («crimson»), pushti («pink»), moviy («azure»), zangori («cerulean»), lojuvard («ultramarine»), binafsha («violet»), feruza («turquoise»), zumrad («emerald»), zarrin («golden»), jigarrang («brown»), kulrang («gray»), and novvotrang («amber»), among others. This center–periphery relationship demonstrates that the Uzbek color lexicon constitutes an open, dynamic, and historically stratified lexical system.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that color terminology represents one of the oldest and most semantically productive lexical domains in any language. Color terms serve not only to denote the external characteristics of objects but also to reflect the historical development, cultural values, national

mentality, and worldview of a people. A comparative investigation of Chinese and Uzbek color terminology reveals that the formation and evolution of color systems in both languages have been profoundly influenced by the perception of nature, philosophical traditions, and ethnocultural factors.

The findings of this study indicate that the Chinese color system was fundamentally shaped by the ancient doctrines of Yin–Yang (阴阳, yīn-yáng) and the Five Elements Theory (五行, wǔxíng). The system of Basic Color Terms (基本颜色词) established within this philosophical framework defines not only the denotative meanings of color terms but also their symbolic and conceptual significance. Consequently, Chinese color lexemes are actively used across all layers of the language, exhibiting high semantic productivity in the formation of new lexical items, the development of metaphorical and metonymic meanings, and the expression of linguocultural concepts.

Similarly, in Uzbek, color terminology originates from the ancient Turkic linguistic heritage, and its semantic development has been profoundly influenced by the traditional way of life, customs, religious beliefs, and artistic thought of the Uzbek people. In particular, the lexemes white, black, red, yellow, blue, and green constitute the core of the Uzbek color system and have generated numerous metaphorical, symbolic, and evaluative meanings. The simultaneous development of both denotative and connotative meanings confirms that the Uzbek color lexicon represents a semantically rich, multifaceted and dynamic lexical system.

The analysis further demonstrates that, in both Chinese and Uzbek, color terms should not be regarded as isolated lexical units but rather as interconnected components of a unified semantic field. They form an integrated lexical system through antonymic, synonymic, gradational, and associative relationships. The central position occupied by the basic color terms, together with the formation of numerous derivative lexical units and the continuous development of figurative meanings, underscores the significant role of color terminology in the evolution of both languages. From this perspective, color lexemes should be interpreted not merely as nominative units but also as conceptual and linguocultural phenomena.

From a comparative perspective, the philosophical and cosmological foundations of color terminology are more systematically developed in Chinese, whereas in Uzbek their semantic evolution has been shaped primarily by the everyday life of the people, national customs and traditions, folklore, and artistic thought. Nevertheless, in both languages, color terms function as universal linguistic units that reflect human perception of the world, criteria of social evaluation, and cultural values.

Therefore, the study of color terminology contributes not only to revealing the internal principles governing the lexical-semantic system but also to elucidating the interrelationship between language and culture, as well as the ways in which national mentality and conceptual worldview are reflected in linguistic units. Consequently, comparative linguistic and linguocultural investigations of color lexemes in the Chinese and Uzbek languages are of considerable scholarly significance for clarifying the evolution of color concepts, identifying the mechanisms underlying their semantic development, and determining both the common and distinctive features of the cultural cognition of the two peoples.

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