

Lela Ebralidze

COLOR IDIOMS AND THEIR GEORGIAN EQUIVALENTS

Abstract

The subject of the present article is color idioms in English, their classification based on semantic transparency, stability of form, connotation and the ability to be translated into Georgian. In regard to translation, special attention is paid to the transfer of images contained in the original idioms into the target language. Considering the specific character of idioms, particularly color idioms, different methods of translation have been suggested including finding the exact or close equivalents of transparent, universal idioms. Other strategies used with more opaque expressions are finding the expressions whose constituent parts are in some way associated with the colors mentioned in the original expressions. Paraphrasing, replacing color idioms with textually/dynamically equivalent expressions having the same value and function in Georgian, and calquing are other possible methods.

Key words: color idioms, semantic transparency, universal idioms, translation strategies.

Introduction

1. Definition

In Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, the term idiom is defined simply as “an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts. Other definitions provided by different scholars sound quite similar:

- “An idiom can be defined as a number of words which, when taken together, have a different meaning from the individual meanings of each word”; (Seidl&McMordie 1988: 12–13);
- “Two or more words together that, as a unit, have a special meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the words separately” (Brenner 2003: 4–5);

- Idioms are “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components” (Baker 1992: 63).

2. *Classification*

Idioms are considered as more vivid and effective than conventional, non-idiomatic expressions. There have been several attempts to categorize them, for instance, Fernando, distinguishes three sub-classes: pure idioms are non-literal, containing the words used figuratively; semi-idioms are made up from literal and non-literal parts, while literal idioms are transparent because they can be interpreted based on the meanings of their parts. (Strakšiene 2009: 14). Similar classification employing different terms is based on the degree of compositionality and semantic transparency. According to their compositionality, idioms can be non-compositional, partially compositional, and fully compositional. In non-compositional idioms, no relations between the idiom’s constituents and the idiom’s meaning can be discerned, while such relationship to some extent exists in partially compositional idioms, and the meaning of fully compositional idioms can be inferred from their constituent parts. (Glucksberg 2001: 73).

Kvetko classifies idioms based on their fixedness or stability. He distinguishes unchangeable idioms, which are completely fixed and cannot undergo any modifications (e.g. once in a blue moon, red tape), and changeable idioms allowing certain variations, e.g. a skeleton in the closet (American English) – a skeleton in the cupboard (British English) (Kvetko 2009: 104–105).

2. Data Collection and Analysis

2.1. Color idioms

Idioms are used a lot by native speakers, while for those studying English as a second language they can be rather confusing. However, since it is impossible to avoid them, learners of English face the need to be familiar with the meaning and usage of English idioms, which are very many. Idioms add color to the English speech and writing, and this is even more true for the expressions associated with different colors. Hence, since it is impossible to cover all the idioms in one paper, I have confined my research to color expressions. Below is given the list of 90 idioms with different colors mentioned in them. Each of them is accompanied with a definition and examples.

- 1. See the colour of someone's money - To prove that someone has enough money for something**
 - The antiques dealer wouldn't let me touch the items until he saw the colour of my money.
- 2. Chase rainbows - When someone tries to get or achieve something that is difficult or impossible**
 - My brother doesn't think realistically. He just chases rainbows all the time.
- 3. With flying colors - To complete something with great distinction, and excellent results**
 - I didn't think she would do so well in the final exam, but she passed it with flying colors!
- 4. To paint in bright/dark colors - To describe something in a flattering or unflattering way**
 - John was struggling financially after moving home, but he painted everything in the brightest colors, and made it look like he was absolutely fine!
- 5. To be kept in the dark - Keeping a secret from someone, shielding the truth**
 - He kept everyone in the dark about the true extent of his illness.
- 6. Black and white - To judge everything as either one way or the other, good or bad.**
 - Our boss always thinks that everything is straightforward, but he doesn't realize that this whole situation is not as **black and white** as he thinks!
- 7. Put something down in black and white - To write or have something written down on paper for confirmation or evidence**
 - I don't understand why you don't believe me! Look, it's written here in black and white!
- 8. Black and blue - Used to describe something that is badly bruised**
 - John's face was **black and blue** after the boxing match.
- 9. Black eye - A bruise near one's eye**
 - Fred came home with a horrible **black eye** today, but he won't tell us what happened!
- 10. Black out - Either darken by putting out or dimming the lights, or to lose consciousness.**
 - We had a huge **black out** here last night, the whole town was out of power for about 7 hours!
- 11. Black market -A term used for places where goods are illegally bought and sold for a profit.**
 - Jerry used to sell cigarettes from South America on the **black market**!
- 12. Blacklist someone -To write someone's name on a list if they break any rules, and ban them from having the opportunity to take part again**

- “I was in a lot of debt a while ago, and was unable to pay it all back, so I’ve been **blacklisted**. I’m not allowed to get a mortgage in my own name.
- 13. Pot calling the kettle black** - when the person who criticizes someone else is as guilty as that person She kept telling me that I shouldn’t do that, but that’s like the **pot calling the kettle black**, as she does it herself too!
- 14. Blackmail someone** - To extort or take money from someone by using their secrets against them and threatening to reveal it to others
- He has been **blackmailing me** for months with some photos that I didn’t know he had.
- 15. In someone’s black books** -To be in disgrace or in disfavor with someone
- After that argument yesterday, he will be **in a lot of people’s black books** for quite some time!
- 16. Black tie event/affair** - a formal event where male guests wear black bow ties with tuxedos or dinner jackets
- The award’s ceremony will be a **black tie event**, so I’ll have to buy a smart suit.
- 17. Black sheep** - a person who is the ‘odd one out’ of a group, and doesn’t fit in with others. This could also be used to talk about someone who is a disgrace or embarrassment to their group.
- I have always been the **black sheep** in my family, I have a completely different personality to all of them, and we don’t even look the same!
- 18. In the black** - Meaning successful or profitable
- Their company has been **in the black** ever since the new CEO took over, and changed it all around!
- 19. Pitch black** - Another term for somewhere that is very dark, and you are unable to see anything
- I was afraid to go downstairs, the whole house was **pitch black**, and very quiet.
- 20. Out of the blue** - to appear out of nowhere without any warning.
- You won’t believe it but Sarah called me **out of the blue** yesterday, and told me she’s coming to visit! How unexpected!
- 21. Blue pencil** -To censor something, or limit the information that is shared
- The reports about how soldiers were being treated abroad had been **blue-penciled** by the authorities.
- 22. A blue-eyed boy** - A critical description of a boy or young man who is always picked for special favors by someone in a position of higher authority.

- He is such a **blue-eyed boy!** I don't like that the manager always treats him as if he is special, it is not fair on the rest of us!
- 23. A bolt from the blue** -When some unexpected bad news is received
 - It was a complete **bolt from the blue** for us, we had no idea that they were having problems, let alone getting divorced!
- 24. Blue blood** - Used to describe someone from a noble, aristocratic or wealthy family
 - Many of the **blue bloods** in our town were invited to the royal wedding.
- 25. Blue ribbon** - To be of superior quality or distinction, the best of a group
 - A **blue ribbon** panel of experts were invited to investigate the extraordinary remains.
- 26. Feel blue** - When someone looks or feels depressed or discontented
 - What's that the matter with you today? **You seem really blue.** Is there something you'd like to talk about?
- 27. Blue in the face** - To try really hard to win someone's agreement, but usually end unsuccessfully
 - I kept trying to convince him that it was a good idea until I was **blue in the face**, but he's so stubborn, he just kept disagreeing with me!
- 28. Once in a blue moon** - To occur extremely rarely, or only once in a lifetime
 - My sister is working in Africa, she hardly ever has the time to call us. My parents only hear from her **once in a blue moon.**
- 29. Blue collar** - Used to describe men used as laborers, or factory workers
 - The got rid of a lot of the **blue-collar** workers during the recession.
- 30. To be green** - Used to describe someone who is immature, or inexperienced
 - **He can be rather green** sometimes. I don't think he's ready to be promoted to a higher position yet.
- 31. Green with envy** - Used to describe someone who is extremely jealous, full of envy
 - When we were children, my older brother always used to get **green with envy** if my dad bought something for me and not for him.
- 32. Give someone the green light** - When someone receives permission to go ahead with something
 - **We have been given the green the light** by the Marketing Executive to go ahead with the new advertising campaign.

33. Grass is always greener on the other side - Used to describe a place that is far away, and better than, where you are now, or another person's situation that is very different from your own

- He realized that **the grass is always greener on the other side** when he saw that his new job wasn't perfect, and had its own problems too.

34. Green thumb/green finger - Used to describe someone with a talent for gardening, having the ability to make plants grow

- This garden used to look so beautiful when my mum lived here. She definitely had a **green thumb**. I wish I did too!

35. A golden opportunity - An opportunity that may never present itself again

- Think carefully about what you're going to do, this is a **golden opportunity**, and you don't want to mess it up!

36. A golden handshake - A large sum of money that is paid to a retiring manager or director, or to a redundant worker

- The company Chairman received a **huge golden handshake** when he retired.

37. Golden boy - The term given to a young man idolized for a great skill, usually in sport.

- By many of his fans, Wayne Rooney is seen as the **golden boy** of his football team.

38. The golden rule – the most important rule or principle to remember when one something.

- Always keep an eye on your opponent. **It is the golden rule.**

39. 57. See pink elephants - When someone sees things that are not really there, because they are in their imagination

- Anyone who hears his story thinks **he sees pink elephants**. It's just such a far-fetched story, and very hard to believe.

40. In the pink of something - Meaning in very good health

- My grandmother looked ever so well when I saw her, **she was in the pink of condition**.

41. To be shown the red card - This derives from football terminology, and means to be dismissed from your job

- The company Accountant **was shown the red card**, after they found out he was using company money for personal gain.

42. To be in the red - To have an overdraft, be in debt to your bank, or owe an institution some money

- I've got three credit card bills to pay off at the moment. **I hate being in the red!**

43. To be out of the red - To be out of debt

- **Our company is finally out of the red now.** We've managed to pay back our loan, and now we're making profit!

44. A red flag - A signal that something is not working properly or correctly

- The fallen trees along the road raised **a red flag** for the safety inspectors.

45. Beet red - Also used to describe dark red, usually the colour of a face (derives from beetroot)

- I could see my son up on the stage, his little face was **beet red!**

46. Red hot - Something new and exciting, creating much demand

- The new video game is **red-hot**. Some fans have been waiting outside stores for days, to get a hold of them!

47. Red herring - An unimportant matter that misleads everyone and draws attention away from the main subject

- Unfortunately that witness was just **a red herring**. She had no justification to her story, and it was a waste of valuable time.

48. Catch someone red-handed - To catch someone in the act of committing a crime

- He kept lying to me about where he was going in the evenings, so yesterday I followed him and **caught him red-handed**. He was with another woman!

49. Red in the face - To become embarrassed

- I went **red in the face** when the teacher told me off in front of everyone for arriving late!

50. Red-eye - A journey that leaves late at night and arrives early in the morning

- We had to catch the **red-eye** flight last night, and I'm completely **exhausted** now.

51. Red-letter day - A day that is memorable because of some important event

- The day I graduated was **a red-letter day** for my mum, she still talks about it today!

52. To look through rose-colored/tinted spectacles/glasses - When someone sees things in an overly flattering or over-optimistic light

- Sarah doesn't understand what it's like for us. She has always **seen everything through rose-tinted glasses** because her parents spoilt her so much when she was young!

53. To see red - To react with uncontrollable rage against someone or something

- John **saw red** when he heard someone shouting at his mother.

54. Red tape - The term used for bureaucratic delay, or excessive formalities, and attention to rules and regulations, often resulting in injustice to the ordinary citizen

- I just want to start my own business, but the amount of **red tape** involved is so frustrating, that it almost makes me want to give up!

55. To see the red light - To recognize approaching danger. The red light is referred to as a danger signal

- When I had a minor heart attack last year, **I saw the red light** and realized that I had to quit smoking, and improve my health.

56. Paint the town red - To go out and have a really good time at a party

- I've managed to get a babysitter for this weekend. Let's go and **paint the town red!**

57. Roll out the red carpet - To greet a person with great respect, and give them a big, warm welcome

- When Barack Obama came to visit our school, we **rolled out the red carpet** for him.

58. Red-carpet treatment - (Similar to the one above) To receive special or royal treatment, and be received with a big, warm welcome

- My aunt always gives us the **red-carpet treatment** when we go to visit her.

59. The silver screen - A term for the cinema

- Do you fancy going to watch that movie on **the silver screen** tonight?

60. Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth - Meaning born into a rich family

- I don't think Kelly has ever had a job. She was **born with a silver spoon** in her mouth.

61. To be given something on a silver plate/platter - When something is offered to someone wholeheartedly (in a metaphorical sense)

- **I offered my heart to him on a silver platter**, and he turned it down.

62. As white as a sheet - When someone is in a state of great fear or anxiety

- Harold are you alright? You're **as white as a sheet**, what's the matter?

63. Raise a white flag - This indicates that one has accepted defeat and surrenders to the other party

- There was such a heated debate going on in the conference room, they wouldn't back down! **I just raised my white flag** in the end.

64. Whitewash something - To cover up or gloss over faults or wrongdoings

- The government was accused of trying **to whitewash the scandal** over charity pay-outs.

65. White elephant - A term used for a useless possession, something that is of no use

- My mum bought a new CD player for me, but it's a **white elephant**. I don't need it, I don't even have any CDs!

66. White as a ghost - Used to describe someone who is very pale because of pain, fear, shock or illness

- I didn't think the movie was that scary, but my sister was **as white as a ghost!**

67. A white lie - A 'harmless' lie told in order to be polite and avoid hurting someone's feelings

- I just wanted to get out of work so I told my boss a **little white lie**, and said I had a doctor's appointment.

68. White collar - A term used for office workers that traditionally wear white shirts with a collar.

- We have a lot of vacancies for **white-collar** workers, but hardly anyone is applying for them!

69. Yellow-bellied - Someone who is seen as a coward or extremely timid

- There is no point in asking him what to do. He is a **yellow-bellied coward**, and won't stand up for what is right!

70. A yellow streak - Someone who has cowardice in their character

- He has always had a **big yellow streak** running down his back, don't expect him to change now!

3. Methodology

Based on the above material an experiment was carried out to classify the listed color idioms according to their compositionality. The experiment involved 30 upper-intermediate (B2) level Georgian learners of English, who were given the colour idioms with the accompanying examples (the context) but no definitions. Their task was to write the meanings of all the idioms.

4. Findings and Results

As the results of the experiment were summed up, the color idioms were divided into three groups according to the correct answers provided by the most students. Hence we got a table given below:

Compositional idioms	Partially compositional idioms	Non-compositional idioms
Chase rainbows	See the colour of someone's money	With flying colors
To be kept in the dark	Out of the blue	Black out

To paint in bright/dark colors	Blacklist someone	Blackmail someone
Black and white	Black sheep	In the black
Put something down in black and white	Black and blue	Blue pencil
Pot calling the kettle black	Men/boys in blue	Blue ribbon
Black eye	A blue-eyed boy	Feel blue
Black tie event/affair	Blue collar	Once in a blue moon
Pitch black	White collar	Green thumb/green finger
Black market	Blue in the face	A golden handshake
In someone's black books	A grey area	See pink elephants
A bolt from the blue	Red hot	To be in the red
Blue blood	To be green	To be out of the red
Give someone the green light / get the green light	Catch someone red-handed	Red herring
Grass is always greener on the other side	Red-eye	To see red
Green with envy	To see the red light	Red tape
A golden opportunity	A red flag	Paint the town red
Golden boy	Whitewash something	Roll out the red carpet
A golden rule		Red-carpet treatment
To be shown the red card		Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth
Beet red		White elephant
Red in the face		Yellow-bellied
Red-letter day		A yellow streak
To look through rose-colored/tinted spectacles/glasses		
The silver screen		
To be given something on a		

silver plate/platter		
As white as a sheet, white as a ghost		
Raise a white flag		
A white lie		

Through analysis of the three groups it becomes obvious that the idioms contained in the first group are quite transparent as the words from which they are made up are used in their literal meaning. An important factor which accounts for their being fully compositional is their universal character, which also makes them much easier to translate than partially compositional and non-compositional idioms. Hence, finding their equivalents in other languages, in this case in Georgian, does not require much effort. For example, to put something down in black and white - შავით თეთრზე; black as night, pitch black - კუპრივით შავი; black market - შავი ბაზარი; blue blood - ცისფერი სისხლი; beet red, red in the face - სახე აჭარხლებული; A bolt from the blue – მეხი მოწმენდილ ცაზე; A golden rule - ოქროს წესი; look through rose-colored/tinted spectacles/glasses - ცხოვრებისთვის ვარდისფერი სათვალით ყურება; the silver screen - ცისფერი ეკრანი; to be given something on a silver plate/platter - ხონჩით მირთმევა; Give someone the green light / get the green light - მწვანე შუქის ანთება; as white as a sheet, white as a ghost - მიტკალივით თეთრი/გაფითრებული; a white lie - უწყინარი ტყუილი etc.

As for the color idioms belonging to the remaining two groups, it is more difficult to guess their meanings, find their equivalents and translate them into Georgian. Unlike the compositional color idioms, in their translations it is often impossible to preserve the images contained in the original expressions, e.g. see the colour of someone's money – დარწმუნდე იმაში, რომ (ვიღაცას) ფული ნამდვილად აქვს; a black sheep - ოჯახის ან ჯგუფის შემარცხვენელი წევრი; to catch someone red-handed - დანაშაულზე წასწრება; a blue-eyed boy - ფავორიტი; a golden handshake - ვინმესთვის თანხის გადახდა, რათა მან დატოვოს სამსახური; red-carpet treatment - საზეიმო

მიღება; to see red - ძალიან გაბრაზება; red tape - ბიუროკრატია; red herring - თვალის ასახვევი მანევრი; see pink elephants - სიმთვრალისგან ჰალუცინაციების ქონა; a white elephant - რამე ძალიან ძვირად ღირებული, რასაც პრაქტიკული სარგებელი არ მოაქვს; yellow-bellied - მშიშარა; a yellow streak - მხდალობის, ან გამცემლობისკენ მიდრეკილება.

It is also noteworthy, that unlike the compositional idioms, most of the partially compositional, and especially, non-compositional idioms are difficult to interpret without getting familiar with their etymology. Below is given the history of several expressions:

To do something **once in a blue moon** is to do it very rarely, e.g. “That company puts on a good performance only once in a blue moon.” The phrase refers to the appearance of a second full moon within a calendar month, which actually happens about every thirty-two months.

The idiom “**with flying colors**” originated with the practice of victorious ships flying flags, or “colors,” from their masthead as they sailed back into port, announcing their victory. To be flying the colors meant the ship had won.

The expression “**in the red**” derives from the practice of using red ink to denote debt or losses on financial balance sheets. Likewise, businesses that are financially solvent are described as “**in the black**”.

As a result of the analysis it becomes clear that the idioms involving the same colors can have different connotative meanings and can be associated with very different ideas. As an example we can classify the meanings of the following “red color” expressions: “roll out/put out a red carpet”, “red-carpet treatment”, “to be out of the red”, “red-letter day”, “paint the town red”, “red hot” have positive connotation, while “red rag to the bull”, “red tape”, “to see red”, “a red flag”, “to see the red light”, “on red alert”, “red herring, ” “to be shown the red card”, “to be in the red”, “not to have a red cent” (have no money at all), “red in the face”, “red as a beetroot/ beet red”, “catch someone red-handed”, “red-eye” have negative meaning.

A close analysis of color idioms makes it clear that the universal (mostly compositional) idioms, like “red rag to the bull” (ხარისთვის წითელი ნაჭრის აფრიალება), red in the face (წამოწითლებული, დარცხენილი), to be shown the red card (წითელი ბარათის ჩვენება, გადატანითი მნიშვნელობით სამსახურიდან განთავისუფლება), in someone’s black books (შავ სიაში), raise a white flag (თეთრი დროშის აღმართვა, დანებება, კაპიტულაცია), paint in dark colors (მუქ ფერებში დახატვა), black and blue (სულმთლად დალურჯებული) etc. are easier to translate as they are more transparent than others and have counterparts in the target language. So, such idioms are transferred to another language as the expressions bearing the same images, while the translations of other idioms cannot be expected to be metaphoric. However, sometimes it is still possible to find the equivalents that may not necessarily contain the color words, but the words associated with particular colors. That would be the best solution, as the loss of “colors” would be compensated in this way. For example, „გაცეცხლება“ (in Georgian ცეცხლი means “fire”) would be a good translation of “to see red;” “black out” could be translated as “დაბნელება“, „გონების დაბნელება“, „to be green” could be translated as მწვანე, but to avoid ambiguity (associations with ecology) “ჯერ კიდევ მწვანე“ would be better. The Georgian expression closest to “chasing rainbows” is probably “ღრუბლებში ფრენა“, which literally means flying in clouds and figuratively refers to someone constantly pursuing unrealistic goals.

Unfortunately, equivalents like the above mentioned ones are not always available and quite often the translator has to resort to the methods of paraphrase, e.g. “to catch someone red-handed” is translated as დანაშაულზე წასწრება, ნივთმტკიცებით დაკავება, so it is impossible to preserve the images of the original expression. A golden handshake is translated as პენსიაზე გასვლისას ან შტატის გაუქმებისას კომპენსაციის სახით გადახდილი თანხა. In the Georgian translation of a “black sheep” the metaphor is lost, while it is preserved in the Russian паршивая овца.

Some English color idioms have equivalents in Georgian – these are idiomatic expressions with similar meaning, although due to different images they may cause different associations. For instance, the expressions “Pot calling the kettle black” can be replaced by the Georgian saying საკუთარ თვალში

დირეს ვერ ხედავს და სხვის თვალში კი ბეწვსაც ამჩნევსო. “Born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth” could be translated as ქუდბედიანი დაბადება. However, in such cases care should be taken to avoid the expressions containing specific Georgian realities reflecting the Georgian culture and mentality. The substitutes of color idioms have to be universal. On the other hand, aphorisms from Georgian authors’ works used as the equivalents of English expressions are sure to sound ridiculous. It is also noteworthy to maintain the connotation and style of the expressions in question.

Another method of translating color idioms is calquing or loan translation. Instead of paraphrasing the translator could create calques like ოქროს შესაძლებლობა (“golden opportunity”), ლურჯსაყელოიანი/თეთრსაყელოიანი მუშაკი („blue collar” and “white collar”), and ცისფერთვალეზა ბიჭი/გოგონა (blue-eyed boy/girl (უფროსის ფავორიტის მნიშვნელობით) etc. When using calques, if the literal translations of original expressions do not sound clear enough, it is a good idea to resort to footnotes.

5. Conclusions

Research of the English idiomatic expressions associated with different colors has disclosed the differences between them based on different features like semantic compositionality, stability, connotation and translatability. Like other idiomatic expressions, color idioms are divided into fully compositional, partially compositional and non-compositional. The meaning of fully compositional idioms can be inferred from the meanings of its constituent words, so most of them can be understood and translated literally. The idioms belonging to that group are mainly universal and the more universal an expression is, the easier it is to translate. Since idioms are metaphoric, image-bearing expressions, it is important to maintain the images contained in them in translation. This is not difficult in case of fully compositional color idioms, but images are practically always lost when translating partially compositional and non-compositional idioms. replacing them with the idiomatic expressions, which in the target language have similar value and function; and calquing.

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Author's email: lelaebr@yahoo.com

Author's biographical data:

The author of the article is a Doctor of Philology working as an Assistant Professor at Javakhishvili State University. She has a broad experience in teaching English and translating many kinds of texts including works of literature. Along with teaching and translation activities she carries out scientific research.