Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Color Semantics: A Semiotic Analysis of Color Symbolism in English and Arabic

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Abstract

In the real world, each word within a language carries a simple referential meaning. Yet, there exist intricate semantic relationships, all of which may vary depending on the various linguistic contexts. In this paper, I explore two main color terms, *red* and *black*, in terms of their semantic relationships between English and Arabic. In fact, this paper discusses different kinds of meanings (i.e., denotational and connotational) and semantics relations (i.e., paradigmatic and syntagmatic) of the two terms *red* and *black* in English. Afterward, a comparison of the findings is expounded, elucidating the semantic nuances and pragmatic applications of these terms within the Arabic language– my native tongue. The results revealed that in English, *red* and *black* carry some semantic meanings similar to Arabic. These similarities arise from universal beliefs. However, the diversity of linguistic and cultural influences results in distinct semantic relations of these color terms in the two languages.

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1. Introduction

Colors are an unavoidable aspect of our visual experience. When viewed as such, they are referred to as "fundamental terms" in the language. It is safe to believe that every language includes words for some of the colors in the spectrum, and we can all agree that color words are fundamental to everyday communication. Although color is a constant for the visually impaired, a form of nonverbal communication, and a potent psychological aid, there are linguistic and cultural variances that affect how each group interprets it (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Language, culture, natural environment, and life history all play important roles in shaping how people interpret the world around them. All of these things fall under the subjective heading; as a result, individuals may associate colors with various meanings. Despite differences, there are universal and unique cultural color associations. These associations can be borrowed and evolve within a language. Contacts between people of different backgrounds facilitate cultural mingling. Color associations and collocations are constantly evolving. This article focuses on the current state of English and Arabic collocations involving black and red. According to Berlin and Kay (1969), these languages are in the terminal phase of color language evolution.

The foundational work by Berlin and Kay (1969) sparked the discussion. These authors analyzed the color vocabulary of 98 different language families (20 of which were examined in greater depth). Basic color vocabularies ranged in size from three to eleven, showing a wide range of variability. Basic color terms were defined as morphologically straightforward color terms with unrestricted applicability, omitting loan words. There were eleven general categories from which the meanings of these nouns were drawn, however (equivalent to the English words black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, grey, pink, purple, and orange). As a corollary, they discovered that dictionaries of color terms adhere to implicational universals of the kind if a language has a word for yellow, it also has a word for red (Berline & Kay, 1969). These findings suggest that non-linguistic components of perception and cognition place significant limits on the extent to which cross-linguistic semantic diversity is possible. Heider's (1972) research supported Berlin and Kay's findings, but recent studies propose modifications. Some challenge the existence of universal tendencies in color naming systems. Other investigations show a correlation between the native language and color perception (Gilbert et al., 2006; Witthoft et al., 2003).

Infusing the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis within this context, we can consider the usage of colors in language as another dimension of cultural variance. According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, linguistic structures can shape our thinking process and, by extension, our understanding and interpretation of sensory perception, such as color (Whorf, 1956).

In conclusion, understanding the language and cultural influences on color associations is crucial, as they shape how individuals interpret and communicate about the world. This article will delve into the evolving nature of color collocations in English and Arabic, focusing on the colors black and red. By examining these linguistic features, we can gain insight into the complexities and universality of color perception. This paper, hence, discusses different kinds of meanings (i.e., denotational and connotational) and semantics relations (i.e., paradigmatic and syntagmatic) of the two terms red and black in English. Afterward, a comparison of the findings is presented, specifically to both the meaning and use of these terms in Arabic – my native tongue.

2. Theoretical Framework

"Even a very ordinary and widely used word can have a complex relationship with its 'referents' and with other words with which it exists in a structural semantic network" (Carter, 1998, p. 22). In language, a lexical item certainly appears to have semantic relationships that are often complex. Indeed, as mentioned before, in language, every individual word in the real world carries simple referential meaning yet has intricate semantic relationships that could vary (Carter, 1998). These could well represent the various meanings the words have – for example, 'denotational' and 'connotational' – or even the lexical relations that can be found between words, such as 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic'. When two languages are compared side by side, this complex semantic relationship becomes stronger and more intere-

sting. Indeed, differences between cultures could result in profound variations in color term connotation between languages (Crisp & Chang, 1987), in addition to their structural semantics (their lexical relationships) (Agarwal, 1995).

Numerous studies have been conducted on color terminology by linguists as well as anthropologists and psychologists. Why use color terms? We may suppose that the physiology of color perception is generally the same throughout language communities, but the way in which colors are classified differs greatly; thus, this appears to be a particularly interesting concern.

According to Berlin and Kay's (1969) study of 98 languages, which asserts that all languages share commonality regarding the foci of Basic Color Terms (BCT) and that they have similar evolutionary stages relating to color terms, the earlier representative work from a linguistic standpoint can be ascribed (Berlin & Kay, 1969). Other studies (e.g., Wierzbicka, 1996) explore how people perceive color terms based on conceptual prototypes, while some studies (e.g., Derrig, 1978) argue cross-cultural generality in the extensional meanings of fundamental color terms. In Berlin and Kay's (1969) timeline of color evolution, black and white are the only two hues at stage one and are perceived by all individuals equally.

Colors have a significant impact on how people perceive the world. The fact that people's perceptions of primary colors and their tints might occasionally be the same or wholly different is intriguing from a language perspective. In their work "Basic color terms: Their universality and evolution" (1969), linguist Kay and anthropologist Berlin conducted research on basic colors and discussed their universalism. They made comparisons between several language groups and English, concluding that not all languages in the world use the same set of eleven terms (colors): white, black, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, and grey (Berlin & Kay, 1969).

Color symbolism is a unique language that enhances your ability to accurately paint a "picture of the world" (Bochina et al., 2021). It is thought that color perception influences both comparable and distinctive characteristics of the same class of objects and processes, even in

psycholinguistics (Pansat & Khalikova, 2023). For instance, red, yellow, and orange are used interchangeably in Vietnamese, and blue and green are used interchangeably in the Bernimo tribe of New Guinea. The researchers explain this deficiency as a development gap when compared to Western languages. But in spite of how color terminology is constructed in various languages, people, in general, recognize "the theory of basic colors" as being universal.

Color terms were given as an example of a domain in which linguistic relativity—the Sapir and Whorf argument that linguistic categories shape how we perceive the world—can be clearly demonstrated. For instance, the structuralist textbook Gleason (1961) stated:

> There is a continuous gradation of hue from one end of the spectrum to the other. However, an American will list the colors as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, or something similar when describing it. Nothing about the spectrum or how people see it is fundamentally compelled to be divided in this way. (p. 4)

It turns out, nevertheless, that there are very consistent laws across cultures and that categorization of hue is not at all arbitrary. Colors have a multifaceted nature, with both objective and subjective cognitive values. This is why studies of color are conducted throughout many fields of study. The exact and natural sciences, engineering, and technology all employ logical, material, and quantifiable research methods to learn more about objective values. Subjective values, on the other hand, are examined by scholars in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. It is within the realm of subjective values that shape the sociocultural framework, alter perception, and produce a picture of reality that the linguistic study of color can be meaningful.

Since symbolizing is fundamentally a linguistic function, the accessible color vocabulary must play a determining role in the development of any language of color symbols, as stated by Gage (1999). The semiotic method has become the standard for studying color meaning in contemporary linguistics. A linguist views color as a sign with several meanings and multiple references. While many of them have deep cultural roots, others transcend national boundaries. In the twenty-first century, when

media regularly combine words, images, and sounds to construct components of the message, this basic premise leads to the conclusion that colors contribute to generating the meaning of every communication.

Language is "the system of communication comprising codes and symbols which is used by humans to store, retrieve, organize, structure and communicate knowledge and experience" (Kim, 2003, p. 1), and colors are linguistic indications within this framework. Based on Berlin and Kay's (1969) idea of the basic color terms (BCT), the words white, black, red, green, yellow, and blue (as adjectives and nouns) was selected for this study. Studies comparing color terms in two or more languages, such as Spanish and Russian (Kosik-Szwejkowska, 2019) or English, Russian, and Hebrew (Tali, 2022), are common in the most recent literature on color semantics.

In keeping with the idea of "universals of human experiences" (Wierzbicka, 1996), these pieces compare and contrast one or more "basic" colors. The monolexemic nature of BCTs is characterized by their simplicity, independence from the semantics of other color names, broad collocability, and psychological salience in reception.

In deepening our understanding of color semantics, it is valuable to tap into the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), which proposes two principal variants; the strong version posits that language determines thoughts and cultural perception (Dingemanse et al., 2015), whereas the weak version suggests that language merely influences our perception and thought (Lucy, 1992). This hypothesis presents a comprehensive understanding of how the semiotics of color can be dramatically shaped by culture (Leavitt, 2010). Through the lens of the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the semantics of colors in English versus Arabic can be traced back to linguistic structures that potentially pre-determine cultural interpretations and responses.

Further enhancing our interpretation are George Lakoff's (1987) principles. In his cognitive linguistics theory, Lakoff perceives thought as being shaped by various metaphorical concepts intrinsic to different cultures. Applying his theories here provides a fresh perspective and suggests that the symbolism of colors in both English and Arabic cultures could be viewed as metaphors rooted within their respective cultural milieu (Lin, 2003). Drawing on this, the semantics of colors may imply more than just aesthetic appeal or visual recognition. Instead, they can be symbolic metaphors representing cultural narratives, behavioral patterns, and shared experiences (Oboko, 2020). Therefore, combining Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis and Lakoff's cognitive semantics presents an enriching pathway to decode and compare the semiotics of colors in differing cultural perspectives – English and Arabic in this context.

Building on the understanding provided by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Lakoff's principles, the "Cultuling" concept (Pishghadam et al., 2020b) can be related. "Culturling" refers to the idea that culture can be observed and studied through language. Researchers aim to identify cultural memes within a language, which are transmitted across generations. These memes can be found in various forms, such as proverbs, sayings, literature, and more (Pishghadam et al., 2020a; Pishghadam et al., 2020b).

In specific reference to language study, the memes - or transmittable cultural units - often reveal themselves through elements like proverbs, sayings, and literature within that language. These elements could provide insights into the values, beliefs, or norms of a society and are usually inherited or learned over generations. In relation to the study of color semantics, viewing language through the lens of the "Culturling" concept can be quite useful. The meanings associated with different colors could be regarded as cultural memes that are passed down through generations and are reflective of specific cultures' historical, social, and in some cases, even geographical contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

For the purpose of this research, a meticulous selection of sentences, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions related to the colors "red" and "black" were carefully gathered from both the Arabic and English languages. The goal was to curate a dataset that comprehensively examines the nuanced aspects of color meaning and its cultural significance. A total of 120 phrases/ idiomatic expression examples were analyzed, evenly distributed between the two colors, and

meticulously curated from various sources, including literature, online platforms, and cultural references.

In order to achieve a comprehensive and balanced analysis, certain criteria were established to guide the selection of sentences and examples for examination. These criteria ensured that the analysis encompassed a wide spectrum of meanings and contexts related to the colors under study. The specific criteria for selecting sentences included relevance to the colors, diverse contextual usage, incorporation of idiomatic expressions and collocations, and equal representation in both English and Arabic sentences. More importantly, this selection aimed to encompass a diverse range of linguistic styles and cultural associations while embracing the complexity of idiomatic usage.

3.2. Procedures

The data collection and analysis process involved several steps. Initially, diverse sources such as dictionaries, language materials, literature, and idiom databases were utilized to gather a wide array of sentences related to "red" and "black" in both English and Arabic. Following an initial screening, 120 relevant and coherent sentences, examples and idioms were retained. Arabic examples were translated into English while preserving meaning. Semantic analysis began with denotational and conno-tational assessments, where each sentence was scrutinized for explicit and associated meanings of "red" and "black". Paradigmatic relations were explored next, identifying synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms in both languages. Syntagmatic relations followed, involving the identification of common co-occurrences, idiomatic expre-ssions, and phrases, shedding light on patterns of association between the colors and other words. Finally, the denotataional, connotational, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic analyses of the colors "red" and "black" in English and Arabic were compared and contrasted to identify similarities and differences in meaning and usage across languages.

The analysis process was guided by specific criteria aimed at systematically examining the denotational, connotational, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic aspects of the colors "red" and "black". These criteria were designed to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the meanings

and relationships associated with these colors. In terms of denotational and connotational analysis, sentences were selected to differentiate between the literal definition of the colors and the additional implied meanings they evoke, encompassing emotions, cultural symbolism, and deeper associations. The investigation into paradigmatic relations focused on identifying how words related to the colors interacted, including synonyms, antonyms, and hierarchical relationships. Syntagmatic relations were explored by uncovering idiomatic expressions, collocations, and phrases that combined the colors "red" and "black" with other words in meaningful ways. This systematic approach aimed to provide insights into how these colors are understood and used in both English and Arabic. Ultimately, the analysis aimed to compare and contrast the denotational, connotational, paradigmatic, and syntagmatic aspects of "red" and "black" to identify similarities and differences in meaning and usage across languages.

In order to facilitate a clear understanding of the subsequent analysis, a crucial step in the data collection procedure involved establishing precise definitions for key linguistic concepts. These definitions encompass denotation, connotation, paradigmatic relations, and syntagmatic relations. These definitions formed the foundational framework that guided the exploration and interpretation of the results. *Denotation* and *connotation* aimed to reveal both the literal dictionary meaning and the associated emotional, cultural, and symbolic undertones of the terms "red" and "black", achieved through the inclusion of relevant sentences. Further enhancing the analysis, *paradigmatic relations*, which involve the associations between words like synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms, were meticulously examined. This exploration aimed to bring to light the intricate semantic connections these colors share. Additionally, the scrutiny of *syntagmatic relations*, focusing on how "red" and "black" co-occur with other words in phrases and idiomatic expressions, provided insights into their contextual usage patterns.

4. Results

4.1. Red in English

In the English language, the denotational meaning of *red* is "the color of fresh blood"

(Oxford University Press, 2012). For example, she drives a *red* sports car. In this example, the denotational meaning of the term *red* is defined as the color most like that of fresh blood. So, whilst a word's denotative meaning appears to be rather simple, this, in fact, may not be true when it comes to second language learning. After all, compared to the actual reference, words carry far more associations.

The connotative relation, specifically of a word, may be particularly difficult for non-native English speakers to understand. Indeed, it is linked to cultural and social aspects, surpassing the actual meaning via real, lived experiences (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2007).

In English, the word *red* wields connotations that are both negative and positive. Positive ones include love (*red* is universally popular for Valentine's Day, as it is symbolic of the heart), passion, and warmth, indicating that someone is typically seen as healthy (*a red-checked face*), embarrassed (*red-faced*), and humanitarian organization (*the International Red Cross*). Furthermore, *red* signals both warning and danger (traffic signs, such as "STOP" or other signs in a red circle), and drops in finance (a bank overdraft or falling stock prices, for instance) (Oxford University Press, 2009). Yet, it should be noted that how people perceive these connotations may vary, depending on their personal experiences. Indeed, the color *red* may evoke memories of a battle or a wound.

4.1.1. The Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Relations

As mentioned previously, in English, the word *red* carries many synonyms, which include the following: cherry, cerise, sanguine, ruby, and crimson, to name a few (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These synonyms, while not true synonyms are near-synonyms. Indeed, particularly in idioms, they fail to substitute for the word *red* in most instances. For example, it is acceptable to state, "Upon his arrival to London, Mr. John was given the *red-carpet* treatment," but not, "Upon his arrival to London, Mr. John was given the cherry-carpet treatment".

Antonyms are linked to the second type of paradigmatic association. These can be defined as words that carry opposite meanings (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Unlike some other English adjectives, such as small and big, *red* and a few other colors, like *yellow* and *brown*, lack an

exact antonym (Al-Adaileh, 2012). Having said this, Murphy (2010) revealed that *red*, in fact, has three opposites: 1) *white* (the opposite of *white wine* is *red wine*, whilst the opposite of *red* is sometimes *blue*), as they "[…] are contrasted on flags and clothes"; 2) *green*, as it indicates the traffic light colors system, and 3) *blue*, as this can, on occasion, be opposite to *red*, being "[…] contrasted on flags and clothes" (Murphy, 2010, p. 28). Finally, hyponymy is another category of paradigmatic relations: "[a] relationship whereby one word includes others within a hierarchy so that we have super-ordinate words and subordinate words" (Hedge, 2000, p. 116). So, following this definition, *black* and *red*, at least with relation to the word 'color', are subordinate hyponyms (Cruse, 1986).

Another type of semantic relationship includes syntagmatic relations. Murphy (2010) defines these as follows: "[…] the relations between words that go together in a syntactic structure" (p. 8). Should these words co-occur in written or spoken texts commonly, including when they have differing grammatical roles, the relation may be deemed to be *syntagmatic* (Hedge, 2000).

In a lot of collocations, syntagmatic relations of *red* can be found – these are words that go together in a sentence, sounding 'natural' to native speakers (Cruse, 1986; Hedge, 2000). In the English language, there are a huge number of lexical items that frequently appear with the word *red*, as evidenced in Table 1.

Table 1
Collocation for red in English (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Nouns frequently appear after *red*	Hair, eye, light, face, wine, carpet, color, brick, heat, tape
Adjectives frequently appear before *red*	bright, brilliant, fiery, vibrant, vivid, light, pale, dark, deep, dull, dusky, rich, carmine, cherry, Pinkish, poppy, ruby, hot, brownish
Verbs frequently used with *red*	Become, rise, flush, swell, look, turn, produce, glow, make, turn

Over time, a number of these collocations with the word *red* can turn into idioms, such as *red flag,* meaning to warn someone (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Idioms are "a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meaning of each word

on its own" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Indeed, they are another example of syntagmatic relations that are common in languages (Ruge, 1992). When it comes to *red* idioms, examples include *paint the town red* (to celebrate outside), *a red eye* (a late/overnight airplane journey), and *red mist* (denoting the emotion of rage) (Oxford University Press, 2009).

These idiomatic expressions are often hard to understand for learners of the English language. After all, their meaning cannot be said to be linked to the individual words' denotative meanings. Furthermore, *red*, for instance, can be found – and indeed used – within non-idiomatic juxtapositions, including *red alert* and *red-cheeked girl* (Oxford University Press, 2009). These are much easier for non-native speakers to understand.

4.2. Red in Arabic

In Arabic, the adjective (*ahmar)* means *red* in English. Further, it possesses an identical denotational meaning: the color of fresh blood (Ibn Mandhur, 2009). With regard to connotetional relations of the word *red*, both languages – namely, Arabic and English – use it to show positive meanings, like passion, health, and love (Al-Adaileh, 2012; Ibrahim, 2008).

Red cheeks (emotional or physical health) and the *Red Crescent* are examples of how *red* can convey positive meanings. Furthermore, both cultures use the word *red* in a negative context, as it refers to heated emotions, such as rage *red eyes*. Yet, having said this, in Arabic culture, *red* carries more negative meanings, such as death. For example, shortly before a person is executed, he/she is forced to wear *red* attire, which is symbolic of their impending death and punishment (Ibrahim, 2008). The English equivalent is the color *black*, which highlights another difference between the two languages.

Red, however, carries a positive meaning for English speakers. Indeed, the color *red* yields a positive meaning, such as evoking thoughts of Christmas and Santa Claus. Furthermore, *red hats*, for instance, are sometimes worn to signal the New Year. What is more, as mentioned, the color is symbolic of love and Valentine's Day (Manav, 2007).

In the Arabic language, the term *red death* (maotun ahmar) indicates a horribly painful and fatal disease. In addition, the word *red* yields an array of negative connotations. For example, the phrase *he has red hair* (sharatuhu hamra) implies that the person in reference is untrustworthy. Also, *to show someone a red eye* (wareeh alain alhamrah) may be interpreted as being a threat, whilst the term *red wax seal* (shama ahmar) is used to describe a business or shop that has been forced to close due to a breach. In a similar vein, *a red year* (sanatun hamra) refers to one where there is a lack of food, whilst saying *a red afternoon* (hamra'a aldhaheerah) is to refer to extreme heat in the afternoon (Ibn Mandhur, 2009).

In Arabic, the meaning behind the word *red* is further determined by the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations between that word and others. It is important to note that, at a syntagmatic level, collocations with the word *red* are not found in the English language as they are in Arabic. For instance, *red* describes animals and humans (particularly horses and camels, as Arabs deem them as highly precious): namely, *red horse* (jawadun ahmar), *red man* (rajul ahmar), and *red camels* (humru Alnea'm). It is interesting the word *red* and its meaning throughout these aforementioned examples is *white* (i.e., white horse, white man, and white camels).

Thus, Arabic is unlike English in this context, given that, in some instances, calling something *red* is understood as meaning white. Indeed, as an example, if an Arab call someone *red,* he/she, in other words, is highlighting their status as a foreigner. In days past, this was an insult to an Arab. This is because ancient Arabs used *red* to imply white, which is mostly used to describe non-Arabs who tend to be white. However, the color *black* describes Arabs, for they tend to have brown skin (Al-Adaileh, 2012). Having said this, Arabs perceive *red* in *red man* as a white color. Indeed, they do not say *white man*, as white is usually used by them to signify that something is pure and genuine (Al-Adaileh, 2012).

An additional example includes *the red camels* (humru alneam). This refers – quite literally – to white camels. Here, the word *red* is perceived as a white color by Arabs (Al-Adaileh, 2012; Salah, 2006). Yet, Arabic has an interesting use of *red* that comes in a dual form. For example, *the two reds* (alahmaran), which

means bread and meat, or gold and saffron (Ibn Mandhur, 2009).

In the Arabic language, *red* is further used in various idioms. These are related to Arabic society and culture, including *a red camel that runs and does not eat barley* (hamra wajareyah wa matakul sha'eer). This is an idiom which describes a working, efficient object. As mentioned previously, *red* can mean white in Arabic, so within the idiom, *red camels* refer to white camels and is perceived as being an object of beauty.

From a native Arabic speaker's perspective, the paradigmatic relations of *red* appear to be limited. Indeed, I was unable to find a synonym for *red*, apart from when *red* may be perceived as white, such as in *red man*. Here, a synonym for *red* is *white*, but this substitution is used to describe non-Arabs. Also, in Arabic, as in the English language, it is difficult to identify an antonym for *red*. In regard to hyponymy, *red* in Arabic shares identical paradigmatic relations concerning hyponymy as in English (Salah, 2006). Further, the word possesses similar semantic ties as in the English language. Indeed, this is because of the universal denotation of the color. Yet, it is important to note that, based on their culture, Arabs attach different meanings to words that are not found in English.

4.3. Black in English

4.3.1. The Denotational and Connotational Meaning

The denotational meaning of *black* in English is "having the darkest color there is, like the color of coal or a very dark night" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). For instance, *I wear a black dress*". Here, the word *black*'s denotative meaning relates to its literal meaning: namely, a dress that is *black* in color, like the night. Yet, its connotational meaning is not the same; instead relates to different emotions and ideas. In English, *black* typically has negative connotations. These include but are not limited to black-hearted (a malicious person), *black sheep* (an evil family member), and *a black day* (a very unlucky day) (Oxford University Press, 2009). Having said this, *black* also symbolizes traits such as dignity.

For instance, *black* attire is frequently worn by famous people, as they perceive it to be a color of prestige, whilst an orchestra's members will wear *black* to show respect to the audience (Salah, 2006). As such, it is evident that, in the English language, the meaning of *black*, as with *red*, is riddled with contradictions, as its meaning goes beyond binaries, such as good versus evil. This is due to the fact that colors – and their perceived implications – are primarily created via lived experiences, not stereotyped associations (Murphy, 2010).

4.3.2. The Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Semantic Relations

With regard to the paradigmatic relations of the color term *black* in the English language, there exist three primary groups: synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms (Murphy, 2010). Firstly, *black*, as an adjective, has a variety of synonyms, such as coal-*black*, inky, and raven, but these are not accurate substitutions for the word itself (Salah, 2006). Indeed, it is acceptable to state *I want to drink a black coffee*, but not, *I want to drink raven/inky/dark coffee*. Secondly, *black,* in contrast to the color term *red*, appears to possess an opposite word: namely, *white. Black* and *white* are frequently used in unison in various expressions of an idiomatic nature, indicating how they are, in essence, opposites (Cruse, 1986).

For instance, *John tends to view everything as a black-and-white issue, whereas his partner always finds grey areas, which* means that he sees the thing in binaries – either wrong or right, never a combination of both. Based on this usage, then, *black* is opposite to white (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). *Black* has other anto-nyms, too, including clear, happy, and good, based on its meaning (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hyponymy is the third type. Furthermore, as previously stated, *black* and *red* are subordin-ate, as they possess a co-hyponymy relationship – specifically, under the word "color," which is a superordinate word for these terms.

Black possesses a vast array of syntagmatic relations. These are realized in both idioms and collocations. Yet, a word's meaning may differ, for it is based on the collocations where it appears. For instance, *black eye, blackboard*, and *black box* are different collocations of *black*, where its actual meaning – i.e., *black* color – is not referred to. Below, Table 2 outlines different words that are more likely to collocate with *black*.

Table 2
Collocation for Black in English (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Nouns frequently appear after *black*	coal, eye, ink, hair, night, pitch, Jet. man, market, clothes.
Adjectives frequently used with *black*	glossy, freshly, dark, matt, deep, big, small.
Verbs frequently used with *black*	turn, wear, become, look

In some instances, collocations may become lexicalized as commonly used phrases, whereby the related component words are not able to be interpreted individually. The definition of this is an idiom. Examples include the *black market* (somewhere where items are illegally traded to make a profit) and *blackballing someone* (to socially reject a person) (Oxford University Press, 2009). Typically, idioms present a problem to English language learners, as knowledge specific to the culture is required in order to successfully decipher the meaning.

4.4. Black in Arabic

In Arabic, *black* is known as (aswad), which has a denotative meaning: the darkest color on the spectrum, such as coal. As in the English language, the word (aswad) has some negative associations and meanings, such as *black day* (yawmun aswad), bad luck and *black-hearted*, (aswadu alqalb), a malicious person. However, in Arabic, unlike in English, *black* is typically associated with positive meanings that are not found in English, such as being used to point out the beauty of women, like *black hair* (sharun aswad) and *black eyes* (eyoonun sawda'a). Further, dissimilar to English culture, *black* suits are not worn to denote respect, nor is the color associated with formality, but rather to signify beauty, especially that of women.

The word *black* in Arabic, specifically when under paradigmatic relations, possesses a range of near-synonyms, including *coal-color* (Fahem alawn), which may substitute for *black* in Arabic – only should the meaning of *black* directly refer to the literal meaning (color). Yet, in some idioms and phrases, none may substitute for the word *black* (aswad). Indeed, Arabs often state *black day* (yawmun aswad), but not "dark day," as this, to them, is nonsensical. White and *black*, then, appear to be exact antonyms in English and Arabic, in addition to different languages and cultures (Ruge, 1992). Further, in Arabic, *black* has

identical paradigmatic semantic relations regarding hyponyms as in the English language. Indeed, it appears as a subordinate hyponym to the word 'color' in both languages.

In English and Arabic, syntagmatic relations between the word *black* and others are, all too often, significantly different. Further, it is important to note that while the same collocations with *black* are found in both languages, the connotation and meaning vary. Indeed, *black coffee* (qahwah sawda) in English simply means having one's coffee without the addition of milk, but in Arabic, this has a strong negative connotation, revealing how a coffee lacks quality and possesses a nasty taste. After all, decent Arabic coffee is described as (qahwah shaqra'a), which translates to "Blond/Golden coffee".

Traditionally, expensive herbs – namely, saffron and cardamon – are mixed with the coffee, making the color rather light. As such, if a coffee in this culture is *black*, this indicates it has not been properly made. Further, if commented on, this could be deemed as either an accusation of the makers being thrifty or an insult. Indeed, the *black eye* is a suitable example here, for, in the English language, it has a connotation that is negative (signifying bruising emerging near someone's eye). In contrast, in Arabic, the same alludes to a woman's beauty.

In Arabic, *black* is found in a dual form, as it refers to two different entities (Al-Adaileh, 2012; Salah, 2006). This duality has either a negative or positive connotation. Indeed, if *the two blacks* (al'swadan) appear as a nominative case, it conveys a positive meaning (i.e., connotation), which means water and date. Yet, in the accusative case, negative connotations are connected with this, signifying a scorpion and snake (danger and death) (Ibn Mandhur, 2009; Salah, 2006).

It would not be unusual for one to ponder upon why water and date, for example, are referred to as *the two blacks*, considering *black* is not the color of the water. The reason for this is because, at least in a traditional sense, water is enjoyed with dates – the latter is the color *black*. Further, of great importance, water and dates are known as "irreversible coordinates." Therefore, Arabs would find it strange if someone said a *water and date combination* (Al-Adaileh, 2012).

Idioms are the second type of syntagmatic relations, which are known as meanings or forms, all of which could potentially vary across languages. As noted, idioms of a similar nature, which are related to *black*, exist in both English and Arabic, such as *black magic* (asehro alaswad), *black-livered* (aswad al-kabid) (Al-Adaileh, 2012; Salah, 2006). Yet, some Arabic idioms do not have an English equivalent, like *his face is black*. If a person is said to have a *black face* (aswad alwajh), this means they committed an action that made them feel ashamed.

Other *black* idioms in Arabic and English have identical meanings yet collocate with other different words. For example, the Arabic equivalent of the common English saying *a black mark on one's record* is *a black spot in one's record*. This possesses an identical connotation and meaning, but "mark" is substituted with "spot." Yet, I could not always find an English equivalent; in Arabic, for instance, a plan to achieve a goal that is, for all purposes, evil is known as a *black plot* (khudah sawda'a) (Al-Adaileh, 2012). So, while these languages certainly share paradigmatic and denotation relations of the word *black*, which are sometimes very similar, differences exist relating to the word *black*'s positive connotation meaning, including its syntagmatic relations.

5. Discussion

Within this paper, I presented a discussion of semantic relationships, namely, of red and black in the English language. My analysis included their respective connotations and paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships with some different words. The paper proceeded to compare and contrast the findings with the same words in Arabic, revealing how words and their associated lexical semantics can be fraught with complexity. Ordinary words, including red and black, were revealed to have dense semantic relations, yet this complexity becomes more intricate upon comparing how they are used within the two respective languages, which cannot be explained in detail therein.

The interplay between social and cultural contexts and color perception significantly influences the linguistic understanding of color terms. These terminologies contribute to constructing a linguistic worldview that enables us to interpret reality and express our claims and beliefs. Notably, the colors black and red in English share some semantic nuances with their counterparts in Arabic. This shared meaning is derived from associating a linguistic symbol (like black) with a natural element (such as a pitch-black night) and then extending the word's meaning to encompass something negative or evil. Universal beliefs, such as the fear associated with spending time alone in a dark night, contribute to the color black acquiring negative connotations (Al-Adaileh, 2012). However, the ways language is used are deeply influenced by individual lived experiences (Brown, 2005), potentially accounting for the divergent semantic relations and connotations of black and red in English and Arabic.

The realm of color symbolism goes beyond the linguistic sphere, offering insights into human civilization, the natural world, moral values, emotions, and the human psyche (Pansat & Khalikova, 2023). These color codes are deeply rooted in both international and regional contexts. In the exploration of the intricate interplay between culture and language, the concept of "cultuling", introduced by Pishghadam (2013), aligns with Lakoff's (1987) hypothesis, proposing that culture and thought collaboratively shape color semantics. This concept emphasizes the presence of cultural memes within language, passed down through generations. Considering this perspective, it becomes crucial to assess the findings of this study. Initially, the study's outcomes seemed consistent with these theories, evident in the distinct connotations of the color red between English and Arabic, where cultural memes contribute to unique symbolic associations (Pishghadam et al., 2020a; Pishghadam et al., 2020b). However, deeper analysis revealed counteracting aspects that challenge this hypothesis. While culture undoubtedly plays a role in the complexity of color symbolism, the identification of shared semantic meanings between red and black, linked to universal beliefs such as danger or warnings, contradicts the notion of an exclusive deterministic link between culture and language (Bochina et al., 2021). This observation underscores the intricate interplay of cultural influences, cognitive processes, and shared human experiences in shaping color semantics. Consequently, the findings underscore that while culture and thought are influential factors in determining color meanings, they are not

sole determinants, inviting a more nuanced perspective on the intricate interactions among language, culture, and cognition (Oboko, 2020; Pishghadam et al., 2020a; Pishghadam et al., 2020b).

Further studies in the realm of color semantics and its intricate relationship with language, culture, and cognition hold promising avenues for exploration. To expand on the insights gained from this study, it is recommended to delve into a comparative analysis of color terminology in languages with diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds. Investigating how color terms are perceived and assigned meanings across different linguistic and cultural landscapes could offer a comprehensive understanding of the universality and specificity of color symbolism. Moreover, a diachronic examination of color terminology, contrasting historical and contemporary usage, has the potential to reveal the evolution of shared semantic concepts over time. Cross-cultural studies that explore the impact of color semantics on communication and perception across societies could contribute to enhancing intercultural understanding. Additionally, cognitive studies delving into the psychological mechanisms underlying color perception and its linguistic expression could provide deeper insights into human cognitive architecture and its interaction with linguistic symbols. By pursuing these avenues, researchers can contribute to a more holistic and nuanced comprehension of the intricate interplay between language, culture, and color semantics.

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