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## DEPENDENCIES AMONG IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS INCLUDING COLOUR TERMS

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the character of relationships among certain idiomatic expressions. The testing field for the examination will be an assortment of idiomatic expressions including colour terms. The use of colour terms in linguistic expressions is not arbitrary; on the contrary, it transparently shows cognitive processes by exposing interconnections among various expressions. Such links can be pointed out between two or more collocations with either the same or various colour terms. The first kind of connection to discuss here is bound to a single colour and its multiple meanings. To break down the meanings they will be sorted out according to the very association they originate from. The same association can initiate numerous expressions connected with each other by a corresponding underlying idea, and, therefore, of somehow predictable meaning. Secondly, expressions including different colour terms can just as well be subject to a pragmatic strategy. Once a certain meaning of an expression is established, it is free to be contrasted with other phenomena of the same kind, for example by means of changing the element of colour in an expression its semantic pole can be completely shifted. Still another point to analyse is the evolution of form and meaning, which process can involve the above ones as well as other complex transformations. What is at play here is certain ease with which people can accept a linguistic change by applying such tools as overgeneralization, simplification, or a shift of meaning.

### **Theoretical implications**

Language is tightly connected, even dependent on the society and culture in which it operates. Therefore, with some background knowledge we can interpret culturally specific hints, allusions, and symbols in idiomatic expressions. Even if certain practices were abandoned, their symbolic meaning is preserved in fixed collocations. To refute the argument of an arbitrary character of language means showing links between cognition and language, as well as among linguistic expressions. Lakoff (1993: 211) claims,

many of the metaphorical expressions discussed in the literature on conventional metaphor are *idioms*. On classical views, idioms have arbitrary meanings, but within cognitive linguistics, the possibility exists that they are not arbitrary, but motivated, that is they do not arise automatically by productive rules, but they fit one or more patterns in conceptual system.

In this way, we may expect that the psychological reconstruction of meaning employs various techniques to look for recurrent patterns. Such patterns can be traced according to a keyword, e.g. the same colour term in different expressions, or in the form of expressions; say a person knows the meaning of the idiom *to be in the red*. If s/he happens to come across another idiom, *to be in the black*, in which the structure remains invariable except for the colour element, the person will try to identify the meaning within the same semantic domain as the familiar one. The distribution of meanings in the elements of language is far from accidental and proves communication to be an active cognitive process.

Discourse, which is not based on isolated words, or even dictionary entries, is facilitated by textual and contextual clues. Sinclair (1998:7) postulates,

texts are not expected to be totally explicitly coherent and individual judgements on doubtful instances are expected to differ. The writing and reading of a text is a human and not a mechanical activity.

The same principle applies to the spoken medium; active processing of meaning concerns the immediate situation just as much as general knowledge of and about the linguistic expressions. What seems to be at work is that 'we assume that all addressees expect texts to be coherent and actively search for coherence' (Sinclair, 1998: 19). This explains how, for instance, a particular meaning of a polysemous expression is selected to match a particular use of it in an utterance.

Moreover, due to the economical, therefore simplified, character of vocabulary, to access the message an utterance is dealt with in a process of interpretation rather than direct reading it. The identification of the message takes place not on the surface level but, more likely, is a mental, hence individualistic, operation of deconstructed concepts or hints triggered off by linguistic stimuli. This implies that, despite our attempts to define the meanings of words, collocations, concepts we can only offer a certain approximation, rather than an atomistic or prescriptive statement of meaning. As Green (1998: 17) sees it,

One abstract property seems evident: our natural and social worlds are, to some degree, probabilistic. Given certain clues, we cannot know how things will turn out. The system should, therefore, be capable of updating its estimates in the light of experience.

It is clear that the probabilistic character of meaning allows certain flexibility. Additionally, it makes the chain of meanings and collocations of a word an open store. Some meanings are forgotten while others come into existence, still others evolve toward a new sense.

All the above remarks can be checked against the background of idiomatic expressions including a colour term. Colour terms are especially predisposed to trans-

parently show certain cognitive mechanisms taking place in perception of the world, and therefore language; its literal meaning takes on, by way of associations, symbolism and metaphorical potential, new, idiomatic meanings which co-exist independently from each other. By their exceptional capacity and flexibility as seen in a variety of collocations, we can observe numerous examples of a motivated language change.

## Relationship between an association and an expression

The first issue to illustrate is the use of the same colour term, or more precisely its particular connotation, in different collocations, either fixed or innovative. Here we will analyse how various symbolic associations give rise to different meanings of colour terms. We should notice that the use of colour terms in a variety of meanings is not, as it may seem, random. It is usually narrowed down to a certain context or contexts only. In other words, only certain associations, direct or symbolic, refer to particular colour terms; therefore only some collocations are possible.

On the other hand, these collocations are bound to certain realms rather than strictly determined points of reference. As a result, the use of colour terms in collocations is not very restricted; more than one collocation can follow the same association. Moreover, the same idea can be expressed in slightly different forms, like, for example, to express jealousy at least three set expressions come in handy, viz. *green eye*, *green with envy/jealousy*, *look through green glasses*.

Additionally, some colour terms are more productive than others. Semantic domains associated with them consist of a range of symbolic meanings either connected with one another (e.g., in the case of *green*, a number of collocations result from its associations with growing plants and the natural environment), or exist independently of other expressions, and can be typical of only a single collocation (e.g., the association of *green* with sickness).

Tables 1–3 illustrate how numerous expressions follow associations of three exemplary colours: *black*, *white*, and *green*.

Table 1. Symbolism of black

ASSOCIATION	COLLOCATIONS
<b>Darkness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Black prince</i> – ‘the devil, the prince of darkness’ (CLSECS)</li> <li>– <i>Black clouds</i> (UED)</li> <li>– <i>Black darkness</i> (UED)</li> </ul>
<b>Death</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Black lion</i> – syphilis, <i>Black muzzle</i>, <i>Black Death</i> – bubonic plague – names of diseases</li> <li>– <i>Black Tuesday</i> – names of days remembered for some disastrous event</li> <li>– <i>Black cap</i> – ‘worn by a judge in pronouncing a death sentence’ (UED)</li> </ul>



<b>Punishment, rejection</b>	– <i>Black ball</i> – ‘ostracism, rejection’ (CLSECS)
<b>Terror, fear</b>	– <i>Black list</i> – ‘a list of those in disgrace or who have incurred censure or punishment, or who are regarded as untrustworthy or disloyal’ (BDPF) – <i>Black flag</i> – ‘pirates’ emblem; signal of execution’ (UED)
<b>Misfortune, lack of luck</b>	– <i>Black-letter day/ black day</i> – something sad or disastrous happens (ODCIE); (unlike other definitions which explain the phrase as a common day) – <i>Black mood</i> – ‘a fit of depression’ (ODCIE) – <i>Look on the black side</i> – notice only disadvantages of a situation (analogous to <i>look on the bright side</i> )
<b>Funeral, mourning</b>	– <i>To be in black</i> – to be in the mourning – <i>Black coat</i> – an undertaker
<b>Nothingness, unconsciousness</b>	– <i>Blackout</i> – ‘temporary loss of consciousness or memory’ (OPD) – <i>To go black</i> – ‘disappear from sight because one has fainted or become unconscious’ (ODCIE)
<b>Malice, hatred, anger</b>	– <i>Black look</i> – ‘look that expresses anger, dislike, hate’ (ODCIE) – <i>Look black at somebody</i> – ‘disapprovingly’ (UDE) – <i>Black in the face</i> – ‘very angry, with great exertion so that the face is darkly flushed’ (BDPF) – <i>Black humour/ black comedy</i> – ‘comic elements are combined with more tragic, macabre or absurdity ones’ (ODCIE); – <i>In somebody’s black books</i> – ‘bad books’ (ODCIE)
<b>Impurity</b>	– <i>Black magic</i> – ‘necromancy, allusion to the colour of devil’ (BDPF) – <i>Black art</i> (UED) – <i>The pot calling the kettle black</i> – <i>Have some black on one’s hands</i> (UED)
<b>Illegality</b>	– <i>Black market</i> – illegal buying or selling (OPD) – <i>Black economy</i> – ‘the part of country’s income that remains illegally undeclared’ (BDPF) – <i>Black hat</i> – ‘a villain in a political scandal’ (DTW) – <i>Blackmail</i> – ‘to threaten a person with exposure unless he pays price for silence; extortion of money by threat’ (UED)
<b>Evil, offence</b>	– <i>Black spot</i> – ‘place on a road where accidents often occur, such as a bend or a crossing’ (BDPF) – <i>To blackwash so</i> – ‘speak ill of someone’ (AECCI) – <i>Blacken</i> – ‘say evil things about’ (OPD) – <i>Black sheep</i> – ‘a scoundrel’ (OPD) – <i>Black character</i> – ‘wicked perverse, infamous’ (UED) – <i>Black mouth</i> – ‘a slanderer’ (CLSES) – <i>Blackleg</i> – ‘a swindler and cheat, esp. at cards and racing; or: a workman member of a Trade Union who, when a strike is threatened or declared, offers to work at lower rate of wages than that for which his union is contending’ (UED)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Blackness</i> – ‘wickedness’ (UED)</li> <li>– <i>Black-hearted</i> – ‘having an evil, malignant nature’ (UED)</li> <li>– <i>Blackguard</i> – ‘a low, disreputable ruffian; a scoundrel, a man of low moral character and devoid of honour; also: <i>to blackguard</i> – abuse violently’ (UED)</li> </ul>
Seriousness	– <i>Black tie</i> – ‘the requirement of formal clothing at a reception’
Severity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Black fast</i> – ‘very severe’ (AECCI)</li> <li>– <i>(Beat somebody) black and blue</i> – ‘showing signs of being physically harmed in some way’ (ODCIE)</li> </ul>
Hell, devil, Satan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Black mass</i> – ‘a blasphemous mass in which the devil is involved in place of God and various obscene rites are performed in mockery of the proper ceremony’ (BDPF)</li> <li>– <i>Black Prince</i> (see above)</li> </ul>

Table 2. Symbolism of white

ASSOCIATIONS	COLLOCATIONS
Virginity	– <i>White wedding</i> – traditional ceremonial wedding
Purity	– <i>Make one’s name white again</i> – ‘clear oneself of a bad name’ (CLSCS)
Innocence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>White lie</i> – innocent lie</li> <li>– <i>White man</i> – ‘a thoroughly straightforward and honourable man’ (BDPF)</li> <li>– <i>White knight</i> – ‘a champion or rescuer, esp. One who comes to the aid of a company in financial difficulties; also: a perfect man’ (BDPF)</li> <li>– <i>White hat</i> – an innocent person in a political scandal (DTW)</li> <li>– <i>White-handed</i> – ‘unsullied by evil acts’ (CLSECS)</li> <li>– <i>White-headed</i> – ‘specially favoured, darling’ (FDEL)</li> <li>– <i>Whitewash</i> – ‘mode of description, report, designed to clear, justify person’s name, actions’ (UED)</li> </ul>
Stainlessness, tidiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>White wing</i> – ‘a street cleaner or other person wearing a white uniform’ (FLEDEL)</li> <li>– <i>White collar</i> – non-manual worker</li> </ul>
Colourlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>The white of an egg</i></li> <li>– <i>White light</i> – ‘natural, colourless sunlight’ (UED)</li> </ul>
Cowardliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>White feather</i> – ‘(org. In a cock’s tail taken as a sign of inferior breeding and hence of poor fighting qualities) a symbol of cowardliness’ (FLEDEL)</li> <li>– <i>White-livered</i> – ‘cowardly’ (LDEI)</li> <li>– <i>White with fear</i></li> <li>– <i>White about the gills</i> – ‘showing signs of terror, very afraid’ (ODCIE)</li> </ul>

<b>Sincerity, honour</b>	– <i>White magic/witch</i>
<b>Peace / truce</b>	– <i>White flag</i> – symbol of surrender or truce (UED)
<b>Bloodlessness</b>	– <i>Bleed somebody white</i> – ‘drain a person of all his resources’ (CLSCS) – <i>White-livered</i> – cowardly – <i>White-knuckle</i> – ‘full of tension and anxiety’ (LRNW)
<b>Transparency/ lucidity</b>	– <i>White lady</i> (see below)
<b>Death</b>	– <i>White lady</i> – ‘a ghostly spirit whose apparition was considered to bring death’ (CLSECS)
<b>Old age</b>	– <i>White beard</i> – ‘an old man’ (FDEL) – <i>White hair</i> – old age
<b>Snow</b>	– <i>White harvest</i> – ‘a late harvest when the ground is white of a morning with frost’ (BDPF) – <i>White Christmas</i> – Christmas with snow outside;
<b>Light/ brightness</b>	– <i>White nights</i>

Table 3. Symbolism of green

ASSOCIATION	COLLOCATIONS
<b>(re-)birth</b>	– (?) <i>Green old age</i> – ‘one characterised by sustained vitality’ (AECCI)
<b>Youth</b>	– <i>Green youth</i> – ‘immature’ (UED)
<b>Vegetables</b>	– <i>Green grocer</i> – selling vegetables – <i>Green goods/ green stuff</i> – fresh vegetables (AECCI) – <i>Greens</i> – vegetables
<b>Growing plants</b>	– <i>(to)green</i> – to become green because of plants growing – <i>Green Christmas</i> – a mild Christmas without snow (AECCI) – <i>Green fingers</i> – ‘skill in making plants grow’ (OPD) – <i>Green belt</i> – area of open land around a town (OPD);
<b>Fresh / raw</b>	– <i>Green hide</i> – not processed – <i>Green memories</i> – not processed – <i>Green wound</i> – ‘unhealed’ (UED) – <i>Green bricks</i> – ‘not fired’ (UED)
<b>Natural environment</b>	– <i>The Green Party/ The Greens</i> – defenders of natural environment, members of such a party or their supporters – <i>Green</i> – ‘of, relating to, or concerning environmental issues’ (DTW) – <i>Greenback green</i> – ‘a member of demographically youth group that spends heavily on environmentally issues and financially supports products perceived as environmentally sound’ (DTW)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Green lobby</b> – ‘any of the lobby groups with common environmental interests including Greenpeace, The Sierra Club, and Citizens for a Better Environment’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Green marketing</b> – ‘marketing efforts by large corporations to persuade the public that their products, packaging, manufacturing methods and intentions are environmentally sound’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Green product</b> – ‘a product that is or is said to be environmentally sound’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Green revolution</b> – ‘the burgeoning environmental awareness and activity affecting the nation and having a profound impact in corporate planning and public efforts’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Green seal</b> – ‘the so-called Good Earthkeeping seal of approval indicating that a product and its manufacture is not dangerous to the environment’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Greentailing</b> – ‘a retail movement that focuses exclusively on environmental and ecological products’ (DTW)</li> <li>– <b>Green wasting</b> – a corporation’s disingenuous efforts sensitive, pro-environmental force, often through advertising and promotional activities (DTW)</li> </ul>
Jealousy, envy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Green eye</b> – ‘a jealous eye’ (BDPF)</li> <li>– <b>Green with envy</b> (ODCIE)</li> <li>– <b>Look through green glasses</b> – ‘be jealous, envious’ (AECCI)</li> <li>– <b>To green</b> – ‘to hoax, take in’ (AECCI)</li> </ul>
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Green with fear</b></li> </ul>
Sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Green about the gills</b> – ‘look as if though one is about to vomit’ (ODCIE)</li> <li>– <b>Green</b> – ‘unhealthily pale in the face because of sickness’ ((DELIC))</li> </ul>
Lack of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Green horn</b> – ‘an allusion to the immature horns of a young animals; a raw, immature person’ (FLWED)</li> <li>– <b>See green in somebody’s eye</b> – ‘think that somebody is naive’ (AECCI)</li> <li>– <b>To be green</b> – inexperienced</li> <li>– <b>Not as green as cabbage looking</b> – knowing more than others would expect one to know</li> </ul>

Having analysed the above assortment of collocational potential of the three colour terms, the first issue to tackle is consistency (or rather its lack) among examples with the same colour term. Unlike *white* and *green*, *black* seems to be fairly homogeneous. We can speak of a chain of related associations. Certainly, most of the expressions stem from a general frame of *black* as evil, hence some of the associations suggested in Table 1. overlap, and could be just as well classified in a slightly different fashion, which, on the other hand, does not refute the main claim here, i.e. precedence of association over expressions.



By contrast, the other two colour terms exhibit, among the collocations they perform, a significant diversity as far as their meanings are concerned. Again, the classification offered in the present paper should not be understood as a clear-cut affiliation of expressions with the associations they originate from. Therefore, scopes of meaning attributed here to certain associations can occasionally overlap. In fact, what we are dealing with is the issue of fuzzy boundaries across the spectrum of meanings bound to a single colour term.

However, another underlying idea, namely, dissimilarity among semantic fields and meanings as such cannot be questioned. It is not even unambiguous whether *white* has a tendency to stand for favourable or negative notions. On the one hand we have purity, and on the other cowardliness; we have dignity, light, lucidity and also death. Take, for instance, a few random examples: *white collar*, *white with fear*, or, *White Christmas*. Without referring to a particular association, the meanings would have to be treated as polysemous and learnt arbitrarily, which does not seem to be the case here.

The diversity of meanings of the same colour term used in different collocations is a result of a lack of consistency among associations they are related to. For one thing, a stipulation of certain associations with a colour has been a process in progress for a long time and at different levels of human activity or experience. For another, colour is not only bound to allude to physical properties or their implications. Bennett (1988:22) stresses the two-fold character of colour symbolism;

Colour terms are also useful in metaphors because colours have natural and conventional associations, so that it is possible to express ideas in a concise way.

Again we need to appreciate the culture-specific character of a semantic store in terms of physical and abstract descriptions, as well as emotional, aesthetic, biological and personal perception and interpretation of colours.

## **Recurrent patterns among expressions with different colour terms**

One of the psychological requirements making communication efficient is alluding to phenomena that are already known to us, rather than constantly applying completely new, disconnected ideas. When we want to explain or understand something it is easier if we compare it or make analogy to something else. Moreover, by introducing a certain change we can contrast the familiar meaning with the new one.

It is very likely that the fixed structure of a phrase will be at some point slightly altered to achieve new quality. Modification of one element will change the meaning of the whole expression. The new expression will be understood by means of analogy, especially if the altered element has a clear connotative meaning.

Such phrases can easily become fixed collocations since they take a kind of mental shortcut to appeal to our grasp of language. These ready-made linguistic frames are eagerly played with in language of clichés, advertisements and media as an element of wit and indirectness.



Table 4. provides a few examples of expressions whose form found a continuation in other expressions, usually by means of contrast.

Table 4. Analogy in the form of expressions

EXPRESSION	MEANING, DOMAIN	COMMENTS ON ANALOGY
<b>White Christmas</b> <b>Green Christmas</b>	Christmas with snow outside Mild Christmas without snow (AECCI)	Both expressions frame the same domain; colours are used as a metonymic differentiation in weather
<b>White hat</b> <b>Black hat</b>	An innocent person in a political scandal A villain in a political scandal	Metonymic, parallel meanings; the analogy makes use of the conventional connotations of the colours
<b>Red-letter day</b> <b>Black-letter day</b>	A holy or an important day An unimportant one	Both allude to the way days were conventionally marked in calendars
<b>White goods</b> <b>Green goods</b>	Household appliances Fresh vegetables (AECCI)	Both allude in a metonymic frame to commodities available in the market
<b>Red-handed</b> <b>White-handed</b>	Doing mischief Unsullied by evil acts (CLS)	Both allude to the hand as a doer and use conventional colour associations
<b>White-collar</b> <b>Blue-collar</b> <b>Pink-collar</b>	Working in an office Manual worker Jobs traditionally regarded as women's domains	All are metonymies that concern professional groups; used in their adjectival form or as noun phrases; (more examples of the metonymy 'CLOTHES stand for PROFESSION' are exemplified later on)
<b>White elephant</b> <b>Pink elephants</b>	Wrong investment A figment of imagination	No common reference between the two expressions
(look through) <b>rose glasses</b> <b>green glasses</b>	Be optimistic Be jealous, envious (AECCI)	Both allude to the attitude toward life; the second one makes use of the conventional connotation of green
<b>To be in the red</b> <b>To be in the black</b> <b>To be in the pink</b>	To be losing money; – to be prosperous – to be in mourning (CLS) To be healthy	The first two meanings show analogous meaning within a financial domain. The other two meanings are not associated with this domain despite their form
<b>Reds</b> <b>Greens</b>	Communists or their supporters Ecologists or their supporters	Both allude to the domain of socio-political attitude; both exist in their adjectival forms in the same domain

As we can see, most of the expressions that use the same structure and alter only one element (here it is colour) are bound within the same domain. They operate within the same frame, only they shift from one semantic pole to another. However, the process does not necessarily account for binary antonyms but has a multiple character (alike the category of colour). Takes, for instance, *white goods* and

*green goods*; the division does not classify all possible kinds of goods as either *white* or *green*. In the marketing jargon there exists another expression alluding to this structure, namely *brown goods*, that is equipment like hi-fi or TV sets, and it is likely that still another colour term associated with some other kinds of products will be applied.

On the other hand, there are expressions which exhibit the same structure but apply to completely different domains of meaning. Consider the idioms *to be in the black* and *to be in the red*. They both make an allusion to accountancy, or in a broader sense, to making profit. However, another expression, *to be in the pink*, that makes use of the same structure, departs from this meaning and is associated with the colour of the face.

Another example of certain discrepancy in meaning can be seen between *white elephant* and *pink elephants*. Although, one might claim that the structure differs not only as to the element of colour but also plurality. There is no common reference for the two and they constitute separate metaphors. However, for most of the expressions sharing their semantic domain coincide with a structural correspondence, which facilitates our understanding of them and allows further making up new collocations.

Moreover, colour is very often treated as the most salient characteristic of a thing. Our knowledge of the surrounding world depends on identification of certain phenomena and their characteristics. A substantial part of this kind of understanding is taken for granted and is either fossilised in the form of fixed expressions or does not have to be verbalised at all. We can distinguish certain expressions that use a colour term to show the contrast or a change introduced to what is normally taken for granted. Let us consider a few examples that depict situations in a literal way and use colour terms to accentuate a certain element or contrast it with a similar notion of this kind (which is perhaps more salient or even taken for granted).

– *White harvest* – as opposed to usual harvest in summer and early autumn when there is no frost; the colour accentuates the colour of the ground when there is frost;

– *Black clouds* – as contrasted with white clouds; in fact, the colour is exaggerated and in reality it is rather dark grey; it is a signal of a coming storm; also, in a symbolic sense, an ominous forewarning;

– *White night* – as opposed to sunless, dark nights; the colour draws attention to the fact that during such nights there is a natural source of light;

– *Green Christmas* – unlike *White Christmas*, it is a time without snow when it is typically expected, namely around the Christmas period; the colour term alludes to the lack of snow rather than the greenness of the environment, (which in the winter has only few traces of green plants); on the other hand, *White Christmas* seems to be an iconic image associated with Christmas and appears to be much more preferable;

– *Black sheep* – it stands out against the background of a white flock. The expression is based on the most salient opposition of *black* (the colour of evil) and *white* (which stands for good), and involves figure and ground alignment. Otherwise, a black sheep on its own would not imply any negative connotations;

Such expressions present a frame of a situation focusing on a colour associated with one of its elements. Therefore, they are metonymies in which a colour term alludes to a factual or symbolic characteristic which is overgeneralised or exaggerated. For the sake of communication, one element is singled out in order to represent the whole concept, its connotations, and an allusive character. The selection of the feature to stress is by no means accidental. It serves as a juxtaposition with what is considered ordinary, or even is taken for granted.

## Final remarks

All the above groups of expressions aimed to show a strongly motivated character of language change. In discussing each of them we frequently touched upon the question of associations, which accounts for surprising flexibility of thought and language. Colour terms not only can bind literal and metaphorical meanings, but also convey information about their conventional, symbolic, and culture-specific implications.

Linguistic and psychological routines make human beings frequently use and refer to well-known phenomena. It makes language a part of a more general cognitive web. What we get to know about our surroundings is copied and imprinted in the form of linguistic expressions; what is already in language can find its continuation; the same concepts can function in language in many ways. By altering a part of an expression some new quality is achieved while the semantic pole is changed.

A number of processes discussed in the present paper seem to confirm a motivated, cognitive, and non-arbitrary way in which we perceive the world and verbalise it. Among them let us recall the most outstanding ones such as interpretations of linguistic and non-linguistic clues, approximation, associations and a probabilistic character of meaning, productiveness and the evolution of elements of the vocabulary store.

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