

THE MEANING OF COLOR TERM IN CHINESE AND INDONESIAN IDIOMS: NATURAL SEMANTIC METALANGUAGE APPROACH

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Abstract

Every human being has the same vision for colors. On the other hand, idioms –as an embodiment of the expression of human experience, can certainly be a medium for expressing the universal meaning possessed by humans across cultures, including the meaning of colors. Through the meaning of colors term in idioms, the universality of the human mind can be known. Natural Semantic Metalanguage is an approach that tries to see the universality of language. By using six-color term in the Morris Swadesh word list, this study aims to find out the universality of the meaning of colors term in Indonesian and Mandarin. This study shows the meaning of the 'black' colors term in Indonesian and Mandarin idioms is universal. Moreover, the meaning of the colors 'black', 'green' and 'red' is universal in the concept of associating colors with objects and conditions.

Keywords: color meaning, idiom, Natural Semantic Metalanguage

INTRODUCTION

Equally having two hands, having two eyes, one law, two legs, and so on. However, in the same physical body does it contain the same thoughts? we need to look into our minds The idea of the universality of human concepts can be found in the minds of humans born in the seventh century, by rationalist thinkers such as Leibniz, Descartes, dan Pascal. Leibniz specifically believes that every human being is born with a set of innate ideas that are activated and develop through experience, but are latently stored in our minds from the start. Leibniz believes that every human being is born from the *alphabet of the human mind*. All complex thinking - all meaning - arises from through different combinations of simple ideas (Wierzbicka, 1992: 8).

Thus, humans have the same nature of mind that is formed through personal experience. A concrete example is the color vocabulary. Each human being has the same vision for color. However, is the meaning of color in the minds of every human being similar? Idioms as an embodiment of the expression of human experience can certainly be a medium to uncover the universal meaning possessed by humans across cultures. Through the meaning of color vocabulary in idioms, the universality of the human mind can be known.

Color is an object that is equally visible to the human eye, but not necessarily in line with its meaning. The experience about colors obtained by humans is not the same. However, there are six color vocabularies in Swadesh's basic word list. The Swadesh List was created by Morris Swadesh in the

50s to develop quantitative historical linguistic results. The list is a basic term that is widely used. Each item from the list is as universal as possible (Prevot, et.al, 2006: 2). The cultural background of a language influences the perception and meaning of a color. Through idioms from Indonesian and Mandarin, is the universality of color vocabulary meaning can be known, especially white, yellow, red, green, and blue. This study will focus on the basic color term meaning in both language, and its relation to the culture of its users. The problem will be detailed in the following question: 1) what is the meaning of the colors term in idioms in Indonesian and Mandarin, 2) from both Indonesian and Mandarin, which color term has a similar meaning, 3) can color term shows the universality meaning of Indonesian and Mandarin, and 4) what is the culture reflection contained in the color terms in idiom? Through these questions, this study aims to find and determine the universality of the meaning of a color term through idioms.

Natural Semantic Metalanguage is an approach that tries to see the universality of language. The NSM approach to visual semantics takes a similar view: the most important question of all is what the various words used in different languages actually mean; not just in terms of referential range, but above all in terms of the speakers' conceptualizations. But to establish what words actually mean one needs a suitable metalanguage (Goddard, et. Al, 2014:101).

An idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot be interpreted only from one part of it. An idiom also cannot be interpreted as an idiom composition function when it does not coincide with the idiom part of the idiom (Cruse, 1995: 37). In Mandarin, idiom learning often makes learners think about strong cultural connotations (Pan, 2000: 2). For an idiom, to expresses the meaning that it does, it must also be institutionalized. The institutionalization of a lexis means that there is a received meaning which is understood by all (Philip, 2011: 15).

Color is not a universal human concept. Color can be created by all groups of people, like *television*, *computer* or *money*. On the other hand, each language has a word for *see*, so that it can be seen that in most cultures, discourse about *seeing* has been contextualized, and the experience of seeing is described as complex and integrated with color, texture, shape, functions, and other things that cannot be separated (Wierzbicka, 1996: 287-8). Linguist, ethno linguists came to the single conclusion that color naming have some universal similarities (Mazhitayeva & Kaskatayeva, 2013). Based on the background above, this research aims to find the meaning of color term in Chinese and Indonesian that contained in Idioms with Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach.

METHODS

This scientific research used a qualitative method. The data used in this

study is textual data in the form of language units such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. In line with this, qualitative procedures rely on data in the form of text and images, have unique steps in data analysis, and are sourced from different research strategies (Cresswell, 2009:258). Qualitative research also focuses on the processes that occur, especially interested in understanding how things arise (Creswell, 2009: 293). In accordance with the characteristics of this research, the type of research used is qualitative research.

The method used is an optional translation in interpreting the color vocabulary in idioms. The data used in this paper are Chinese idioms that contain *white*, *yellow*, *black*, *green*, *red*, and *blue*. These six colors term is contained in two hundred Swadesh's vocabularies list. The next step is to search for Indonesian and Mandarin idioms that contain those six colors term. Each color is represented by two to three idioms. Data reference sources are the *Indonesian Phrase Dictionary* (Badudu, 2008), the Indonesian electronic dictionary Kateglo.com, the 现代汉语词典 *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian Modern Mandarin Dictionary* (2005), and the Pleco Chinese Mandarin electronic dictionary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section will be carried out by division based on the colors

that will be discussed. Each sub-section consists of a discussion of three Indonesian idioms and three Chinese idioms.

Idioms that contains the color term *black*

Here are Indonesian idioms that contain the term *hitam* or *black*.

From the three Indonesian idioms above, there are two idioms where the term *black* is interpreted as *bad*, namely *black sheep* and *black book* idioms. The meaning of the idiom *black on white* seems neutral. The meaning of the idiom is *written*. The term *black* may refer to the ink colors of the pens commonly known by the people of Indonesia. Here are Chinese idioms that contain the color term *black* or 黑 *hēi*.

In the idiom (4), *black* is associated with *night*. This can be associated with the atmosphere at night which is *dark*. The term *black* in the idiom (5) is paired with *money* and is interpreted as *greedy*. In Indonesian, we can match this idiom with *uang gelap* (dark money), so the *black* on the idiom is interpreted as *bad* or *dirty*. Unlike the *black* in the idiom (6) which is interpreted according to the actual color, which is like the color of ink, the same as Indonesian idiom (3).

From this explanation, it can be seen that the meaning of the color *black* which is associated with *badness* and the association with ink is universal between Indonesian and Mandarin. In Mandarin, the concept of *black* can also be linked to *dark*.

(1)	<i>kambing hitam</i> 'goat' 'black'	'the accused'
(2)	<i>buku hitam</i> 'book' 'black'	'list of suspected people'
(3)	<i>hitam di atas putih</i> 'black' 'on' 'white'	'written'
(4)	起早搭黑 <i>qǐzǎodāhēi</i> 'wake' 'up' 'morning' 'go' 'black'	'start work early and knock off late'
(5)	食亲财黑 <i>shíqīncáihēi</i> 'eat' 'family' 'money' 'black'	'selfish and greedy'
(6)	近墨者黑 <i>jīnmòzhēhēi</i> 'near' 'ink' 'this' 'black'	'They that touch pitch will be defiled.'

Idioms that contains the color term *green*

Here are Indonesian idioms that contain the term *hijau* or *green*:

(7)	<i>masih hijau</i> 'still' 'green'	'still young'
(8)	naik kuda hijau 'ride' 'horse' 'green'	'drunk'

In the first idiom, the color *green* is interpreted as *young*. The concept of this color can be connected with leaves or grass. There is a change in the color of the leaves, and the color *green* generally appears when new leaves grow. In the second idiom, *green* is meant as *drunk*.

In Mandarin, two terms that indicate the color *green*, which is 青 *qīng* and 绿 *lǜ*. However, the meaning of 青 *qīng* is often side by side with *green* and *clear*, so the

discussion is focused on the term 绿 *lǜ* only.

The color *green* is interpreted as *beautiful* on the first idiom, while the second idiom is related to the object, and on the third idiom is interpreted as *miserable*. In Chinese culture, the color *green* is often associated with the color *jade*. It could be the beauty of a woman juxtaposed with the beauty of jade. Of these two languages, the universality of the meaning of the color *green* is *association with object*.

(9)	绿女红男 <i>lùnùhōngnán</i> 'green' 'women' 'red' 'men'	'young people decked out in gorgeous clothes'
(10)	绿草如茵 <i>lǜcǎorúyīn</i> 'green' 'grass' 'like' 'mat'	'carpet-like lush green grass'
(11)	绿惨红愁 <i>lǜcǎnhōngchóu</i> 'green' 'miserable' 'red' 'worry'	'(of women) grieved appearance'

Idioms that contains the color term 'white'

The following are idioms that contain the color *putih* or *white* in Indonesian. In the idioms (12) and (14), there is a similarity in the meaning of the *white* color, which is *holy* or *clean*, while in the idiom (13) the intended meaning is *surrender*. The following are idioms in Mandarin that contain the terms *white* or 白 *bai*. Each of the idiom meanings above has a

different meaning. The color *white* on the idioms (15) and (17) is interpreted as *empty*, while the second idiom is interpreted as *plain*. It can be understood that Chinese people see the color *white* as emptiness or emptiness. Judging from the meaning of these idioms, there is no universality of the meaning of the *white* color in Indonesian and Mandarin.

(12)	masih putih 'still' 'white'	'holy'
(13)	bendera putih 'flag' 'white'	'knuckle under'
(14)	buku putih 'book' 'white'	'buku yang berisi penjelasan tentang kebersihan diri'
(15)	白费唇舌 <i>baifeichunshē</i> 'white' 'spend' 'lip' 'tongue'	'waste one's breath'
(16)	白面书生 <i>baimiànshūshēng</i> 'white' 'face' 'book' 'life'	'young and inexperienced persi without practical experience'
(17)	白手起家 <i>baishǒuqǐjiā</i> 'white' 'hand' 'build' 'house'	'start from scratch'

Idioms that contains the color term red

The following are Indonesian idioms that contain the term *merah* and *red*. Each color *red* on the three idioms shows different meanings. In the idiom (18), the color *red* refers to the skin color of a newborn baby, so

it can be interpreted as *newborn*. In the idiom (19), the color *red* refers to the condition of a human face when being shy. Generally, the face turns red because there is a reaction from the pumping of blood. In the idiom (20), the color *red* is meant by *courage*. The following

are Chinese idioms that contain the terms *red* or 红 *hong*: Of the three idioms, the term *red* in the first idiom refers to a blush that is a sign of a healthy (not pale) physical condition. In the second idiom, the color *red* refers to *worry*. It could be that in addition to indicating a healthy body condition, a red

face also appears when someone is nervous. In the third idiom, the color *red* refers to good looks.

From this explanation, it can be seen that the concept of the meaning of the color *red* which refers to 'human nature' is universal in Indonesian and Mandarin.

(18)	masih merah 'still' 'red'	'newborn'
(19)	merah muka 'merah' 'muka'	'embarrassed'
(20)	berdarah merah 'blooded' 'red'	'hero; brave'
(21)	红光满面 <i>hongguangmanmian</i> 'red' 'light' 'full' 'face'	'one's face glowing with health'
(22)	绿惨红愁 <i>lùcānhongchou</i> 'green' 'miserable' 'red' 'worry'	'(of women) grieved appearance'
(23)	绿女红男 <i>lùnùhóngnán</i> 'green' 'women' 'red' 'men'	'young people decked out in gorgeous clothes'

Idioms that contains the color term *blue*

The following are Indonesian idioms that contain the term *biru* or *blue*. In the first idiom, the color *blue* refers to the color of the paper containing the project planning. In the second idiom, the color *blue* refers to *nobility*, giving the impression that the color *blue* indicates authority. In the third idiom, the color *blue* refers to the color of prison clothes. The following is a Chinese idiom containing

the color 蓝 *lan blue*. In the first idiom, the color *blue* does not show implied meaning. In Mandarin, there are stories behind the formation of idioms (Wu, 2010: 6). In the second idiom, the term *blue* refers to the shape of the color itself as one of the original colors of green. It can be seen that the term *blue* in both languages has a universal meaning in reference to the object it labels.

(24)	cetak biru 'print' 'blue'	'plan'
(25)	darah biru 'blood' 'blue'	'aristocratic; blueblood'

(26)	baju biru 'clothes' 'blue'	'prisoner'
(27)	筲路蓝缕 <i>bilùlánlǚ</i> 'basket' 'trip' 'blue' 'strands'	'the hardships of beginning an undertaking'
(28)	青出于蓝 <i>qīngchūyúlán</i> 'green' 'born' 'from' 'blue'	'the pupil surpasses the master'

Idioms that contains the color term *yellow*

The following are idioms with the term *yellow* in Indonesian. The term *yellow* in all three idioms refers to the object. Each

object is a symbol of a message. Of these three idioms, the meaning of the term *yellow* is *warning*. The following are idioms in Mandarin:

(29)	bendera kuning 'flag' 'yellow'	'The flag that is usually hoisted as a sign of death'
(30)	kartu kuning 'card' 'yellow'	'warning sign'
(31)	lampu kuning 'light' 'yellow'	'Gesture to get ready for activities'
(32)	黄金时间 <i>huangjīnshíjiān</i> 'yellow' 'gold' 'time'	'prime time'
(33)	黄粱一梦 <i>huángliángyīmèng</i> 'yellow' 'sorghum' 'one' 'dream'	'illusion of wealth and glory'
(34)	黄袍加身 <i>huángpāojiāshēn</i> 'yellow' 'dress' 'added' 'body'	'take the throne'

In the first idiom, the term *yellow* is attached to the noun *golden*. This knowledge can provide an understanding of why the *yellow* in the second idiom is defined as *wealth*. In the third idiom, the term *yellow* accompanies the noun *dress*, where *yellow dress* symbolizes the empire (woman).

From this explanation, the concept of the meaning of the term *yellow* which is universal in Indonesian and Mandarin idioms

is referring to objects. No universal meaning is found for 'yellow' in both languages.

CONCLUSION

The colors used as the focus in this study are basic colors such as white, yellow, red, green, and blue which are listed in Swadesh's basic vocabulary list. The following conclusions can be drawn from this writing.

The term *black* in Indonesian and Mandarin idioms is interpreted as *bad* and *dark*, and refers to the same object, which is *ink*. The meaning of the terms *green* in Indonesian idioms is *child* and *drunk*, while in Chinese idioms are *beautiful* and *miserable*. The terms *white* in Indonesian idioms are meant as *sacred* and *surrender*, while in Chinese idioms they mean *empty*. The term *red* in the Indonesian idiom is interpreted as *embarrassed*, *brave*, and *newborn* condition, whereas in Chinese idiom it means *healthy*, *nervous*, *handsome*. The term *blue* in the Indonesian idiom is *authority*, whereas the Chinese idiom is not visible. The term *yellow* in Chinese idioms is meant as *warning*, while in Chinese it means *wealth*.

Through idioms, it is known that there is one color whose meaning is similar between Indonesian and Mandarin, namely *black*. However, there are similarities to the concept of using the term *color* in idioms that refer to similar objects or conditions, such as the colors *black*, *green*, and *red*. The universality of the meaning of color in idioms can be seen in the *black* color. The rest, the concept of associating colors with objects and conditions appears universal in the colors *black*, *green*, and *red*. Through the use of color terms in idioms, we can know the cultural reflection contained in it.

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