

# CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF *WHITE* COLOR IN ENGLISH AND MONGOLIAN

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## ABSTRACT

A metaphor has a relatively long history. According to linguists, one of the complicated issues related to speaking, which is the mental expression of humans, is the research on metaphors in the color lexicon. Therefore, this study focuses on the conceptual metaphors of six basic colors in English and Mongolian within a specific context. This research is going to study conceptual metaphors of *white* color in English and Mongolian. In both languages, there are countless metaphorical expressions of colors as in blue stocking, red Devil, white hot, black guard, red carpet, green thumb, green as a gooseberry, red China and etc.. Color metaphor studies have become a motivating topic. Here, in this paper I compared Conceptual metaphors of *white* colors in English and Mongolian and tried to analyze them. The main purpose of this study is to analyze conceptual metaphors of white colors by showing evidence from Mongolian in comparison with English. Moreover, it should be noticed that this study mainly focuses on the language use and its association with the given cultures.

**Keywords:** color metaphors, white color metaphors, color terms, conceptual metaphors, Mongolian

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The scope of research is to make a comparison on *white* color metaphors in English and Mongolian. According to the studies of cognitive linguistics, metaphor has an important position in our concepts and experiences. There are numerous studies on color metaphors in English. I will focus on the *white* colors. I aim to examine the similarities and differences on color metaphors in English and Mongolian, and provide suitable metaphorical expressions on similarities and differences. Color metaphors in English and Mongolia maybe about extraordinary vitality in the cross-cultural communication and support the cognitive view of metaphor. For example, there are universal color metaphors such as good is white, bad is black, happy is white, hot is red, shameful is red, sensational is yellow, etc.

I believe that this comparative study of *white* color metaphors will be an important study in the field of cognitive. My study intends to observe the similarities and differences of *white* color metaphors in English and Mongolian. I am trying to prove that there must be some culture/language-specific metaphors in English and Mongolian. English have had a sedentary lifestyle, whereas Mongolian have a nomadic culture. It is also a quite new study on color terms from a cognitive perspective. Since there is lack of sufficient, systematic research on color terms in Mongolian, I hope that this research will be one of valuable studies on color terms. Additionally, I pay more attention on the cultural basis of color metaphors in English and Mongolian, which are completely different languages. Therefore, this study will help to understand the relationship among cognition, culture and language itself in the two languages.

I shall try to show a systematic comparative study on color terms in the two languages. Thus, I collected the data not only from the Mongolian National Corpus and Mongolian etymology dictionaries, but also different sources such as previous studies on color terms, dictionaries and online sources. Then, I selected *white* color metaphors in Mongolian. Afterwards, I found similar metaphors from English dictionaries and other different sources, and analyzed the data. There are a number of *white* color terms, which can be exemplified by English and Mongolian linguistic materials. Some color terms imply different metaphoric senses in these two languages.

## ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF WHITE COLORS IN ENGLISH AND MONGOLIAN

This section includes the analysis of *white* color metaphors in English and Mongolian. Linguists started to pay much attention on color metaphor studies. Here in this thesis I compared conceptual metaphors of *white* colors in English and Mongolian and tried to analyze them. Our study aims to show similar *white* color metaphors in two different languages, culture, and traditions. I have found that there are more similarities than differences between the metaphorical expressions in English and Mongolian. Our conceptual system contains numerous concrete and abstract ideas, as humans, whether Mongolian or English, think similarly, see similarly and experience similarly. "Conceptual metaphors are based on a variety of human experience, including correlations in experience, various kinds of nonobjective similarity, biological and cultural roots shared by the two concepts, and possibly others".<sup>1</sup>

Metaphors are based commonly on the universal embodiment and social-cultural experiences. According to Kövecses, the cognitive linguistic analysis shows that the range of source domains relies on human factors.<sup>2</sup> There exist experiential bases of conceptual metaphors. There are a few common kinds of similarities such as correlations in experience, perceived structural similarity, perceived structural similarity introduced by basic metaphors and source being the root of the target. These two languages share numerous universal conceptual metaphors of *white* color. The reason for having the same metaphors can be related to the similar image and physical feelings, support on the general physiological system of human. The conceptual differences of color metaphors vary from culture to culture.

I have completely different histories, cultures, religions, experience, backgrounds and lifestyles. There exist some different color metaphors in English and Mongolian. All of these differences head to form different conceptual metaphors of the *white* colors in these completely diverse languages. A comparative study of color metaphors is extremely useful to overcome misunderstanding and recognize cross-cultural communication in English and Mongolian. Therefore, this study includes numerous similar *white* color metaphors and a few different *white* color metaphors in English and Mongolian.

*White* is one of the two basic color terms in English and Mongolian. In the *Oxford dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, and [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) the *white* color is defined

1 Z. Kövecses. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 69.

2 Ibid, 76.

as an adjective, it has eighteen different meanings, another ten different meanings for a noun and two different meaning for a verb. *White* is bright and colorless color, and it reflects equal quantities of all frequencies of visible light. *White* also means belonging to or denoting a human group having light-colored skin, especially people of European descent. *White* historically means counter-revolutionary or reactionary. In numerous societies, *white* implies virtue, honesty and light, and is the typical inverse of dark. *White* means a color of some physical things. According to the Mongolian etymology of *white*, it is a color of snow and milk. It is the same in English. In the two languages, *white* means a color term of various physical items.

*White* is extended to represent different conceptual meanings such as ‘kind/good/helpful’, ‘innocent’, ‘peaceful’, ‘precious or luxurious’, ‘special’ and so on. Now, I will compare the metaphorical meanings of *white* in the two languages.

### 1) Kind/Good/Helpful Is White

In English movies, excellent guys put on a *white hat* and evil guys put on a *black hat*. The *White hat* is the one, who is ‘honorable’ and ‘admirable’. A *White hat* is a mark of ‘goodness’. In English, a ‘good person’ is understood in terms of *white*.

(1) *The two central characters are a cop and a gangster, but don't expect a simple white-hat duality.*

A person with *white-spirit* means a good and pure hearted person and always does good to others. In Mongolian, this metaphor is manifested in the following examples:

(2) a. *Ariun tsagaan amitan*

lit. ‘holy white animal’ > ‘kind, good’

b. *tsagaan üilkhiikheer shiidekh*

lit. ‘white deed plan to do’ > ‘help’

c. *tsagaan sanaauvurtluj irekh*

lit. ‘white idea come with’ > ‘kindness’

d. *genen tsagaan setgeltei khun*

lit. ‘simple white hearted human’ > ‘a helpful man’

Mongolia has a nomadic culture and Mongolian people drink traditional *suutei tsai* (milk tea). Milk is the one of the main dairy products in Mongolia. Traditionally, we worship milk and spilling out milk means bad luck. Dairy products are the most invaluable products in

Mongolian culture. Dairy products are related to ‘kind’, ‘helpful’ and ‘good’ in Mongolian. ‘Charity’, ‘kindness’ and ‘kind-heartedness’ are understood in terms of *white*. In both cultures, *white* is understood in terms of ‘good’ and ‘kind’.

### 2) Innocent/Harmless Is White

This specific metaphorical extension is most likely derived from the more literal relationship of *black* with ‘dust’, whereas we relate *white* with ‘fresh’ and ‘clean’. In the *black* metaphor, *black* means ‘bad’, ‘harmful’ and ‘evil thing’. On the contrary, *white* means the opposite value of ‘harmless’ or ‘good thing’. A remarkable study was directed by two psychologists Sherman and Clore, who inspected programmed relationship among words through ‘good things’ and ‘moral meanings’ understood in terms of *white*, but ‘bad things’ and ‘immoral’ understood in terms of *black*.<sup>3</sup> This shows that people naturally relate *black* with bad, and *white* with good.

Suitable examples were likewise found in English and Mongolian. A *white lie* is a kind of lie, which aims to avoid hurting the person. It means a minor or unimportant lie, especially one uttered in the interest soft actor politeness.

(3) a. *When I was young, I told little white lies.*

b. He is **white**-handed.

In English, *white-handed* means ‘honest’ and ‘innocent’. As a matter of fact, a person, who is ‘innocent’ and ‘honest’ can be conveyed as ‘white hands’ in English. This is true that in Mongolian *white* is also has a meaning of ‘innocence’.

(4) a. *Khuukhduud tsagaan khudlaa ch medekhgui*

lit. ‘children white lie do not know’ > ‘children do not know harmless, untrue statement’

b. *tsagaatgakh uil ajillagaa*

lit. ‘to whiten action’ > ‘activities to prove someone’s innocence’

3 G. D. Sherman and G. L. Clore. “The Color of Sin White and Black Are Perceptual Symbols of Moral Purity and Pollution”, *HHS Author Manuscripts*, 2010.

A *white lie* is harmless and it is used to ‘deliberate’ or ‘untrue statement’, which is intended to produce a favorable result or protect. ‘Harmless’ is understood in terms of *white* in both languages.

### 3) Peaceful Is White

In some ancient cultures, a *white dove* is viewed as a sign of peace, innocence and love. In the Bible, *white doves* are mentioned as symbols of peace. A dove emerges in the representation of religious and military groups.

#### (5) **white dove**

The *Nine Base White Banners* or the *Yöson Khölt tsagaan tug* – was the state flag flown by the Mongols. The *Yöson Khölt tsagaan tug* was a peacetime image utilized solely by the *Khans* as a part of the front of their *ger* (traditional house). The main banner is bigger in size than the rest and is set in the central point of the other eight. In the present day, the Mongolian *Yöson Khölt tsagaan tug* is in the Government Palace in *Ulaanbaatar*.

#### (6) *Yöson Khölt tsagaan tug*.

lit. ‘nine base white flags’ > ‘white-haired banners were used as a peacetime symbol’

### 4) Precious/Luxurious Is White.

The following metaphor changes significantly crosswise over societies, which is maybe best exemplified by the color of important ownership. The English and Mongolian natives vary in some ways as mentioned earlier. Therefore, this study shows that *white* metaphors exist in some degrees.

(7) Some of the stadiums being built for the World Cup soccer tournament, scheduled for the next year, have also been criticized for delays and cost overruns, and have become subjects of derision as protesters question whether they will become **white** elephants.

A *white elephant* means an expensive possession, upkeep of which is excessively expensive. A *white elephant* is really hard to find, so it means ‘a rare thing’ and ‘expensive thing’. Mongolians relate *white* color to a *ger* or *yurt*. A *ger* is a convenient, circular tent covered with skins, felt and utilized as a dwelling by wanderers in the grassland of Mongolia. The Mongolian national *ger* is a fundamental component of the cultural heritage of the Mongolian

individuals. *Ger* is understood in terms of ‘precious’ and ‘expensive’ in Mongolian culture.

#### (8) a. *tsagaan Üüd*

lit. ‘white gate’ > ‘Luxury’

#### b. *dalai tsagaan ger*

lit. ‘ocean white *ger*’ (Mongolian traditional dwelling) > ‘Mostly, a simple Mongolian *ger* consists of 5 walls and 2 pillars. But Dalai

*Tsagaan ger* consists of 10 walls and 4 pillars.’ In Mongolian, this type of *ger* is very ‘precious’ and ‘luxurious’.

#### c. *Khaanii tsagaan Ürgüü*

lit. ‘khan’s white Ürgüü’ (Ürgüü is a polite word for *ger*) > ‘White Palace’ **White** ürgüü is only for people, who are related to the king.

Therefore, there are some metaphors, where ‘precious’ and ‘luxurious’ things are understood in terms of *white* in English and Mongolian.

### 5) Special Is White.

*White glove* is a metaphor that comes up from metonymy. *White gloves* mean providing or involving meticulous care, attention, or special service. In both languages, ‘being special’ is understood in terms of *white*.

#### (9) Clients who were given the **white-glove** treatment

We could study *tsagaan yast* (white boned) terminology as it refers to ‘special’ in *the Secret History of Mongols of Genghis Khan*. In this script, *tsagaan yast* (white boned) means golden kinship of *Genghis Khan*, but *khar yast* (black boned) means a servant. Mongolians understand special in terms of *white* as follows:

#### (10) *tuunii uvuu tsagaan yast*.

lit. ‘his grandfather has white bone’ > ‘special; a real native or a descendant of *Genghis Khan*’

As we see, *white* color metaphors tend to have positive meaning compared to *black* color metaphors. In the two languages, *white* is mostly derived from metaphors such as ‘kind/good/helpful’, ‘innocent/harmless’, ‘peaceful’, ‘precious/luxurious’, ‘special’ and so on. The important purpose of this study is to observe similarities and show differences. Thus, there are some different metaphors. Some different *white* metaphors are found in English and Mongolian.

Mongolians read various kinds of book and some people are addicted to reading. This metaphorical expression does not exist in English. So, we say *nomiin tsagaan solio* (book white mad) about a person, who is addicted to books. Addicted is understood in terms of *white* as in the following:

#### 6) Addicted Is White.

(11) a. *Nomiin tsagaan solio*

lit. 'book white mad' > 'someone is addicted to reading books'

b. *arkhinii tsagaan solio*

lit. 'alcohol white mad' > 'someone is addicted to drinking alcohol'

c. *mungunii tsagaan solio boljee*

lit. 'money white mad happened' > 'someone is addicted to earning money'

The native speakers of English understood 'zealous' in terms of *white*. *White-hot* means extremely hot and states of intense emotion like zeal or eagerness.

#### 7) Zealous Is White.

(12) a shower of **white**-hot embers

The native speakers of Mongolian do not understand 'zealous' in terms of *white*, because it does not exist in Mongolian. In English, *white* is also associated with happiness. *White* is the color of bride. It describes the quality of being pure. For example:

#### 8) Happy Is White.

(13) *And Elea, the blushing bride, wore her long white wedding gown made of silk.*

It is a traditional 'church wedding' at which the bride wears a formal *white* dress.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in English and Mongolian, we could find more similar examples of *white* color metaphors due to the universal cognitive capabilities, cognitive processes, and way of thinking and experiences. Robertson said that culture was a set of products of human beings.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Huang mentioned that language had a crucial role and it was an inseparable part

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, I., *Sociology*, 2nd edition. (North Publishers, N.Y, 1981.

of culture. Culture and language reflect each other.<sup>5</sup> People can understand different terms and idioms without knowing a specific cultural background. There are a lot of metaphor explanations; here we can mention Kövecses (2010), "in addition to objective, pre-existing similarity – conceptual metaphors are based on a variety of human experience, including correlations in experience, various kinds of non-objective similarity, biological and cultural roots shared by the two concepts, and possibly others".<sup>6</sup> There are a lot of studies about color metaphors and a number of researchers dealt with the cognitive view point.

Color metaphor studies have become a motivating topic. Here in this paper we compared Conceptual metaphors of *white* colors in English and Mongolian and tried to analyze them. The main purpose of this study is to analyze conceptual metaphors of *white* colors by showing evidence from Mongolian in comparison with English. Moreover, it should be noticed that this study mainly focuses on the language use and its association with the given cultures. We have found that there are more similarities than differences between the metaphorical expressions in English and Mongolian. This systematic comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors of *white* colors in English and Mongolian contributes importantly to the major claims of the Contemporary Metaphor Theory. Even though English and Mongolian belong to very different language families representing totally different sedentary and nomadic cultures, they share some conceptual metaphors for particular colors with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> K vecses, Z. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, op.cit.

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