

PERSONALITY DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION BY COLOUR SIMILES
IN RUSSIAN, ENGLISH AND FRENCH

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The author classifies different types of content created by colour similes in Russian, English and French contexts and explains the analogical connection between the features of human appearance and the objects chosen for colour representation. A new content appears due to cognitive interaction between two concepts: the object of comparison (OC) and the colour representative (CR).

Nowadays much attention is paid to studying basic cognitive spheres and means of their linguistic representation [1]. Comparison with various objects and phenomena is one of the main ways of reality conceptualization and categorization. In this regard, the study of similes as a linguistic means representing results of this cognitive process is of particular importance [2, 3]. For more detailed information on importance and prospects of conceptual analysis see [4]. The conceptual area of "Colour" brings together the scientific and ordinary knowledge. The field of scientific knowledge about colour includes colour physics, psychology of colour perception, professional knowledge of colour categories and colour symptoms. Everyday knowledge involves knowledge of colour categories, colour characteristics and symptoms at a common level. Colour as an area of everyday knowledge turns to be an object of evaluation.

Simile is a linguistic means of expressing analogy of objects or phenomena, established by one or more characteristics, which can be explicated in its bases (*her skin is as white as snow*) or not (*her skin is like snow*). Establishing analogy between the compared objects is a cognitive mechanism of comparison. The related concepts establish a "target – source" relation, and the content of the target concept (OC concept) is structured in a certain way under the influence of the source concept (CR concept) (this mechanism is described by Lakoff and Johnsen in "Metaphors we live by" [5]). A distinctive feature of the simile is verbalization of one or more characteristics in its bases by which the similarity between the objects is established. In addition to the characteristics verbalized in the basis, similes can convey other characteristics of the OC, not explicated in the basis. This is due to the projection of other elements of the CR concept in the OC concept and activation of similar elements of the OC concept.

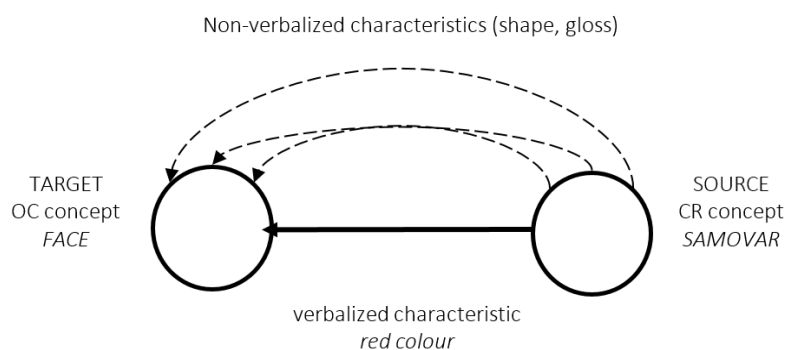


Figure 1. – Interaction between the OC concept and CR concept

Colour similes are used to describe natural personal appearance (constant feature), or visual signals of physical or psychological personal state (variable feature). Being a natural feature or a visual signal of important inner changes, the colour is evaluated positively or negatively [6]. The criteria for evaluating the colour and the object itself (appearance, physical or emotional state) are based on Arutyunova's classification of values [7]. A colour as a component of the individual personal appearance is evaluated as a rule from the aesthetical standpoint, but as a signal of the physical or psychological state of a person – from the normative standpoint. In addition, a colour can be an object of emotional attitude as causing acceptance or rejection, or evaluated as good or bad in general.

Similes describe colour shades that do not have conventional names in the language (*белый как слоно-вая кость* (white as ivory), *red as fire*, *noir comme l'aile d'un corbeau* (black as a raven's wing)). Apart from describing the colour, they provide additional information about the OC. The implementation of the first function is provided by attracting objects possessing specific colour shades (ivory, fire, crow plumage) to be CRs. The second function implies activation of the OC additional objective or evaluative characteristics under the influence of CR [8, 9]. For example, in addition to the colour characteristic *красный как самовар* (as red as a samovar) implicitly tells about the gloss, plumpness; *красный как индюк* / *red as a turkey cock* / *rouge comme un coq (d'inde)* tells about *arrogance*; *красный как мак* / *red as a rose* / *rouge comme un bouton de rose, un coquelicot* about beauty and femininity; *rouges comme braise* about being hot; *красный как рак* / *red as a lobster* / *un homard, une écrevisse* about a change of state.

The mechanism allows us to understand how the OC concept receives a new content, and the reader gets additional, not expressed in the simile information about the OC. It is vividly seen in contexts where the additional characteristics can be supported (1-6):

(1) *В угольной из этих лавочек, или, лучше, в окне, помещался сбитенщик с самоваром из красной меди и лицом так же красным, как самовар, так что издали можно бы подумать, что на окне стояло два самовара, если б один самовар не был с черною как смоль бороною* (Н. В. Гоголь. Мертвые души);

(2) *The nice farmer has red as rose cheeks with light skin* (J. Cowley, Mrs Wishy-Washy's Farm);

(3) *Her lips were red... They were as red as a petal crowning a freshly picked rose* (Ginamarie, Fate);

(4) *Et les viandes de fumer et les vins de pleuvoir dans les gosiers. Ulenspiegel et le landgrave étant tous deux rouges comme braise, Ulenspiegel entra en joie, mais le landgrave demeurait pensif* (Ch. de Coster, La légende et les aventures...);

(5) *Le petit jeune homme, en l'apercevant, avait sauté a terre, rouge comme un coquelicot. Et il ne savait que faire de son bouquet, qu'il passait d'une main dans l'autre, étranglé par l'émotion. Sa jeunesse, son embaras, la drôle de mine qu'il avait avec ses fleurs, attendrirent Nana, qui éclata d'un beau rire* (É. Zola, Nana);

(6) *Il [le commandant] me regarde, fier comme Artaban, ouvre la lettre, la lit, devient rouge comme une écrevisse* (E. Sue, Les Mystères de Paris).

A wide range of set and individual authorial similes describing a person shows that in order to represent knowledge about colour Russian, English and French speakers attract objects and phenomena from different areas: wildlife, artifacts, food, man, biblical characters and fictional creatures, as well as abstract concepts. The presence of the element in three languages allows us to talk about its universality as a CR (*белый как снег*, *white as snow*, *blanc comme neige*). There are also nationally coloured CRs (*красный как самовар*, *красный как кумач*, as yellow as *a guinea* (English golden coin), *jaune comme un vieux sou* (French coin)).

The main part of CRs are concrete objects that have a clear image in the speaker's mind and which characteristics, especially colour, are well known to native speakers. However the role of CRs is fulfilled by abstract concepts ontologically devoid of colour characteristic. This means that the elements of the CR categories are not equal and it is possible to distinguish their more typical and less typical CRs. In this sense, the CR categories have a prototypical structure and are organized according to the core and periphery principle. The prototype phenomena and prototype categories were studied in [10-12]. The basis for identifying the CR as the core or peripheral element of the CR category is the degree of connection between the colour characteristic and the representatives of these characteristics in similes [13].

Let us consider the structure of the GREEN CRs category. We distinguish four zones in it: the core, the center, the close periphery and the far periphery (Picture 2). The core of the category includes the objects which green colour is their essential feature: e.g. EMERALD is "a bright green precious stone" (*зеленый как изумруд* / *green as emerald* / *vert comme une émeraude*). The center of the category has the objects, which green colour is a typical, but not obligatory feature, for example, GRASS (*green as grass*): grass is normally green, but it turns yellow in autumn. The nearest periphery includes the objects which green colour is one of the possible but not typical features, such as APPLE in the GREEN CR category. Apples are usually red, which is set in similes *красный как яблоко* / *rouge comme une pomme (d'api)*. Green colour indicates one of its varieties as in a French individual authorial simile *vert comme les pommes granny smith* (*green as Granny Smith apples*), or an unripe fruit *vert comme une pomme verte* (*green as a green apple*). Far periphery includes JEALOUSY (*green as jealousy*). The feeling can't ontologically possess a colour feature, but there is a metonymic transfer of the colour characteristics to the emotional experience that is seen in other English, Russian and French metaphorical expressions: *но-зеленеть от зависти*, *green with envy*, *être vert de peur*. We suppose that if the CR is far from the core of the category it has an ability to provide additional information about the OC. This is because of the activation of other more important characteristics than colour in the CR concept and their projection to the OC concept [14].

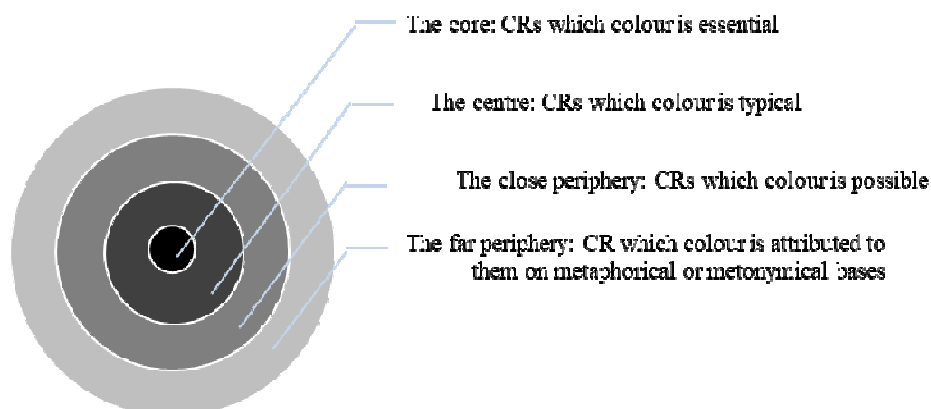


Figure 2. – Green colour representative category

The study of Russian, English and French contexts shows how colour similes function in the real language, which helps us to distinguish between different types of additional content provided by colour similes, such as colour shade specification, colour intensification, description of colour as a result of an impact; characteristics of non-colour features of human appearance; evaluation of human appearance or state; evaluation of internal qualities.

Colour shade specification takes place when a possible shade of personal appearance is objectively close to the CR typical shade (7-9):

(7) ...вертялый дворový мальчик с белыми, как лен, волосами... (Д.В. Григорович, Переселенцы).

(8) Ben was brown as mahogany from the sun (J. Long, Year Zero).

(9) Ajoutez un cou blanc comme l'ivoire... (E. About, Les Mariages de Paris).

The CR typical shade of is reflected in its meaning: *льняной* – «напоминающий цветом волокна льна; белый с желтоватым оттенком» [15: 36]; *mahogany* adj. – «a rich reddish-brown colour like that of mahogany wood» [16]; *ivoire* – «matière fine, résistante, d'un blanc laiteux...» [17: 1037].

Colour intensification can be achieved if a colour of personal appearance cannot objectively be of the same degree of intensity as the CR colour (10-12):

(10) *Николаас никогда не видел, чтобы человек моментально делался белым как мел...* (Акунин, Алтын-Тол.);

(11) ...the cook told me one of his mates had just gone down with gas from last night. And the S.M. [sergeant-major – М.П.] looks as green as grass (R. Aldington, Death of a Hero);

(12) *On ne voyait, de cette face jaune comme du safran et dévastée par la fièvre...* (G. Sand, Le meunier d'Angibault).

Colour as a result of an impact of some external or internal factors is described by similes where CR also gets the colour due to some impact, e.g. hot temperature exposure (13-15):

(13) *Пекли свёклу в печурках.. И без того смуглые, волосом темные, казахи сделались черны, что головешки* (В. Астафьев, Прокляты и убиты);

(14) *And, after being out in the sunshine with the children most of the day, she'd lost her pale, city complexion, becoming as brown as a berry and looking much younger* (British National Corpus);

(15) *Il [le commandant] me regarde, fier comme Artaban, ouvre la letter, la lit, deviant rouge comme une écrevisse* (E. Sue, Les Mystères de Paris).

Colour similes are also able to describe **non-colour features** of human appearance, e.g. shine, shape, size, texture, temperature, statics and dynamics. In the following examples non-colour features are explicated by the elements of the context and supported by colour similes: "large-sized hands" (*ручища* and *половина копченой курицы* – a large hand and a half of smoked chicken) (16), «shine in the eyes» (*gleaming* and *anthracite*) (17), «velvety texture of the face» (*veloutées* and *pêche en automne* – velvety and peach in autumn) (18):

(16) ...принимая из коричневой, как половина копченой курицы, ручищи аборигена грязный документ... (О. Славникова, Бессмертный...);

(17) *Moreover, he was chuckling and making humorous observations to Fleury in Hindustani, his eyes gleaming as black as anthracite...* (British National Corpus),

(18) *...c'était un jeune homme ...aux joues roses et veloutées comme une pêche en automne (A. Dumas, Les Trois Mousquetaires).*

Similes can activate additional features themselves without the contextual support. This is due to CR conceptual characteristics. In the following contexts non-colour features are activated without the use of additional language tools, because they are typical characteristics of the corresponding CR: "size and shape of the mustache" (*бивни* - tusks) (19), "hair shine" (*boot polish*) (20), "high body temperature" (*braise* - coals) (21):

(19) *Желтые, как бивни, усы старика...* (О. Славникова, Стрекоза...);

(20) *...this boy looked almost pure Indian – hair black as boot polish, with eyes to match (T. Capote, In Cold Blood);*

(21) *Et les viandes de fumer et les vins de pleuvoir dans les gosiers. Ulenspiegel et le landgrave étant tous deux rouges comme braise...(Ch. de Coster, La légende...).*

Colour similes evaluative function is caused by their idiomatic nature. Being described by colour similes a person is evaluated generally, esthetically, normatively and emotionally. An object of evaluation is usually a colour feature, detail of appearance, appearance or condition of a person as a whole.

Evaluation of personal appearance can be explicated in the context (direct evaluation) or conveyed by the simile implicitly (indirect evaluation). On the other hand, the OC evaluation determines the choice of the CR with the same sign (plus or minus), We have identified several types of CR evaluation: general, sensory-taste, aesthetic, ethical, emotional, utilitarian, normative.

In the case of direct evaluation, the evaluative characteristics of personal appearance are expressed by certain linguistic means both outside the structure of a simile or in it (22-24):

(22) *И спрятала на грудь мою Как вишня покрасневшее Прелестное лицо...* (Н.А. Некрасов, Кому на Руси жить хорошо);

(23) *And waving her hand, white as a lily and fine as a fairy's, she vanished within the porch...* (Ch. Brontë, Shirley);

(24) – *Je suis confuse!... – Oui, rougissez, ma douce Yvonne, rougissez, vous êtes si gentille quand vous devenez rouge comme... comme un rayon du couchant!* (H. Bernier, Ce que disait la flamme).

The sign of OC evaluation expressed in the context is consistent with the sign of CR evaluation: in (22) *прелестное* - charming (positive aesthetic evaluation) and *вишня* - cherry (positive sensory and taste evaluation); in (23) *fine as a fairy's* (positive aesthetic evaluation) and *lily* (positive aesthetic evaluation); in (24) *gentille* – nice (positive emotional evaluation) and *un rayon du couchant* – a ray of the sunset (positive aesthetic evaluation).

Indirect evaluation of a person by colour similes takes place when there is no direct explication of OC evaluation in the context and it is activated under the influence of the CR evaluation (25-27):

(25) – *Изумительно вы все-таки загорели! – А вы – белый, как червяк, – сказала Лидочка [Стругацкий 1997: 235];*

(26) *Aringarosa was smiling. "Indeed, Noah of the Ark. An albino. Like you, he had skin white like an angel* (D. Brown, The Da Vinci Code);

(27) *Blanc comme un mort, il [le maire] vient se mettre avec tout le monde sur la place. Il tremble tellement des lèvres et mains qu'il ne sait pas nous en dire une...* (A. Stil, Le Premier choc).

CR evaluation is based on generally accepted evaluation categorization of objects of this kind: *червяк* – worm (negative aesthetic evaluation); *angel* (positive ethical evaluation); *un mort* – death (negative normative evaluation). The CR evaluation contributes to the actualization of the similar sign OC evaluation.

Colour similes are also used to **evaluate personal internal qualities**: intellectual abilities (28), life experience (29), moral character (30) and others:

(28) *«Серый ты, Альбертович, как сибирский валенок. Молчал бы лучше...»* (В. Беляев, Реинкарнация старых товарищей);

(29) *Mother, without consulting me, has invited a poor and poky cousin of ours to spend the holidays with us also. He is from the West, green as a gooseberry, and, what's far worse, he's studying for the ministry...* (E.P. Roe, Jest to Earnest);

(30) *Tomaso refusa, me dit qu'il était sûr de son affaire, que l'avocat Barricini l'avait recommandé à tous les juges, qu'il sortirait de là blanc comme neige et avec de l'argent en poche (P. Mérimée, Colombo).*

Evaluation of personal internal qualities is based mainly on activation of figurative meaning of colour names at the base of colour similes: *серый* – перен. малокультурный, необразованный С. человек [18: 583],

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green – lacking experience, not mature or wise [19: 521], *blanc* – «qui n'est pas souillé, coupable... Immaculé, innocent» [17: 189].

To sum it up we should say that on the one hand colour similes denote colour shades of appearance that do not have conventional names in the language. This function is provided by distinctiveness and relative constancy of the colour of the object which functions as CR. On the other hand colour similes are the means of evaluative categorization of appearance, since they add to the selected colour characteristics evaluative meanings, such as the intensity of the colour, additional objective characteristics (shape, size, texture, shine), view of colour as a certain effect, positive or negative evaluation of the OC. Some colour similes are used to describe non-colour characteristics (intelligence, mood, human experience), realizing their figurative meaning.

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