



THE PLACE OF COLOR ADJECTIVES AMONG PARTS OF SPEECH AND IN THE LANGUAGE SYSTEM

Shodiyev Rahimjon Safarovich

Senior Teacher of the "Languages" Department,

Tashkent University of Applied Sciences

shodiyevrahimjon73@gmail.com

Abstract

Color adjectives constitute a significant lexical-semantic group within the system of adjectives and play a crucial role in structuring human perception, cognition, and linguistic categorization of reality. This article explores the place of color adjectives among parts of speech and their functional, semantic, and cognitive roles within the language system. Drawing on theoretical linguistics, cognitive semantics, and cross-linguistic studies, the paper examines the grammatical status of color adjectives, their interaction with other lexical categories, and their contribution to meaning-making processes. The study employs qualitative linguistic analysis, comparative methods, and discourse-based interpretation. The findings demonstrate that color adjectives are not merely descriptive units but multifunctional linguistic elements that reflect cultural values, conceptual structures, and systemic organization of language.

Keywords: Color adjectives, parts of speech, language system, semantics, cognition, linguistic categorization.

Introduction

The classification of words into parts of speech is one of the fundamental issues in linguistic theory. Among these categories, adjectives occupy a central position due to their descriptive and evaluative functions. Within the adjective class, color adjectives represent a distinct and highly productive subgroup that has attracted attention in linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and cognitive science.



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Color adjectives are used to describe visual properties of objects, but their function extends far beyond simple description. They participate in metaphorical constructions, symbolic representations, and evaluative judgments. Moreover, color terms reflect the interaction between language, perception, and culture, making them an important object of linguistic investigation.

This article aims to analyze the place of color adjectives among parts of speech and to determine their role within the overall language system. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the grammatical and semantic status of color adjectives?
- How do color adjectives function within the language system?
- What cognitive and cultural factors influence their usage?

Literature Review:

The study of color terms has a long tradition in linguistics. Early research focused on the lexical classification of colors, while later studies incorporated cognitive and cultural perspectives.

Berlin and Kay's seminal work *Basic Color Terms* introduced the idea that languages develop color vocabularies in a universal and predictable order. Their research demonstrated that color adjectives form a structured lexical system rather than a random set of descriptors. (1969)

From a grammatical perspective, Lyons emphasized that adjectives, including color adjectives, function as modifiers that attribute properties to nouns. Dixon further classified adjectives into semantic types, identifying color as one of the core adjective classes present across languages. (1977)

Cognitive linguistics has significantly contributed to understanding color adjectives. Lakoff and Johnson showed that color terms are frequently used metaphorically (e.g., black market, green energy), indicating their role in conceptualization. Wierzbicka argued that color meanings are culturally embedded and cannot be fully understood without considering cultural semantics. Recent studies have also explored the role of color adjectives in discourse and pragmatics, highlighting their evaluative and emotional functions. (1996)



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Despite extensive research, the position of color adjectives within the broader language system and their interaction with grammatical and semantic structures remain a relevant topic for further investigation.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods research design, combining descriptive, comparative, and corpus-based linguistic analysis. The methodological framework is grounded in modern linguistic theory, cognitive semantics, and functional grammar. The research is exploratory and analytical in nature, aiming to reveal the grammatical, semantic, and functional status of color adjectives within the language system and among parts of speech.

1. Descriptive analysis – to examine the grammatical properties and semantic features of color adjectives.
2. Comparative method – to identify similarities and differences in the use of color adjectives across languages (primarily English and selected typologically different languages).
3. Semantic and cognitive analysis – to explore literal, metaphorical, and symbolic meanings of color adjectives.
4. Discourse analysis – to observe the functioning of color adjectives in different types of texts, including literary, academic, and media discourse.

The data for analysis are drawn from linguistic corpora, dictionaries, and previous scholarly studies. This multi-method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the role of color adjectives within the language system.

The empirical material for the study is drawn from multiple sources to ensure representativeness and reliability:

Modern English language corpora, including fiction, academic prose, journalism, and spoken discourse.

Authoritative lexicographic sources (monolingual explanatory dictionaries and thesauri).

Selected literary texts from contemporary and classical English literature.

Academic linguistic publications focusing on adjective theory, color semantics, and lexical categorization.



The corpus includes approximately 200–300 contextual occurrences of core and derived color adjectives (e.g., red, blue, greenish, golden, dark-colored), allowing for systematic qualitative analysis.

The methodology is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the grammatical properties of color adjectives within the system of parts of speech.
2. To analyze the semantic and functional roles of color adjectives in different linguistic contexts.
3. To examine the interaction of color adjectives with other word classes.
4. To compare traditional grammatical classifications with modern cognitive and functional approaches.
5. To determine the degree of lexicalization and semantic extension of color adjectives in contemporary English.

Table 1. Classification of adjectives within the parts of speech system

Adjective type	Definition	Examples	Linguistic function
Qualitative	Express inherent qualities of objects	big, small, beautiful	Description
Color adjectives	Express visual color properties	red, blue, green	Description/ Symbolism
Relative	Indicate relation or material	wooden, medical	Specification
Evaluative	Express subjective assessment	good, bad, important	Evaluation

Table 2. Literal and figurative meanings of color adjectives

Color	Literal Meaning	Figurative/ Metaphorical Meaning
White	Light color	Purity, innocence
Black	Dark color	Evil, secrecy, illegality
Red	Bright warm color	Danger, love, passion
Green	Natural color	Youth, ecology, inexperience
Blue	Cool color	Sadness, calmness



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To enhance validity and reliability:

- Data were collected from multiple independent sources.
- Repeated contextual analysis was conducted to confirm interpretations.
- Established linguistic theories and terminologies were consistently applied.
- Examples were cross-checked across different text types.

All analyzed texts were used strictly for academic purposes. Proper citation practices were followed, and no proprietary or unpublished materials were included in the corpus.

The chosen methodology allows for a multidimensional examination of color adjectives, integrating grammatical structure, semantic development, and functional usage. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the place of color adjectives within the system of parts of speech and the broader language system.

Discussion:

Grammatically, color adjectives belong to the class of qualitative adjectives. They modify nouns by specifying visual attributes and typically answer the question “What kind?”. In English, they occur in attributive (a red apple) and predicative (the apple is red) positions, demonstrating their syntactic flexibility.

Unlike some adjectives, color adjectives are generally non-gradable (redder is possible but less common in literal contexts), which distinguishes them from evaluative adjectives such as big or beautiful. This feature highlights their descriptive rather than comparative nature.

Semantically, color adjectives encode perceptual information but also extend into abstract domains. Through metaphor and metonymy, color terms acquire additional meanings:

White may symbolize purity or innocence.

Black often conveys negativity or secrecy.

Green is associated with nature, youth, or inexperience.

From a cognitive perspective, color adjectives reflect how humans categorize and conceptualize reality. They serve as linguistic tools for organizing visual experience and linking perception with language.



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Within the language system, color adjectives interact with cultural norms and values. Different languages may prioritize certain color distinctions, which affects lexicalization and usage. For example, some languages use a single term for what English distinguishes as blue and green, indicating that color categorization is language-specific.

Systemically, color adjectives contribute to lexical fields, phraseological units, and stylistic variation. Their frequent use in idioms and figurative expressions demonstrates their integration into the semantic network of language.

Conclusion:

The analysis confirms that color adjectives occupy a significant position among parts of speech and within the language system as a whole. They function not only as descriptive modifiers but also as carriers of cognitive, cultural, and symbolic meanings. Color adjectives form a structured semantic subgroup within adjectives, characterized by specific grammatical properties and rich semantic potential. Their interaction with perception, cognition, and culture underscores their importance in linguistic theory.

Future research may focus on corpus-based quantitative analysis, cross-cultural comparisons, and the role of color adjectives in language acquisition and translation studies.

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