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Color-Related Conceptual Metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish Proverbs and Idioms: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates color-related conceptual metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the framework of Basic Color Terms, the study examined 120 metaphorical expressions containing black (qara/qərə), white (ağ/aq), red (qırmızı), yellow (sarı), mixed color (ala), blue (göy), and green (yaşıl). The data were extracted from a corpus of approximately 14,000 proverbs and idiomatic expressions and were supplemented through fieldwork with native speakers in Tabriz. The findings indicated that black was the most frequent color term, with 76 instances, and was predominantly associated with negative domains such as sorrow, hardship, misfortune, poverty, death, shame, and deceit. White occurred in 27 instances and primarily conveyed positive meanings, including purity, honesty, happiness, honor, and prosperity. Red (6 instances), yellow (3 instances), and mixed colors (6 instances) generally displayed negative polarity. This was evident in associations such as anger and passion for red, illness for yellow, and worthlessness and lack of identity for mixed colors. However, red occasionally conveyed positive concepts such as courage and dignity. Blue and green each occurred once metaphorically, linked to stability or fate and growth or prosperity, respectively. Overall, the results demonstrate systematic mappings between sensory experience and abstract emotional, moral, and social domains in Azerbaijani Turkish.

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1. Introduction

Conceptual metaphors constitute a foundational cognitive mechanism in human languages, facilitating the comprehension of abstract concepts through concrete sensory experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This framework posits that metaphorization and conceptualization are indispensable for processing phenomena ranging from mundane daily experiences to intricate scientific constructs (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). Within this paradigm, color terms that convey conceptual metaphors play a central role in structuring cognition and transmitting culturally embedded meanings. Due to their visual salience and prominence in human perception, colors not only denote physical properties but also shape emotional responses, social values, and cultural beliefs (Cacciari et al., 2004).

As language functions not merely as a communicative instrument but as a reflection of collective cognition and societal cognitive structures, the analysis of proverbs and idioms incorporating metaphorical color terms assumes particular significance. Proverbs, characterized as succinct, prevalent, and sagacious expressions, are typically grounded in a community's collective experiential knowledge, frequently employing metaphorical language to convey profound meanings. They may be regarded as the most ancient form of oral literature, consistently aiding human cognition in elucidating concepts and perceptions (Bahmanyar, 1990). Mieder (2022) defines a proverb as a concise, traditional utterance that encapsulates cultural wisdom or ethical precepts, often expressed metaphorically and transmitted intergenerationally.

Idioms, on the other hand, are fixed expressions whose meanings are non-compositional, deriving from conventionalized interpretations within a specific linguistic community (Bateni, 2014). Proverbs and idioms, as stable idiomatic constructions, leverage conceptual metaphors as cognitive and linguistic schemata to articulate and convey their messages (Moreno, 2005). Owing to their robust metaphorical capacity, these linguistic elements provide a fertile ground for investigating metaphors involving color terms. Colors, with their inherent sensory and cognitive attributes, play a critical role in metaphorical construction (Zarei & Raghib-Doust, 2023). For example, in Eastern cultural contexts such as China, black is associated with the element of water, the northern cardinal direction, and, at times, latent peril, whereas white symbolizes the element of metal and death, frequently employed in funerary rituals (Park, 2009).

Investigating color metaphors is significant for several interrelated reasons. Although color constitutes a universal dimension of human experience, its linguistic representation is shaped by specific cultural, historical, and social contexts. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, color metaphors embedded in proverbs and idioms provide valuable insights into how knowledge is structured and conceptualized in the human mind. Moreover, analyzing color-based metaphors enables meaningful cross-cultural comparison, revealing how different languages employ color terms to encode, structure, and transmit meaning. Although there is a growing body of research on color metaphors in world languages such as English and Chinese, Azerbaijani Turkish remains comparatively unexplored in this domain, despite its rich tradition of proverbs, idioms, and oral literature. In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to determine the frequency distribution of metaphorically used color terms in proverbs and idioms and to identify the metaphorical target domains and semantic polarities associated with color terms in Azerbaijani Turkish idiomatic and proverbial expressions.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored color-term metaphors across various languages, demonstrating that colors play a critical role in expressing emotions, social values, and abstract concepts. Allan (2009) demonstrated that English color terms carried conventional connotations in figurative language. For instance, he showed that black was associated with illegality, evil, and misfortune; white with purity, innocence, and harmlessness; red with anger and danger;

blue with sadness; green with envy or inexperience; and gray with dullness, aging, and ambiguity. Yu (2019) explored color metaphors in Chinese from a cognitive-cultural perspective, demonstrating that cultural and experiential patterns shaped these metaphors. Kövecses (2020), within the framework of the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, elucidated the flexibility of metaphorical meanings and cultural differences in color semantics, noting, for example, that white signified purity in Western cultures and death in some Eastern cultures. Umam and Nirmala (2020) compared color metaphors in English and Indonesian song lyrics, finding notable similarities: black metaphorized darkness, white purity, yellow brightness, and gray sorrow, though variations existed for blue, red, and green. Wang and Lü (2021) highlighted, in a comparative study of Chinese and English, that the metaphorical meanings of colors were influenced by each society's belief systems and cultural values.

Studies in Iranian languages have mainly focused on Persian color terms. Samet-Jukandan's (2014) study indicated that the conceptual metaphor "emotions are colors" exhibited the highest frequency (47 instances) among metaphorical themes in Persian language. Additionally, Aliakbari and Khosravian (2013) found that black and white were the most frequently used color terms, while purple was the least common. Black was associated with negative connotations such as calamity and evil, reflecting cultural perceptions of darkness and misfortune. White—linked to purity and good fortune—signified values of innocence and success, yet its association with death and fear revealed cultural complexities. Green, tied to hope and nature, reflected the cultural emphasis on vitality and the natural world in Persian culture. Red, symbolizing value and resilience, conveyed passion and the significance of life. Yellow and purple—associated with negative concepts—denoted caution toward deceit and anger. The polarity of meanings was predominantly positive for green and red, negative for black, yellow, and purple, and both positive and negative for white. In another study, Taghipoury-Hajebi et al. (2022) analyzed 89 color-related conceptual metaphors across domains such as ideas, fortune, illness, fear, anger, beauty, joy, shame, love, sorrow, and desire, and concluded that geographical environments significantly influenced metaphor formation. Furthermore, Zarei and Raghib-Doust (2023) demonstrated that black was more frequently associated with natural phenomena and animals, while white was prevalent in contexts related to food and objects.

In Turkish, similar studies have been conducted. Özgen and Davies (1998) investigated the semantics of color terms, comparing their meanings across languages, while Türkoğlu (2003) noted that certain colors in Turkish carried negative connotations, forming specific metaphorical expressions. Ahundova (2020) examined color-related idioms in the Çorum dialect of Anatolian Turkish and Azerbaijani Turkish, evaluating similarities and differences in their usage, and reported that the names and spiritual values attributed to colors had been used for centuries and persisted in contemporary contexts.

Although conceptual metaphors have been widely examined in the literature, color-related metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish—the principal language of northwestern Iran—have not yet been systematically explored in the domain of proverbs and idioms. Existing studies on Azerbaijani Turkish idiomatic expressions have instead concentrated on other metaphorical domains and image schemas (e.g., Golshaie et al., 2020). Addressing this gap, the present study investigates color metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms, examining their function in conveying speakers' cognitive and cultural meanings within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Through an analysis of the metaphorical uses of color terms, the study aims to offer a more precise account of how colors operate in Azerbaijani Turkish and, in doing so, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay among language, cognition, and culture in this linguistic context.

3. Theoretical Framework

To provide a systematic account of color metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish, this study draws on established theories of color categorization and conceptualization. In this section, we briefly

explain Theory of Basic Color Terms and Conceptual Metaphor Theory for identifying and classifying color expressions.

3.1 Basic Color Terms

Berlin and Kay (1969) posit that color systems in languages adhere to relatively universal cognitive patterns, although cultural variations influence the ways in which concepts are associated with specific colors. They argue that all languages employ basic color terms—lexical items that refer to fundamental color concepts and reflect both physiological and cultural dimensions of color perception. According to their framework, a basic color term must be a simple, monolexemic word, such as yellow or blue, rather than a compound or derived expression like light blue or pale yellow. Additionally, as Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) note, a basic color term should not be a hyponym of a higher-order color category; for instance, crimson or yellowish-red are subordinate to the basic term red.

Berlin and Kay's (1969) cross-linguistic analysis further reveals a hierarchical pattern in the emergence of color terms. They argue that if a language has only two color terms, they correspond to black and white or dark and light. Moreover, they posit that the addition of a third introduces red. The fourth and fifth terms are yellow and green, in variable order, followed by blue and brown as the sixth and seventh. According to their findings, languages such as English may include additional terms—gray, pink, orange, and purple—without a fixed sequence. Within this framework, eleven basic color terms are generally recognized, although the authors note that Russian distinguishes twelve by separating *sinij* ('dark blue') and *goluboj* ('light blue'). Ultimately, Berlin and Kay's inventory of basic color terms provides the primary analytical basis for identifying and classifying color expressions in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms.

3.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but cognitive structures that shape how humans experience and understand the world. Within this framework, color-related metaphors in Azerbaijani Turkish can illustrate how colors structure perceptions of emotions, mental states, and social conditions. Conceptual metaphors are organized in terms of source and target domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 254), where the source domain consists of a more concrete concept used to understand a more abstract target domain. In this sense, the source domain provides a tangible experiential framework through which abstract concepts are interpreted (Kövecses, 2010, p. 4).

The metaphorical process involves a unidirectional mapping from the source to the target domain, rather than vice versa (Lakoff & Turner, 1989), where mapping refers to the systematic correspondence of features between two conceptual domains (Rasekh-Mahand, 2010, p. 50).

Building on this foundational model, Kövecses (2000, 2005, 2010) further develops Conceptual Metaphor Theory by emphasizing that metaphors are deeply grounded in embodied experience while being shaped by cultural context. He argues that although many conceptual metaphors exhibit cross-linguistic tendencies, their specific realizations vary across cultures due to differences in bodily experience, cultural models, and contextual factors. He maintains that metaphorical systems are generally systematic and coherent, as they establish stable mappings between domains across different linguistic expressions. To illustrate this within the context of the present study, the conceptual metaphor MISFORTUNE IS BLACK is reflected in Azerbaijani Turkish expressions such as *qara günün dostu* ('friend of the black day'), where the color black is systematically associated with hardship and misfortune.

The Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual mapping in this example, showing the relationship between the source domain (DARKNESS) and the target domain (MISFORTUNE), with the unidirectional arrow indicating projection from source to target:

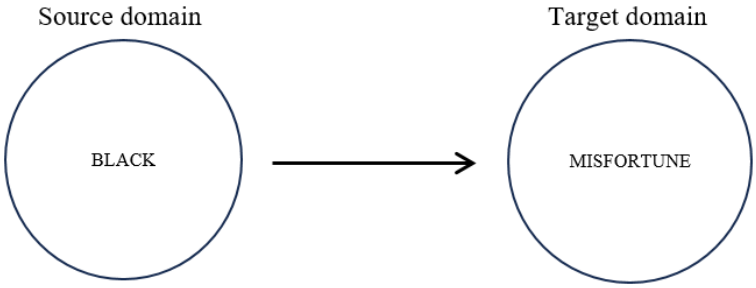

Figure 1. Metaphorical Mapping From the Source Domain to the Target Domain (Adapted from Kövecses, 2010, p. 7)

4. Method

Data were collected through two complementary methods. First, a library-based approach was employed to manually extract expressions containing color terms from major compilations of Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms (Hosseinzadeh & Ghasemi, 2016; Maboud, 2009; Mahin-Bagheri, 2009; Shabihi, 2006), as well as from one academic study (Mousavi, 2019). Collectively, these sources comprise more than 14,000 idioms and proverbs.

Second, a fieldwork-based approach was adopted to supplement the dataset through direct observation and semi-structured interviews with native Azerbaijani Turkish speakers in Tabriz. The sample consisted of ten male speakers over the age of 50 who used Azerbaijani Turkish in their daily interactions. This group was selected based on the assumption that older speakers possessed greater familiarity with traditional idiomatic usage and oral literature.

The data were analyzed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), a systematic method designed to distinguish between literal and metaphorical meanings in discourse. Only idioms and proverbs containing color terms used metaphorically were included in the final dataset. For each expression, the overall contextual meaning was first established to determine whether a metaphorical interpretation was present. For example:

1. *Qara* *gün-ün* *dost-u*
   Black day-[GEN] friend-[3SG.POSS]
   Literal Meaning: 'Friend of the black day'
   Idiomatic Meaning: 'Companion in times of hardship'

In (1), the initial interpretation of the color term *qara* ('black') suggested a day colored black. However, in colloquial Azerbaijani Turkish, it carries a metaphorical meaning. The MIP was conducted through the following steps: First, key lexical units were identified (e.g., *qara gün* ['black day'], *dostu* ['friend']) to assess their potential metaphorical meanings. Next, the literal and contextual meanings of each term were determined.[1] For *qara*, the literal meaning was the physical color black, whereas its contextual meaning in this proverb referred to hardship, misfortune, or difficult times. For *gün* ('day'), the literal meaning was approximately 12 hours from sunrise to sunset, while its contextual meaning metaphorically denoted a period in life. For *dostu* ('friend'), the literal meaning was a person with a friendly relationship, while the contextual meaning referred to a true friend who remained supportive during hardship. In the final step, the literal and contextual meanings were compared to determine if the contextual meaning diverged from the literal, indicating a metaphorical usage. Here, *qara* metaphorically referred to difficult times, with the mapping expressed as BLACKNESS → HARDSHIP.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors arise through mappings between distinct domains: the source domain (here, blackness or darkness) provides features to describe the target domain (here, difficulties or hardships). In (1), the source domain was blackness/darkness, the target domain was life's hardships, and the metaphorical mapping was articulated as 'hardship is

1. The literal meaning is the primary, non-metaphorical sense used in ordinary, non-literary contexts, while the contextual meaning is the sense within the specific context.

dark and black.'

The analysis further considered the semantic polarity of linguistic metaphors—categorized as positive, negative, or neutral—which refers to the inherent positive or negative evaluation of a word or phrase. In lexical semantics, polarity plays a crucial role in understanding how words like good (positive polarity) or bad (negative polarity) contribute to sentence or discourse meaning. Words with differing polarities often exhibit direct oppositions, and semantic polarity influences syntactic structures and interactions with elements like negation (Cruse, 1986). In the proverb *qara günün dostu*, the term *qara* carried a negative polarity, as it metaphorized misfortune and hardship, rendering the proverb's overall polarity negative. To ensure the accuracy of interpretations, the collected data were validated with ten native speakers, who were asked to confirm the metaphorical meanings and contextual applications of the idioms.

5. Results

In this section, we provide the findings on the frequency of color-term metaphors, their metaphorical roles, target conceptual domains, and semantic polarity.

5.1 Frequency of Color Terms

The frequency analysis of 120 extracted proverbs and idioms demonstrated that, as presented in Table 1 and illustrated by the percentage distribution in Figure 2, the most frequently occurring metaphorical color terms were black (*qara/qərə*), white (*ağ/aq*), red (*qırmızı*), mixed color (*ala*), and yellow (*sarı*). Black appeared most often (76 instances), followed by white (27). Red and mixed color (*ala*) each occured six times, while yellow appeared three times. Blue and green were attested only once each, indicating very limited metaphorical productivity in the dataset.

Table 1. The Frequency Distribution of Azerbaijani Turkish Color Terms

Color Term	Frequency
black	76
white	27
red	6
mixed color[1]	6
yellow	3
blue	1
green	1

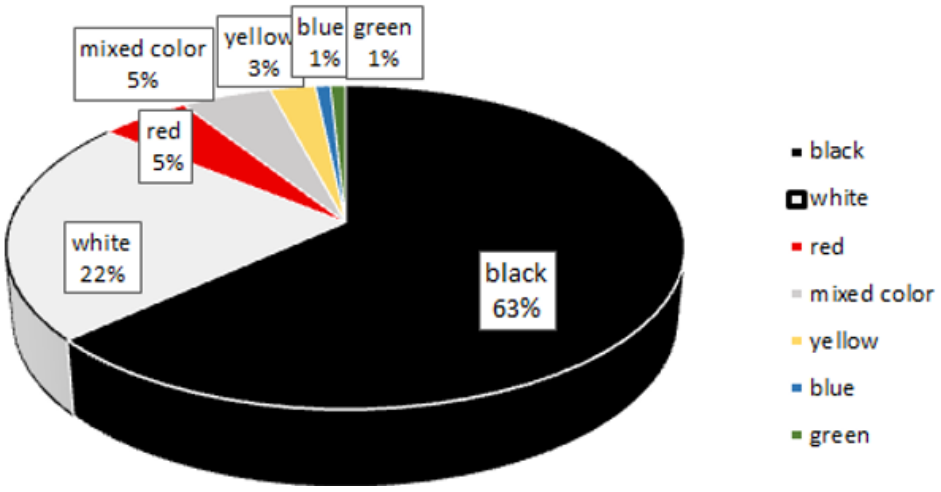

Figure 2. The Percentage Distribution of Color Terms Used Metaphorically in Azerbaijani Turkish Proverbs and Idioms

1. In the course of this study, it was found that there was another color term, *ala*, used in idiomatic expressions; therefore, its metaphorical usage was also analyzed. It was important to note that, according to existing sources and based on interviews conducted with native speakers, two meanings were attributed to this term: one referred to "multicolored," and the other, as defined in the Turkish–Persian Dictionary (Dashgin, 2011), denoted "black patterns on a white background" or vice versa. However, since Ala in the first sense (multicolored) did not appear in the data, the second meaning was the focus of the analysis.

5.1.1 Color Term Black (qara/qare)

The metaphorical occurrence of the color term black was recorded in 76 out of 120 cases and was identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). This process determined whether *qara* was used literally or metaphorically to denote abstract concepts. Examples include:

2. *Qara* *paltar* *qəm* *gətir-ər*
Black clothes grief bring-AOR
Literal meaning: 'Black clothing brings sorrow.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'Black clothing evokes a sense of grief.'

In (2), *qara paltar* referred to black clothing, associated with mourning in certain cultures. Here, *qara* was used literally, indicating a non-metaphorical application.

3. *Fərsiz* *oğul-dan* *bir* *qara* *daş* *yaxşı-dır*
Worthless son-ABL one black stone good-COP
Literal meaning: 'A black stone is better than a dishonorable son.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'A dishonorable man is worthless.'

In (3), *qara* carried a metaphorical meaning, symbolizing worthlessness or futility, which aligned with conceptual metaphor theory, where an abstract concept (worthlessness) was expressed through a concrete entity (a black stone).

5.1.2 Color Term White (ağ/aq)

The color term white appeared in 27 out of 120 cases. Examples of its metaphorical use include:

4. *Ağ* *su* *qara* *bulut-dan* *yağ-ar*
White water black cloud-ABL rain-AOR
Literal Meaning: 'White water falls from a black cloud.'
Idiomatic meaning:'Good comes from unexpected sources.'

In (4), *ağ* was used metaphorically to represent positive concepts, consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's theory (1980), which emphasized the role of conceptual metaphors in transforming physical experiences into cognitive structures. The proverb implied that valuable outcomes (clear water) could arise from unfavorable conditions (black cloud).

5. *Könül* *sev-ən* *gözəl-in* *nə* *ağ-ı* *nə*
Heart love-PTCP beauty-GEN neither white-3SG.POSS nor
qara-sı
black-3SG.POSS
Literal meaning: 'The beauty that captures the heart is neither white nor black.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'True love transcends physical appearance.'

The metaphorical analysis suggests that when someone falls in love, physical attributes like skin color—whether white or black—become irrelevant. True beauty, as an abstract concept, transcends the binary opposition of physical colors.

5.1.3 Color Term Red (qırmızı)

The color term red appeared in 6 out of 120 cases. Examples include:

6. *Ateş* *qırmızı* *üz-lü* *ol-sa* *da* *düş-düyü* *yer-i*
Fire red face-PROP be-COND even fall-PTCP.3SG place-ACC
üz-ü *qara* *ed-ər*
face-3SG.POSS black make-AOR
Literal meaning: 'Even if fire has a red face, it blackens the place it falls.'

Idiomatic meaning: 'A deceptive appearance may conceal harmful consequences.'

In (6), red fire symbolized something attractive or alluring, while black ash represented negative consequences. This reflected a sensory-based metaphor for the abstract concept of deceptive appearances versus hidden harm.

7. *Qırmızı köynək tez gec gör-ün-əcək*
Red shirt soon late see-PASS-FUT
Literal meaning: 'A red shirt will be seen sooner or later.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'What is striking attracts attention quickly.'

In (7), this proverb used the sensory experience of red's visual prominence to metaphorize the abstract concept of significance or priority, aligning with cognitive metaphor theory.

5.1.4 Color Term Mixed Color (ala)

The term *ala* (mixed color) appeared in 6 out of 120 cases. An example includes:

8. *Ala çarpa kimi qara-sız ol-ma*
Mottled quadruped like black-PRIV be-NEG.IMP
Literal meaning: 'Don't be without black, like a mottled quadruped.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'Don't be aimless or without support, like an abandoned entity.'

In (8), *ala* referred to a mixture of colors (e.g., black and white) in an animal's coat, metaphorizing instability or the lack of a firm position. Similarly, *qarasız* ('without black') implied rootlessness, urging one to establish a clear identity or purpose.

5.1.5 Color Term Yellow (sarı)

The color term yellow appeared in 3 out of 120 cases. An example includes:

9. *Yemiş kimi saral-ıb gül kimi sol-ub*
Fruit like yellow-CVB flower like wither-CVB
Literal meaning: 'yellowed like fruit, withered like a flower.'
Idiomatic meaning: *'Sarı* symbolizes illness, weakness, or depression.'

In (9), the first part of the idiom mapped the human face to the source domain of fruits ('being yellowish') and the second part to a flower ('being withered'). Both yellowness and witheredness indicated illness.

5.1.6 Color Term Green (yaşıl)

Green appeared in 2 cases, with only one metaphorical instance.

10. *Yaşıl-lıq abad-lıq ilə ekiz-dir*
Green-NMLZ prosperous-NMLZ with twin-COP
Literal meaning: 'Greenery is the twin of prosperity.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'Greenery signifies prosperity.'

In (10), y*aşıl* metaphorized life, progress, and hope, reflecting a cognitive metaphor for growth and societal advancement.

5.1.7 Color Term Blue (göy)

Blue appeared in 2 cases, with one metaphorical instance.

11. *Haraya get-sən göy-ün rəng-i-ni mavi gör-ər-sən*
Wherever go-COND.2SG sky-GEN color-3SG.POSS-ACC blue see-AOR-2SG
Literal meaning: 'Wherever you go, you see the sky's color as blue.'
Idiomatic meaning: 'Conditions are the same everywhere.'

In this context, *göy* meant 'sky,' symbolizing life circumstances and fate, while *mavi,*

another synonym for blue (primarily in Turkish, not in Azerbaijani Turkish), symbolized stability and uniformity. The metaphor suggested that external conditions remained consistent regardless of location.

5.2 Target Conceptual Domains and Semantic Polarity

The findings, as shown in Table 2, revealed that the principal conceptual domains associated with each color term in Azerbaijani Turkish metaphorical expressions included a range of emotional, moral, and social meanings. Black was predominantly connected with sorrow, hardship, misfortune, death, and poverty, while white was linked to purity, clarity, happiness, and honesty. Red reflected domains such as anger, power, courage, and love, indicating emotional intensity and strength. Yellow was associated with anxiety, illness, and fear, suggesting vulnerability and distress. Mixed color (*ala*) conveyed confusion and complexity, whereas blue and green were related to stability, uniformity, and prosperity, respectively. Together, these mappings demonstrated patterned relationships between color perception and abstract conceptual domains.

Table 2. Main Conceptual Domains Identified for Color Terms

Color Term	Metaphorical Target Domains
Black	sorrow, hardship, misfortune, death, poverty
White	purity, clarity, happiness, honesty
Red	anger, power, courage, love
Yellow	anxiety, illness, fear
Mixed Color	confusion, complexity
Blue	stability, uniformity
Green	prosperity

5.2.1 Color Term Black

The metaphorical use of blackness (*qara/qərə*) in Azerbaijani Turkish consistently demonstrated a negative semantic polarity. It was associated with hardship and crisis, as in *qara gün*, referring to difficult life periods. It also expressed hypocrisy and deceit, contrasting outward appearance with inner reality, where blackness signaled hidden bad intentions. In addition, it conveyed inherent negativity, suggesting an unchangeable state of impurity or badness, and was strongly linked to shame and social disgrace, often marking reputational loss. Even in ironic proverbs, blackness reflected social critique and unethical behavior. Overall, it functioned as a metaphor for suffering, moral corruption, and stigma. Table 3 categorizes the metaphorical mappings for the color term black.

Table 3. The Color Term Black's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Blackness → Hardship	*Qara gün: Days of hardship*	Negative	Hardworking: Hard times, crises
Blackness → Bad intent, Whiteness → Good appearance	*Üzü ağ, qəlbi qara; Zülfü ağ, ürəyi qara*	Negative	Hypocrisy, deceit
Blackness → Inherent badness	*Qara ağarmaz; kömür çönün qaralığından nə arı?*	Negative	Immutability, inherent impurity
Blackness → Shame, disgrace	*Üz qaralmaq; Lotu lotunu qapmasa qara gətirər*[1]	Negative	Shame, disgrace

5.2.2 Color Term White

The metaphorical use of whiteness (*ağ*) in Azerbaijani Turkish generally showed a positive semantic polarity, with a few neutral extensions. It was associated with happiness and joyful life experiences, as in *ağ gün*, symbolizing success and relief from hardship. Whiteness also

1. This proverb is humorous and ironic, referring to socially unjust or contradictory situations, where even *lutis* (traditionally honorable and chivalrous men) resort to unethical actions such as stealing or unfair competition, simply to avoid falling behind or being discredited. In essence, the saying critiques society by suggesting that in a context where dishonor and lack of integrity are widespread, even honorable individuals may feel compelled to act like everyone else to avoid being stigmatized.

represented honesty and integrity, where a "white face" reflected transparency and moral correctness. In some contexts, it indicated honor and social respect, emphasizing restored dignity or mutual recognition. Additionally, it functioned as a metaphor for valuable resources and prudence, particularly in the sense of saving for difficult times. In limited cases, whiteness marked neutral action or inactivity, simply indicating absence of involvement. Overall, white primarily encoded positive evaluations such as goodness, trustworthiness, and prosperity, while also extending into neutral meanings depending on context. Table 4 outlines the metaphorical mappings for white.

Table 4. The Color Term White's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Whiteness → Happiness	*Ağ gün; Ağ gün qara günü yaddan çıxardar*	Positive	Joyful days, personal success
Whiteness → Honesty	*Hesabı düz olanın üzü ağ olar*	Positive	Integrity, transparency
Whiteness → Neutral action	*Əlin ağdan qaraya vurmur*	Neutral	Inaction (neither good nor bad)
Whiteness → Honor	*Sən mənim bir üzümü ağart, mən sənin iki üzünü ağardım*	Positive	Mutual respect, honor |
Whiteness → Valuable resource	*Ağ pulu saxla, qara gündə lazım olar*	Positive	Saving for crises
Whiteness → Good appearance	*Üzü ağ, qəlbi qara*	Positive	Good appearance with bad intent

5.2.3 Color Term Red

The metaphorical use of redness (*qırmızı*) in Azerbaijani Turkish displayed both negative and positive semantic polarity, depending on context. In negative mappings, redness was associated with anger, shame, and the visible consequences of greed or emotional excess, reflecting loss of control or social embarrassment. However, red more frequently carried positive connotations, symbolizing honor, pride, and personal dignity, where "reddening" suggested courage and moral strength. It was also linked to passion and excitement, representing strong emotion, preference, and intensity of feeling. In these cases, redness encoded vitality and resilience rather than negativity. Overall, red functioned as a dynamic metaphorical color, capable of expressing both emotional intensity and socially valued qualities such as pride and dignity. Table 5 presents its mappings.

Table 5. The Color Term Red's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Redness → Anger, shame	*Hərs gələr göz qızarar, hərs gedər üz qızarar*	Negative	Greed, shame, consequences
Redness → Honor, pride	*Sarala sarala qalmaqdan, qızara qızara ölmək yaxşıdır*	Positive	Honor, pride
Redness → Passion, excitement	*Dəli qırmızı sevir, gic sarını*	Positive	Taste, excitement
Redness → Dignity, value	*Qırmızı buta deyiləm, hər gələnə əyilmə!*	Positive	Personal dignity, resilience

5.2.4 Color Term Yellow

The metaphorical use of yellow (sarı) in Azerbaijani Turkish carried a negative semantic polarity. It was primarily associated with weakness, aging, and physical or emotional decline, as reflected in imagery of something fading or withering, such as becoming yellowed or losing freshness. This extended naturally to the domain of decline and deterioration, where yellowness symbolized loss of vitality and strength. In addition, yellow was linked to shame, illness, and financial or emotional distress, suggesting visible signs of internal hardship or

suffering. Overall, yellowness functioned as a metaphor for states of reduced health, stability, or social wellbeing, consistently encoding negative evaluations in both physical and socio-emotional domains. Table 6 outlines the metaphorical mappings for yellow.

Table 6. The Color Term Yellow's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Yellowness → Weakness, aging	*Yemiş kimi saralıb, gül kimi solub*	Negative	Decline, withering
Yellowness → Shame, illness	*Ac ölməz gözü qaralar, borclu ölməz üzü saralar*	Negative	Financial stress, emotional/physical impact

5.2.5 Color Term Mixed Color

The metaphorical uses of *ala* (mixed color) in Azerbaijani Turkish consistently carried a negative semantic polarity. Across the examples, *ala* was associated with worthlessness, inability, failure, and confusion. It was used to express ideas of false comparison and inherent lack of value, as well as incapacity to nurture or produce, indicating deficiency in function or quality. Other mappings highlighted failure to recognize true worth and emotional indifference, where *ala* signaled disinterest or lack of engagement. In more abstract extensions, it conveyed futile ambition and unfulfilled desire, emphasizing regret and unattainable goals. It also symbolized identity ambiguity and confusion, reflecting instability and lack of clear definition. Overall, *ala* functioned as a metaphorical marker of deficiency and disorder, consistently encoding negative evaluations across emotional, social, and existential domains in Azerbaijani Turkish thought. Table 7 presents mappings for *ala*.

Table 7. The Color Term ala's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Ala → Worthlessness, ugliness	*Ala qarğa suya düşər, qaz olmaz*	Negative	False comparison, inherent worthlessness
Ala → Inability to nurture	*Ala qarğa bala çıxartmaz*	Negative	Inability to support or nurture
Ala → Failure to appreciate value	*Ala qarğa şox tərlanı bəyənməz*	Negative	Failure to recognize true value
Ala → Disinterest	*Ala gözünə vurulmamışam*	Negative	Indifference, lack of interest
Ala → Futile ambition	*Ala qarğada alacağın olsun, ala bilməsən ölümün olsun*	Negative	Unfulfilled desire, regret
Ala → Lack of identity	*Ala çarpa kimi qarasız olma*	Negative	Identity ambiguity, confusion

5.2.6 Color Terms Blue and Green

Both blue and green showed positive semantic polarity in Azerbaijani Turkish metaphorical mappings. Blue was linked to stability and uniformity, extending to ideas of fate and future outlook, suggesting reliability and order. Green was associated with prosperity, life, and vitality, based on its connection with natural growth. In both cases, concrete color perception was mapped onto abstract life domains in a positive way, indicating that these colors functioned as culturally affirmative symbols in expressing stability, continuity, and flourishing. Table 8 presents mappings for blue and green.

Table 8. The Color Terms Blue and Green's Metaphorical Mappings and Target Domains

Metaphorical Mapping	Examples	Semantic Polarity	Target Domain
Blue → Stability, uniformity	*Haraya getsən göyün rəngini mavi görərsən*	Positive	Fate, future outlook
Green → Prosperity, life	*Yaşıllıq abadlıq ilə ekizdir*	Positive	Growth, prosperity, vitality

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study finds that color terms (black, white, red, mixed color, yellow, blue, green) are used metaphorically in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms. The descending frequency of color terms—from black and white to red, yellow, and finally green and blue—in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idiomatic expressions is consistent with Berlin and Kay's (1969) proposed universal hierarchy of basic color terms. Furthermore, color terms are extensively used to express abstract concepts such as emotions, psychological states, and social conditions, supporting the hypothesis that they convey diverse abstract meanings in Azerbaijani Turkish, including emotions like love (red), sorrow (black), physical states like stability (blue) and psychological states like shame (yellow), and social meanings like purity (white). These colors evolve into metaphors depicting human emotions and conditions, playing a significant role in oral literature. Ahundova (2022) finds similar color-term usage *(qırmızı, yaşıl, göy, qara*) across Çorum and Azerbaijani Turkish dialects, rooted in their shared Oghuz Turkic origins.

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research. Samet-Jukandan (2014) and Aliakbari and Khosravian (2013), in their analyses of Persian, demonstrate that color terms are used metaphorically to conceptualize domains such as morality, emotions, and belief systems, with black predominantly conveying negative connotations and white positive ones. Specifically, Aliakbari and Khosravian (2013) associate black with meanings such as shame, sorrow, misfortune, and poverty, whereas white is linked to innocence, purity, goodness, and luck—patterns that closely align with the present findings. Similarly, Taghipoury-Hajebi et al. (2022) identify target domains including shame, love, joy, beauty, and anger, which correspond to those observed in this study. Umam and Nirmala (2020) further report parallels between English and Indonesian, noting that black frequently metaphorizes darkness—a pattern likewise attested in the present data. Such cross-linguistic similarities may point to the existence of universal metaphorical tendencies, particularly with respect to highly frequent color terms such as black and white.

Regarding the semantic polarity patterns, the findings of the present study indicate that bright colors like white and occasionally red correlate with positive meanings, whereas black, yellow, and mixed colors often carry negative connotations. Blue signifies uniformity, which has positive value, and yellow signals fear or illness, which has negative value, aligning with prior studies. In line with these findings, Türkoğlu (2003), Aliakbari and Khosravian (2013), and Allan (2009) consistently associate black with negative and white with positive meanings. However, unlike Umam and Nirmala (2020), who regard yellow as positive, the present study finds yellow to be predominantly negative. Overall, these patterns suggest both cross-linguistic consistency in the metaphorical structuring of color polarity and culture-specific variation in the semantic extensions of particular color terms.

Moreover, this study demonstrates that color terms in Azerbaijani Turkish proverbs and idioms function not merely as linguistic devices but as culturally embedded symbols that reflect shared values, beliefs, and cognitive patterns. Colors encode complex emotional and conceptual meanings shaped by historical, social, and cultural experience, representing both individual psychological states and broader cultural associations. Their semantic flexibility reveals how lived experience and collective memory are transmitted through metaphor.

Several challenges arise within the scope of this study. First, the lack of machine-readable corpora poses a significant limitation; the absence of structured databases for Azerbaijani Turkish in Iran slows the research process and necessitates reliance on traditional data collection methods. Second, cultural and linguistic variation presents difficulties, as some idioms shift in meaning when translated into Persian; this issue is carefully considered during analysis. Third, linguistic evolution remains an important consideration, as metaphorical meanings change over time, indicating that the findings of this study may require future reassessment.

Ultimately, these findings provide a basis for cross-linguistic comparison, aimed at identifying both universal tendencies and culture-specific variations in color metaphorization. Future research may extend this inquiry to other discourse types—such as poetry, narratives, and everyday speech—or adopt experimental approaches to examine the role of sensory and embodied experience in shaping color metaphors. Comparative studies across Iranian languages and dialects would further clarify patterns of cultural continuity and divergence in color semantics.

Ethical Considerations

All the interviewed participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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