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COLOURFUL IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS. A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Abstract: Colourfulness typically relates to variation, vividness, kinesthesis, thus life, whereas colourlessness, denoting achromatic or neutral colours, such as black, white and grey, commonly symbolizes monotony, lethargy and lack of life. The presence or absence of colour triggers a certain reaction or state on the part of the viewer, appealing to both their perception and their unconscious self. Such symbolic richness of colours is extensively used in both Romanian and English idiomatic languages, the object of study in the present analysis. The nine series of colourful idiomatic expressions will be examined in turn, paralleled in the two languages and occasionally sentence-illustrated.

Keywords: *colour, idiom, meaning, semantics, symbolism*

Motto:
"*Colours speak all languages.*"
(*Joseph Addison*)

Beyond any intent of pleonastic association, polychromy does colour, over-colour and re-colour our life in subtler ways than we may be aware of. Worth pages of word-explanations and every so often culturally linked, colours have positive or negative impacts on the consciousness and the subconsciousness of the observer. For instance, it has been scientifically proven that warm colours (red, yellow, orange) feed one's appetite, while the cold ones (blue, purple, black) supress it (see *science – red/yellow*). Blue is generally a relaxing colour, yet it leads to depression when overused. The colour of mourning is black all over Europe, whereas in Asian cultures it is represented by white.

From a symbolic perspective, red is linked to love, energy and action, but it is also a warning to stop and a mark of anger in Western cultures; prosperity and good fortune in Eastern cultures, where red is also the bride's colour; in India, it is a sign of a married woman; in Thailand, it represents Sunday; South Africans associate it with mourning; in Nigeria, it is worn by chiefs, while in Russia, it is a symbol of communism (see *color psychology*). Green

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is usually the colour of nature, regeneration and hope, but has various cultural connotations, too, such as: disgrace in China (a green hat offered to the husband indicates an adulterous wife), symbol of the whole country in Ireland, drug culture in North Africa, death in South America, and money and jealousy in the USA (see *color psychology*). In an overall examination, restricted to the work-related sphere, colours also play a central role. For example, Flavell and Flavell give a relevant discussion on coloured uniforms and, extensively, on 'coloured' jobs, starting with "*a black-coated worker*. This referred to his social status and security in a good job – perhaps as a clerk in an office. That was in Victorian England, and it has been suggested that in the turmoil of the First World War period an American counterpart of the British phrase arose: *the white collar worker*" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 19). *Blue-collar workers* refer to "warehousemen, longshoremen, farmers, miners, mechanics, construction workers and other blue collar workers" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 19). Moreover, *pink collar jobs* have begun to denote "low-paid jobs mainly for women, such as cleaners, hairdressers, waitresses" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 19).

As a matter of fact, colours categorize as primary, secondary and tertiary, among the first being red, yellow and blue (RYB) – as the three colours of pigment, or red, green and blue (RGB) – as the three colours of light (see *science – primary colours*), all the others being combinations of them. How many colours or colour blends can a human actually see?

> "Mathematically, when multiplying the nearly 10 million distinguishable colors with the thousands of outside forces acting on the brain's perception of those colors – such as light, surfaces and viewing conditions – psychophysicists have determined the number of potential colors and combinations to be almost endless" (see *science – colours*).

As expected, so many shades or hues are practically impossible to be named, but Ingrid Sundberg's *Color Thesaurus* should be really helpful. For instance, white can be categorised, inter alia, as pearl-, snow-, ivory-, egg-shell-, cotton-, salt-, daisy-, frost-, porcelain- and rice-white, whereas black splits, among others, into ebony-, charcoal-, midnight-, ink-, raven-, oil-, soot-, metal- and leather-black. No matter how interesting these are or how great their potential exploration may prove, such fine colour delineations are not the object of this study.

Out of the eleven basic colour categories of English – white, black, red, yellow, green, blue, pink, orange, purple, brown and grey (Berlin & Kay, quoted by Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 350), nine have been chosen (not orange and purple) in the present paper, which is fundamentally descriptive, not theoretical, even though theoretical matters will also be

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appealed to. For example, the term *idiom* has been debated upon and raised various controversies whether it actually covers the significance of idiomaticity in a certain language. However, for the sake of simplicity, it is preferred to other terms and sometimes even combined with others in order to ensure a wider range of such phraseological units (see FEIs, Moon's coined term of *fixed expressions including idioms* – Moon 1998: *passim*). Broadly speaking, idioms are shaped by three characteristics: linguistically and socially, they should be institutionalized, thus "recognized and accepted as a lexical item of the language" (Bauer, in Moon 1998: 7); secondly, they present a certain 'lexicogrammatical fixedness' or 'formal rigidity' (Moon 1998: 7); semantically, idioms are non-compositional, namely "[t]he meaning arising from word-by-word interpretation of the string does not yield the institutionalized, accepted, unitary meaning of the string" (Moon 1998: 8). Naturally, the three criteria are met to certain degrees in idioms: "There are degrees of institutionalization, from the extremely frequent *of course* to the fairly rare *cannot cut the mustard*; of fixedness, from the completely frozen *kith and kin* to the relatively flexible and variable *take stick from someone*, *get a lot of stick from someone*, *give someone stick*, and so on; and of non-compositionality, from the opaque *bite the bullet* to the transparent *enough is enough*" (Moon 1998: 9).

More or less colour-rich, more or less semantically obvious, the nine series of colourful idioms will be discussed below, starting with white and black, followed by red, yellow, green and blue, and ending with pink, grey and brown.

- **WHITE**

An all-comprising colour – created by the fair mixture of the primary colours of light, red, green and blue – white commonly symbolizes purity, innocence and cleanliness, reflected by *lily-white* (Rom. *alb ca un crin*) and *as white as the driven snow* (Rom. *alb ca zăpada*). However, as part of most idiomatic expressions, its connotations are mostly negative: (*as*) *white as a ghost* (Rom. *alb ca o fantomă*), *as white as a sheet* (Rom. *alb ca hârtia*) or *white-faced* (Rom. *alb la față*) signify pallor because of illness, fear or shock. Exasperation is expressed by the Romanian idiom *a scoate* (*cuiva*) *peri albi* – an emphatic, white-version of *to give grey hair* (to be further analysed under *grey*).

Moreover, *cusut cu ață albă* (Engl. sewn in white stitches, a *bald-faced lie*) describes "something obviously fake and untrue" (*dexonline*) – probably due to the contrast between

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white and other colours, thus between the truth and the untruth, whereas the Biblical idiom *a whited sepulchre* (Rom. *mormânt văruit*) denotes "a hypocrite, something outwardly presentable but inwardly corrupt" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 199). Belonging to the same area of deception and falseness, the verb *to whitewash* (Rom. *a acoperi, a muşamaliza*) translates as "to cover up or gloss over faults or errors or wrongdoing" (*idcon*):

e.g. *The MP is accused of whitewashing the scandal about the illegal funds*.

Another idiom, whose etymology is provided in *Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins*, by Linda Flavell and Roger Flavell, is *white elephant*,

"an unwanted object, especially cumbersome. The devious kings of Siam invented an ingenious way of ridding themselves of any courtier who irked them. They would present the hapless fellow with a white elephant, a rare and sacred beast. The cost of maintaining the creature, which was not permitted to earn its keep as a working animal, was excessive and gradually ruined its new owner" (1994: 199):

e.g. *The new airport is a white elephant and nobody wants to use it* (*idcon*).

A transitional set, sharing both positive and negative undertones, is represented by *to raise/to wave a white flag* (Rom. *a ridica steagul alb*), a symbol of defeat and surrender; *a white lie* (Rom. *minciună nevinovată*), "a harmless or small lie told to be polite or to avoid hurting someone's feelings (*idcon*); *până în pânzele albe* (Engl. up to the white sails), meaning to do anything, at all costs, to obtain what one wants. *Ba e albă, ba e neagră* (approximately Engl. *to blow hot and cold*) – once white, now black, applies to someone's contradictory words or deeds.

The last three idioms, so different from a semantic view, will be explained here as separate idiomatic expressions. A *white sale* refers to "the selling of towels or sheets at a reduced price" (*idcon*) – approximately Rom. 'reduceri la albituri'; *a semna în alb*, to sign a blank document, thus before being filled completely; figuratively, it means "granting someone utter trust" (*dexonline*). Finally, a *white-tie event/affair* is "an event that requires guests to wear formal dress such as men wearing white bow ties with formal evening dress" (*idcon*), in comparison to a *black-tie event/affair*, where "guests wear semi-formal clothes with men wearing black bow ties with tuxedos or dinner jackets" (*idcon*).

- **BLACK**

The opposite symbol of white, yet also an achromatic colour, black is usually associated with death, magic, evil, but with power and elegance, as well. The antagonism of

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black and white – hence, the very idiom *black and white* (Rom. *ori albă, ori neagră*), "either good or bad, either one way or the other way, oversimplified" (*idcon*) – has, in fact, given birth to interesting, subtle idiomatic juxtapositions. The Romanian expression *a face albul negru*, change white into black, means to falsify reality, to prove that something is different from what it really is (see *dexonline*); *a strânge bani albi pentru zile negre* ('to gather white money for black days', *to save for a rainy day*) is a common idiom used when saving money for future needs or (potential) troubled times.

The concrete (black) writing on (white) paper has extended to the idiomatic language into *put* (*something*) *down in black and white* (Rom. *a scrie negru pe alb*), "to write the details of a contract or something on paper" (*idcon*):

e.g. *I asked the buyer to put the offer to buy my car down in black and white* (*idcon*).

Similarly, *in black and white* (Rom. *negru pe alb*), in writing or print/ officially, has a second meaning in Romanian, too, namely "surely, clearly, incontestable" (*dexonline*).

Darkness or the intensity of black are conveyed by a large number of idiomatic similes: (*as*) *black as a skillet*, (*as*) *black as a stack of black cats*, (*as*) *black as coal* (Rom. *negru ca tăciunele/ca şi cărbunele*), (*as*) *black as night* (Rom. *negru ca noaptea*), (*as*) *black as pitch/ pitch-black* (Rom. *negru ca smoala*), (*as*) *black as the ace of spades* (approximately Rom. *negru ca pana corbului*). In addition, (*as*) *black as a sweep*, implying blackness and dirt, translates into Romanian as *negru ca funinginea* or *negru ca un coşar*, actually the same vocabulary items connected with chimney sweeping.

As stated before, black is linked to evil, mourning and decease, as well as to all further feelings stemming from them. Therefore, *a i se face/a vedea negru înaintea* (*dinaintea*) *ochilor* (Engl. to see black (in front of one's eyes) decodes as not see clearly, because of anger or sadness, or *to black out*, thus to faint, lose consciousness; yet, *a vedea* (*totul*) *în negru* approximately translates as 'to see the world through black-coloured glasses', specifically to be pessimistic. *A-i face cuiva zile negre* (Engl. *to give somebody a rough time*) means "to cause grief to someone, make their life bitter" (*dexonline*). *Negru la faţă* (Engl. black in the face) describes a very angry or sad person, while *a fi negru la suflet/ a avea suflet negru* (Engl. to have a black soul) defines an extremely bad person.

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Moreover, the verb and the noun *blacklist* (Rom. (*a trece pe*) *lista neagră*) explain as "to list the name of someone contravening rules or conventions; to ostracise" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 31):

e.g. *The sports federation blacklisted the swimmer because he was using steroids* (*idcon*).

By extension, the list becomes a book, i.e. (*be*) *in someone's black books* – "to be out of favour with someone, to be in disgrace" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 29): "The *black books* […] are reports on monastic holdings and allegations of corruption within the church, compiled by Henry VIII; […] black books were also held by medieval merchants who kept records of people who did not pay for goods. Black lists were compiled of men who had gone bankrupt" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 29).

A similar idea is conveyed by *to blackball*, "to exclude someone from a social group or club" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 31), the means of voting being white and black balls. "The phrase can be applied to situations wider than entry to exclusive clubs, with a sense closer to *give someone the cold shoulder*" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 31), hence "to exclude or ostracize someone socially, to reject someone" (*idcon*):

e.g. *She was blackballed in the school because of her out-dated teaching methods*.

The embodiment of exclusion and disgrace could be *the black sheep* (*of the family*) (Rom. *oaia neagră* (*a familiei*), the original explanation being that "shepherds dislike black sheep since their fleece cannot be dyed and is therefore worth less than white" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 29).

Further negative black-idioms are *to blackmail* (Rom. *a şantaja*), "to extort or take money from someone by threatening him or her" (*idcon*); *black market* (Rom. *piaţa neagră*), "the illicit buying and selling of goods in violation of legal price controls, rationing, etc." (*dictionary*); (*nici*) *cât* (*e*) *negru sub unghie* – not even a black speck under the nail – very little, hardly any. A rather euphemistic idiom is *pot calling the kettle black* (Rom. *râde ciob de oală spartă*), "the person who criticizes or accuses someone else is as guilty as the person he or she criticizes or accuses" (*idcon*):

e.g. *Criticizing her for snobbery is like pot calling the kettle black*.

In the end, *the black sheep* of this dark family is *in the black*, its oddity being the positive meaning it denotes, to be profitable or successful:

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e.g. *Our company has been in the black since they began to cut costs* (*idcon*).

- **RED**

Red seems to be a multi-faceted, contradictory colour, as shows Steinvall's table – 'the salience of basic emotion categories in reference to basic color categories in percentage of instances' (in MacLaury et al. 2007: 357): surprisingly or not, anger mostly co-occurs with red (55.49%), followed by both sadness (19.94%) and joy (12.72%), while love and fear score merely 7.23% and, respectively, 4.62% of the instances of red (in MacLaury et al. 2007: 357).

To begin with, extreme anger is visually depicted by *to see red* (Rom. *a vedea*/*a i se face roşu* (*înaintea ochilor*), probably transferred from a bull's reaction to red, idiomatically conveyed by *like waving a red flag in front of a bull*:

e.g. *Talking about the city mayor with my father is like waving a red flag in front of a bull. He hates the city mayor* (*idcon*).

Catching someone red-handed (Rom. *a prinde în flagrant*, approx. *a prinde cu mâţa-n sac*) explains as catch them "in the very act of a crime, wrongdoing, etc., or in possession of self-incriminating evidence" (*dictionary*). *Be in the red* (Rom. *a fi în deficit, a fi pe roşu*) means "to be in debt, to be unprofitable" (*idcon*), whereas *out of the red* is quite the opposite, like *in the black*:

e.g. *The company has been in the red for three years now* (*idcon*).

Our company is finally out of the red and we are now making money (*idcon*).

The brightness or intensity of red is expressed by idiomatic similes, for instance (*as*) *red as a poppy*, (*as*) *red as a cherry*, (*as*) *red as a rose*, (*as*) *red as a ruby* or (*as*) *red as blood*. The first and the last similes can be idiomatically translated as such into Romanian: *roşu ca macul/sângele*, but a better alternative should be *roşu ca focul* (fire-red). Embarrassment is rendered by facial colour, hence *red in the face* (Rom. *roşu la faţă*) or the emphatic *beet red* (Rom. *roşu ca o sfeclă*).

The last red idioms to be analysed here belong to various domains, from carpets to eyes, flags to herrings, tapes to calendars, the common point being attention-drawing. *A red flag* (Rom. *steag roşu, semnal de alarmă*) is an alert signal to incorrect or improper functioning; the adjective *red-hot* (Rom. *senzaţional*) describes something as very hot, "creating much excitement or demand" (*idcon*); *a red-letter day* (Rom. *zi de sărbătoare, zi memorabilă*), echoing the holidays marked with red in calendars, terms now an unforgettable

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day, due to some major personal event. A *red-eye* (Rom. *zbor de noapte*) defines a late airplane flight, obviously causing red eyes to the sleepless passengers, whereas a *red herring* (Rom. *tertip, mijloc de diversiune*), once an olfactory distractor, is today extended to any "unimportant matter that draws attention away from the main subject" (*idcon*). A "condemnatory phrase, often an insult of a frustrated man doing battle with officialdom" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 152), *red tape* (Rom. *birocraţie, hârţogării*) catches attention to "excessive bureaucracy, form-filling" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 152), originating "in the former practice of tying together papers and official documents with red tape" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 152). Finally, *to paint the town red* (Rom. *a chefui, a-şi face de cap*) means having a great time out, partying, while *to roll out the red carpet* (Rom. *a întinde covorul roşu*) implies treating someone with respect and honour, like royalties, who undoubtedly receive *red-carpet treatment*.

- **YELLOW**

According to *British National Corpus*, yellow is specific to fiction, magazine and spoken contexts, the less frequent context being the academic (see *BNC*). Even if, metaphorically, yellow connotes as a colour of joy, there are hardly any 'happy' idiomatic expressions. The symbolism of yellow echoes that of green, as an alternative shade for sickness or vertigo. For example, *a i se face galben înaintea ochilor* (Engl. *to see yellow* (in front of one's eyes) explains as become sick or dizzy, or on the point of fainting. Moreover, (*a se face*) *galben ca ceara* (Engl. to turn wax-yellow) reads as to become unusually or deathly pale, "as from fear, ill health or physical exhaustion" (*dexonline*).

Fear is extended to cowardice and weakness in two English idioms, namely *to have a yellow streak* and the slang *yellow-bellied*:

e.g. *His manager has a yellow streak/is yellow-bellied and would not defend his rights.*

- **GREEN**

"Closely linked to the anger category, precisely to envy and jealousy" (Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 358), green symbolically associates with nature and its regeneration. Within the second category, the *green belt* or *greenbelt* (Rom. *zonă verde*) refers to "an area of woods, parks, or open land surrounding a community" (*dictionary*), while *to have a green thumb* – Am.E. or *to have green fingers* – Br.E. describes a person skilled at gardening.

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Similar to a plant, a *green* individual or a *greenhorn* is characterised by youth, lack of experience and immaturity, the Romanian term *crud* (Engl. unripe) also retaining the vegetal connotation. Moreover, *a îndruga* (*la*)/*a spune verzi și uscate* reads as 'to tell green and sapless things', thus lots of petty or futile considerations taken together. *A spune verde în față* (to tell straight/'green' to the face), probably a comparison to a green bough suddenly slapping into one's face, means telling someone the naked truth, taking the risk of shocking or upsetting them.

In what regards the first semantic category, in the English idiomatic language, jealousy is embodied by a so-called *green-eyed monster*, Shakespeare's coinage:

e.g. *Othello fell under the sway of the green-eyed monster* (*dictionary*).

Similarly, *green with envy* (Rom. *verde de invidie*) colourfully depicts one's high degree of envy or extreme jealousy. Romanian idiomatic language prefers green as a result of physical causes, mostly sickness or nausea, rather than psychical reasons, such as envy. Therefore, *a i se face verde înaintea ochilor* (Engl. *to see green* (in front of one's eyes) translates as become sick, giddy or nauseated, or be affected with vertigo. The same sensation of nausea is expressed by *green around the gills*:

e.g. *Unfortunately, after any bus ride, my mother looks green around the gills.*

Still connected with envy, but also with a sort of naïveté, *grass is always greener on the other side* (*of the fence*) is comparable to *ce au alții e mai bun*, 'what others have is better', namely "a place or situation that is far away or different seems better than one's present situation" (*idcon*):

e.g. *The man believes that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence and he always wants to change jobs* (*idcon*).

Permission is also represented by green, actually the colour of traffic lights, in straightforward idioms such as *to give* (*someone*) *the green light*, *to get the green light* or *to have the green light*, all present in Romanian, too: *a da* (*cuiva*) *undă verde*, *a primi undă verde* and *a avea undă verde*, thus signals of authorisation or approval to do or continue something:

e.g. *They were given the green light to renovate the ancient bridge.*

To end with, Romanian idiomatic language has two more 'green' expressions: *a vedea stele verzi* (Engl. to see green stars) is used when someone gets a strong smack and almost

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loses consciousness. The other one is *a visa*/*a vedea*/*a spune cai verzi* (*pe pereți*) (Engl. to dream/to see/ to tell green horses (on the walls), a counterpart of *to see pink elephants* (to be discussed under *pink*), with the mention that the Romanian term extends the meaning to wishing and uttering, not merely seeing, the certain imaginary or impossible things.

- **BLUE**

Interestingly enough, blue shares two opposing emotions: joy and sadness (see Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 357), probably best expressed by melancholy, "the Romanticist conception of blue" (Pastoureau quoted by Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 359), also associated with "love, pure poetry and ideal life" (Pastoureau quoted by Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 359). As an illustration, the poetic *inimă albastră* (Engl. blue heart) denotes a sad soul, thus grief and downheartedness. In English, *to get/to have the blues* translates as to become/to be sad or depressed:

e.g. *The dull cloudy weather has caused me to get the blues* (*idcon*).

Two more 'unhappy', concrete idioms are (*to be*) *blue in the face* (Rom. *albastru la față*), "be very angry or upset, to be excited and very emotional" (*idcon*), and *black and blue* (Rom. *vânăt*, a blackish purple colour, that of eggplants), hence bruised. Moreover, the Romanian familiar expression *Situația e* (*cam*) *albastră* (Engl. the situation is quite blue) indicates an unpleasant, bad or difficult state of affairs.

Another semantic category is represented by nobility and honour, aristocracy and high rank also being termed as *the purple*, a blue-derivation. *To have blue blood* or *blue-blooded* (Rom. *cu/de sânge albastru*)

"is a direct translation from the Spanish *sangre azul* (blue blood). AD 711 saw the first invasion of Spain by the Moors and, for centuries, vast areas of the country were under Moorish influence and rule. Spanish aristocrats had fairer complexions than the dusky-skinned Moors, who were considered their social inferiors, and their veins showed more blue beneath their paler skin" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 35).

Distinction and superiority are idiomatically expressed by *blue-ribbon* (Rom. *de prim rang*). Etymologically interpreted, "[t]he most desired Order of Knighthood in Britain is the blue ribbon of the Garter. It is conferred by the Sovereign. By extension, the expression *the blue ribbon* connotes excellence and the highest honour" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 34):

e.g. *A blue-ribbon panel of experts were asked to suggest a new policy for the city* (*idcon*).

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A parallel expression is *blue-chip*, meaning

"reliable, giving the highest return. This phrase comes from the gaming tables. Chips are the coloured counters used to represent money in games like poker. The blue chip has the highest value, so *a blue-chip investment* is one that promises to be most lucrative. *A blue-chip company* is financially secure, with high profits. *A blue-ribbon company*, on the other hand, is judged principally in terms of honour and excellence, not simply of the size of its bank balance" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 37).

The idea of favouritism is conveyed by a *blue-eyed boy*, sometimes *a blue-eyed girl*, namely "a favourite, a protégé" (Flavell and Flavell 1994: 37). The Romanian idiomatic language has retained a partially synonymous expression, deeply rooted in the political context of the Communist regime and commonly used in the plural, accompanied by a definite article: *băieţii cu ochi albaştri* (the blue-eyed boys), the protégés of the Communist rule, were called the agents and the collaborators of the Securitate. At the same time, such idiom slightly echoes *the boys in blue*, the uniformed police, underlining the idea of control and fear.

At the end, three additional idioms should be mentioned here, not fitting into any semantic category discussed above: the singular *to talk a blue streak*, thus fast and continuously; *once in a blue moon* (the Christianity-related Rom. *din an în Paşte*), adverbially signifying a rare, occasional occurrence; and the highly frequent *out of the blue* or *like a bolt from the blue* (Rom. *din senin*, out of the cloudless sky), namely totally unexpected, suddenly or with no warning.

- **PINK**

Pink, a combination of red and white, seems the ultimate colour of joy and love, in all its idiomatic representations, with one exception, *the pink slip*, "a termination notice from a job" (*idcon*), the job dismissal being expressed by *to get/to give the pink slip* or the verbal idiom *to pink-slip*. Devoid of such negative connotation, pink positively colours expressions like *tickled pink* (delighted, appreciative or very pleased) and (*be*) *in the pink* (*of condition*) (Rom. *în formă, înfloritor* or rather *cu bujori în obraji* – rosy-cheeked), thus in very good health:

e.g. *Her grandparents were in the pink of condition when she visited them.*

In other words,

"[w]ith joy, the association is based on facial color, as in *pink with pleasure*. It would seem likely that other associations of pink, such as *in the pink* and *tickled pink*, reinforce the

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pattern. Pink facial color further indicates mild anger and embarrassment. Accordingly, there is risk of ambiguity when the emotion is not spelt out. On the whole it appears that the link to positive feelings is stronger" (Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 359).

Another relevant expression is *to look at/to see the world through rose-coloured glasses* (Rom. *a vedea/a privi* (*ceva/totul*) *în roz*), referring to an unrealistic, exaggeratedly optimistic perspective, a tendency to see only the good parts of something. Such a viewpoint can sometimes culminate into a distorted reality, *to see pink elephants*, the Romanian counterpart culturally replacing the (pink) elephants with (green) horses, *a vedea cai verzi* (*pe pereți*). Their meaning is "to see things which are not really there because they are only in your imagination" (*idcon*) or even to perceive "various visual hallucinations sometimes experienced as a withdrawal symptom after sustained alcoholic drinking" (*dictionary*):

e.g. *The man was seeing pink elephants according to those who listened to his story* (*idcon*).

- **GREY**

Grey/gray has few, yet common, idiomatic representations in Romanian and English. Due to its mixture of black and white, grey seems to be an in-between, vague colour, illustrated in the expression *a grey area* (Rom. *nici albă, nici neagră*), "something that is not clearly defined and does not conform to an existing set of rules, neither black or white, neither one way or another way" (*idcon*):

e.g. *The issue of the tax on children's toys is a gray area for the accountant* (*idcon*).

Similarly, in the language of advertising, *grey* describes "a neutral, non-affiliated body" (*dexonline*), while *a grey market* (Rom. *piaţă gri*) stands for a market "operating within the law but charging prices substantially below list prices or those fixed by an official agency" (*dictionary*), in comparison with the utterly illegal *black market*. *To get grey hair* (*from*) (Rom. *a încărunţi*) visually expresses the result of great worry, stress and anxiety and is transitively rendered by *to give grey hair* (*to*) (Rom. *a scoate peri albi*) – causing someone extreme grief, annoyance or anger; the Romanian idiom intentionally uses white as a form of emphasis. Last, but not least, "[t]he grey category is also associated with sadness. The link appears to be metaphoric of weather: emotional gloom is described as grey weather and grey weather is called gloomy" (Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 358).

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- **BROWN**

As an idiom, brown is absent from Romanian; in English, it is part of the idiomatic expressions *brown bag it*, meaning "to take a lunch to work" (*idcon*), the slang *browned off* – "angry, fed up" (*dictionary*) and the informal *to do it up brown*, namely "to do thoroughly" (*dictionary*):

e.g. *When they entertain, they really do it up brown* (*dictionary*).

In conclusion, as demonstrated in Steinvall's study based on the Bank of English corpus, green is definitely the colour of anger (88.06%); yellow is the colour of joy (81.48%); black and grey are the colours of sadness (75.48% and, respectively, 75%); white is the colour of anger (39.24%) and fear (34.18%); blue is the colour of joy (54.90%), but also of sadness (37.25%); brown is mostly linked to anger (50.00%) and sadness (42.86%); on the contrary, pink signifies joy (43.48%) and love (30.43%) (in MacLaury et al. 2007: 357). In other words, "positive emotion categories, love and joy, collocate with bright and warm colors" (Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 357). As a final curiosity of language, idioms and colours, surprisingly or not, the emotion category of surprise is colourless or, better say, potentially rainbow-like, since it does not associate with any of the basic colours, scoring 0.00% in all cases (see Steinvall, in MacLaury et al. 2007: 351).

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