

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COLORS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Mirzayeva Dilshoda Ikromjonovna

Fergana State University, PhD, docent

Marufova Sarvinoz Murotjon qizi

Fergana State University Master's degree student

Abstract

Color is a universal phenomenon, yet its meanings and psychological influences vary significantly across different languages and cultures. While some colors evoke similar emotional reactions globally, many associations are shaped by cultural history, religion, social norms, and linguistic categorization. This article examines how colors influence human psychology and how these effects differ across cultures, drawing on examples from Western, Eastern, and Central Asian traditions. It also discusses how linguistic and cultural contexts shape emotional responses to color and influence communication, symbolism, and perception.

Key words: cognition, cultural symbolism, perception, tradition, symbolic meaning, color psychology, emotional response, rituals, linguistic categorization

Color is one of the most powerful tools of human perception. It plays a central role in art, communication, symbolism, and emotional expression. Psychologists argue that colors can affect mood, behavior, and cognitive processes, while anthropologists emphasize that cultural values determine how societies interpret and use color. According to **Johannes Itten** in his book *The Art of Color* (1961), color perception is shaped by both objective sensory mechanisms and subjective emotional responses [4. P. 36]. Meanwhile, **Brent Berlin and Paul Kay** in their influential work *Basic Color Terms* (1969) argue that linguistic categories strongly influence how cultures divide the color spectrum [1. P. 87].

Colors carry symbolic meanings that influence daily life from clothing and architecture to ceremonies and social interactions. However, these meanings are not universal. A color associated with joy in one culture may represent mourning or danger in another. This article explores the psychological impact of colors across cultures, focusing on how different linguistic and cultural systems shape people's understanding and emotional reactions to color. It also integrates theoretical perspectives from scholars such as Itten, Berlin & Kay, **Clifford Geertz**, **Anna Wierzbicka**, **Richard E. Cytowic**, and **Evan Thompson**, showing how perception, culture, and cognition interact to give color its psychological power.

Color psychology studies how different hues affect human emotions and behaviors. Some reactions appear to have biological roots, while others result from cultural learning and linguistic categorization.

Biologically, humans are naturally sensitive to certain colors. **Evan Thompson**, in *Colour Vision: A Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception* (1995), explains that human visual systems evolved to pay special attention to red and yellow because they signaled ripe fruit or potential danger [5. P. 162]. Warm colors such as red, orange, and yellow tend to stimulate the nervous system, while cool colors such as blue and green have a calming effect. These universal tendencies form the foundation of color psychology.

Neurologist **Richard E. Cytowic**, in his groundbreaking book *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (1993), adds that color can activate emotional and sensory responses even without conscious awareness, showing how deeply color is wired into human perception [2. P. 143]. Cytowic's research on synesthesia, a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sense involuntarily triggers another, demonstrates that colors are not processed only visually but also engage emotional and limbic structures in the brain. According to Cytowic, even people without synesthesia exhibit subtle cross-sensory interactions: certain colors can influence taste perception, increase or decrease sensitivity to sound, or even alter the feeling of physical warmth. His findings suggest that color perception operates at

a pre-verbal, instinctive level and that emotional responses to color occur milliseconds before rational interpretation. In this sense, color functions not only as a cultural symbol but also as a deeply biological trigger embedded in human neuropsychology.

Despite universal reactions, cultural traditions give each color a unique meaning. Anthropologist **Clifford Geertz**, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), argues that cultural symbols including colors shape collective worldviews [3. P. 57]. Similarly, linguist **Anna Wierzbicka** in *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition* (1992) demonstrates that color meanings differ because cultures attach different emotional and moral values to color terms [6. P. 90].

For example, while white symbolizes purity in Western contexts, it signifies mourning in Japan and China. In Islamic cultures, green has sacred value, while in China wearing a green hat symbolizes infidelity. Cultural meaning often overrides biological tendencies and deeply shapes emotional responses.

Color Symbolism in Different Cultures

Below is a small comparative table showing some symbolic variations:

Color	Western Cultures	East Asia	Central Asia / Islamic Cultures	Latin America
Red	Love, danger, power	Luck, weddings	Life, protection, fertility	Passion, celebration
Blue	Calm, trust	Immortality	Protection from evil (nazar)	Religious symbolism
White	Purity, peace	Mourning	Honesty, dignity, sacredness	Purity, spirituality
Black	Grief, formality	Mystery	Strength / misfortune	Masculinity
Green	Nature, harmony	Youth, vitality	Sacred, paradise	Nature, growth

Color	Western Cultures	East Asia	Central Asia / Islamic Cultures	Latin America
Yellow	Happiness, caution	Imperial power	Warmth, harvest	Optimism

Color Terminology in Different Languages

Languages categorize colors differently, and these linguistic distinctions have a direct influence on human perception. **Berlin and Kay's** influential study *Basic Color Terms* (1969) demonstrated that languages vary widely in the number of basic color terms they possess some languages recognize only two or three color categories, while others distinguish ten or more [1. P. 43]. According to their theory, languages evolve color vocabularies in a predictable sequence: terms for black and white appear first, followed by red, then green and yellow, and so on. This means that speakers of languages with fewer basic color categories perceive and organize the color spectrum in broader, less differentiated ways than speakers of languages with more developed color lexicons.

For example, **English** makes a strong distinction between *blue* and *green*, and English-speaking children learn to separate these colors early in development. In **Japanese**, however, the term *aoi* traditionally referred to both blue and green, and only in modern times did the language adopt *midori* as a widely recognized term for green. Even today, traffic lights in Japan use “blue” for what many English speakers would call green, showing that linguistic tradition still influences perception and categorization.

A similar phenomenon is seen in **Uzbek**, where the word *ko'k* historically covered a wide range of shades, including dark blue, sky blue, and even certain greenish tones. This broad categorization has cultural significance: *ko'k* is associated with the sky, eternity, and spiritual elevation, meanings that blend across what English would consider separate color families. Because the term historically encompassed both blue and green tones, symbolic

associations of freshness, nature, infinity, and holiness are intertwined in Uzbek cultural expressions.

Linguist **Anna Wierzbicka**, in *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition* (1992), emphasizes that such differences in color terminology reflect deeper cultural patterns [6. P. 54]. She argues that when a language lacks a specific color term, speakers do not simply fail to notice that color; rather, they organize visual experience according to culturally meaningful distinctions. In other words, the boundaries between colors are not purely optical they are shaped by shared cultural knowledge, traditions, and values. These linguistic categories influence how people remember colors, how they discuss them, and even how they emotionally respond to them.

Marketing and Branding

Color is one of the strongest non-verbal communication tools in global marketing. Brands carefully select colors because consumers associate specific hues with emotional and cultural meanings. Research in cross-cultural marketing shows that **the same color can trigger different buying behaviors in different regions**.

For instance, **red packaging is highly effective in China** because red is rooted in cultural beliefs about prosperity, luck, and happiness. Consumers perceive red as energetic and auspicious, which increases the appeal of products ranging from food to technology. In Western markets, however, red often signals urgency or attraction, which explains its frequent use in sales promotions and fast-food branding.

Blue logos dominate global corporate branding, especially in banking and technology sectors. Because blue is culturally linked to trust, stability, and intelligence in many parts of the world, companies such as PayPal, Ford, and Samsung use it to convey reliability and professionalism. This cross-cultural consistency makes blue one of the safest and most effective corporate colors.

Meanwhile, **green is widely used in eco-friendly branding**, especially in Europe and North America. It symbolizes sustainability, nature, and health associations shaped by

Western environmental discourse. However, in the Middle East, green additionally carries sacred connotations linked to Islam, giving it spiritual weight that influences how consumers perceive certain brands.

These examples demonstrate how cultural symbolism and psychological responses work together in determining how color affects consumer preferences.

Education and Child Development

Color also plays a significant role in children's emotional regulation, attention span, and learning motivation, though cultural reinforcement shapes these effects.

In many **Western educational settings**, classrooms are painted in shades of **blue or green** to promote concentration and reduce stress. Psychological studies show that cool colors help children stay calm and focused during learning activities. Educational designers in Europe and North America therefore prioritize these tones for classrooms, libraries, and study spaces.

However, in cultures where **red has a strong positive meaning**, such as China or parts of Central Asia, the color can enhance motivation and enthusiasm. Red textbooks, notebooks, and reward stickers can increase a child's excitement and engagement because the color is associated with happiness, achievement, and good fortune. In these contexts, red does not cause overstimulation, as it might in Western settings, because cultural associations counterbalance its biological intensity.

This illustrates how **cultural symbolism mediates psychological reactions**, even among young learners.

Architecture and Interior Design

Color preferences in architecture and interior design reflect cultural aesthetics, climate conditions, and spiritual traditions.

In **Central Asia**, blue has a deep spiritual resonance rooted in historical and Islamic symbolism. Traditional architecture frequently uses blue tiles in mosques, madrasas, and mausoleums. The Registan in Samarkand, for example, uses turquoise, navy, and sky-blue tiles to represent the infinite sky, divine presence, and spiritual purity. This demonstrates how architecture communicates cultural narratives through color.

In contrast, **Scandinavian countries**, with long, dark winters, favor **white, beige, and light pastel tones** to maximize natural light and create a sense of openness. Interior design trends such as “Scandinavian minimalism” rely on pale colors to make spaces feel brighter and larger. Here, color choice is shaped primarily by environmental adaptation rather than symbolic meaning.

References:

1. Berlin, B., & Kay, P. *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. University of California Press, 1969.
2. Cytowic, R. E. *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*. MIT Press, 1993.
3. Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.
4. Itten, J. *The Art of Color*. Wiley, 1961.
5. Thompson, E. *Colour Vision: A Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception*. Routledge, 1995.
6. Wierzbicka, A. *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*. Oxford University Press, 1992.