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ENGLISH ADJECTIVAL COLOR SIMILES AND THEIR TRANSLATION INTO SERBIAN

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the semantic analysis of English conventionalized adjectival color similes as well as their translation into Serbian. The first half of the paper contains a brief discussion of some of the most important theoretical issues significant for our study, whereas the second half covers the research methods as well as the results. Briefly, the results showed that complete correspondence is the most frequent relation between English and Serbian color similes, followed by partial correspondence and equivalence.*

Keywords: *color, simile, English, Serbian, translation, correspondence, equivalence*

1 Introduction

For almost fifty years, the topic of color has received much investigation. Ever since the publication of *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* by Berlin and Kay in 1969, a vast number of papers that deal with color semantics largely rely on the findings present in this shared work. One of the points of reference is Berlin and Kay's identification of eleven focal colors that English speakers use: black, white, red, orange, yellow, brown, green, blue, purple, pink, and grey, of which black and white are the most basic color terms[2] (1969: 4). However, there are some languages in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Africa that do not even have the word for "color." This means that

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[2] Basic color terms were defined as those (a) which are monolexemic (unlike reddish-blue); (b) whose signification is not included in that of any other term (unlike crimson and vermilion, both of which are kinds of red); (c) whose application is not restricted to a narrow class of objects (unlike blond and roan); and (d) which are relatively salient as evidenced in frequent and general use (unlike puce and mauve) (Kay and McDaniel, 1978: 612).

"color" is not a universal concept as was previously claimed by Berlin and Kay (Wierzbicka, 2006: 2). Wierzbicka thus challenged Berlin and Kay's (1969) work calling it "attractive and influential" but "anglocentric and untenable," particularly because of the "basic color categories" and "color universals" (ibid.: 22). However, it is true that color has a very important role in English. Visual descriptors referring to human appearance (skin, hair and eyes) witness this importance. For example, white, black, yellow and red people are lexemes based on the skin colors of human races; blond refers to hair; hazel refers to eyes and so on. There are also lexemes in Serbian that we intuitively think are used to convey a message exactly through colors, e.g. *žutica* (Eng. *jaundice*), *zelembać* (Eng. *green lizard*), *belilo* (Eng. *bleach*), etc. But, not all speakers give attention to color in the same way, especially those that do not have the word for it.

Like color, similes have also attracted attention over time due to the attempts of many authors, such as Aristotle, to form a better view of similes through the use of different perspectives. This microlinguistic study deals with a number of English conventionalized adjectival color similes and their translation into Serbian. The paper is restricted only to the similes of the form *(as)* + ADJ + *as* + N, where adjective (ADJ) is the *ground* and noun (N) is the *vehicle*. In similes, the ground is a property shared by the vehicle and the *topic*, the element which is being compared and which can be excluded from a simile depending on the context. The ground also acts as the *tertium comparationis,*[3] which shall help us to explain why some colors are used in figurative expressions. The primary aim is to establish whether the same colors are used in English and Serbian to conceptualize certain characteristics, primarily those related to human physical appearance, or whether the two languages are different in this respect. The major assumption is that they are similar in the majority of cases.

2 Theoretical Background

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[3] Tertium comparationis is defined as "a perception of a similarity of some kind, in the first instance of form or sound, between language-A-speakers' use of their language and language-B-speakers' use of theirs" (Chesterman, 1998: 55). In other words, it is a conceptual reference or the sameness in meaning, a quality that the two things being compared share.

The term "simile" derives from Latin *simile* meaning "resemblance and likeness" (Fadaee, 2011: 22). As it is very often discussed simultaneously with metaphor, Pierini helps to make a difference between these two figures of speech more clearly:
1) "Simile compares two entities, but metaphor conceptually assimilates them to one another (Bredin, 1998).
2) Simile can be literal or non-literal, while metaphor is only non-literal.
3) Simile is signaled by a variety of comparison markers, while metaphor has no surface marker" (2007: 23).

In other words, similes contain the copulas "as" or "like," which characterizes them as "explicit," and at the same time different from metaphors, which are thus "implicit" (Evans and Green, 2006: 293; see also Israel et al., 2004: 129). Whereas metaphors have the form A is B (e.g. *Achilles is a lion*), similes have the form A is like B (e.g. *Achilles is like a lion*) (Evans and Green, 2006: ibid.). Leech claims that every metaphor has the form "X is like Y in respect of Z, where X is the tenor, Y the vehicle, and Z the ground," and in similes such as *his face was as white as a sheet*, all the three elements are explicitly mentioned, that is, *his face* is the tenor, *sheet* is the vehicle and *white* is the ground (1969: 151; see also Lipka, 1992: 122).

Traditional theorists considered both metaphors and similes a mere decoration of speech, but modern theorists disagree. As a matter of fact, they treat them as the way we think. Metaphors and similes are a matter of thought, that is, reflections of our conceptual structure which allow us to perform a set of cross-domain mappings between two conceptual domains: the *source domain* and the *target domain*[4] (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In the case of color similes, there is another cognitive mechanism involved besides the conceptual metaphor, and that is *conceptual metonymy*. What is meant by conceptual metonymy is "a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same conceptual domain," and it is important to point out that in metonymy both the vehicle and the target are elements of the same conceptual domain (Kövecses, 2010: 324).

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[4] Source domains are more concrete aspects of conceptual structure, whereas target domains are less easily apprehended aspects of conceptual structure, and these abstract, complex target domains are expressed in terms of concrete, physical source domains.

When it comes to the topic of this particular paper, there are specific types of conceptual metonymies which correspond to physiological, behavioral, and expressive responses associated with particular emotions (ibid.: 109). For instance, as Omazić noticed, *as white as a sheet* can be based either on the conceptual metaphor HUMAN FACE IS SHEET, or the conceptual metonymy BLOOD LEAVES FACE FOR FEAR (2002: 103). The general metonymy is EFFECT OF EMOTION FOR THE EMOTION, whereas BLOOD LEAVES FACE FOR FEAR is a specific-level metonymy. The same can be applied to other colors, e.g. red. Red is very often used to indicate the color of someone's face or cheeks when he/she is angry or embarrassed, primarily because there is an association of red with heat, in this case followed by an increased blood circulation in the cheeks. Hence, the specific-level metonymy here is REDNESS OF FACE FOR ANGER/EMBARASSMENT. On the other hand, if we observe this from the point of view of metaphors, then we would have ANGER IS HEAT and EMBARASSMENT IS HEAT as conceptual metaphors. However, it is very important to emphasize that, without context, it is not always possible to determine whether a certain simile refers to a person's face or the entire body.

Color similes derive from our immediate surroundings and are created by means of associations or conceptual links between different entities. We use the color (*ground*) of objects or even abstractions (*vehicle*s) to describe some other entity (*tenor*). The cognitive process involved is called *categorization*, whereby *category* refers to a set of objects considered equivalent (Rosch, 1978: 4). Colors are used for categorizing objects, however, not whole categories are used in color similes, but the so-called *prototypes*, the best or most widespread members that represent a particular category (ibid.: 11). These are the cores of a category whereas other members are marginal since they bear less resemblance to the prototype. Rosch conducted experiments in which it was revealed that robins, for instance, are better representatives of the category of birds rather than hens, ostriches or penguins (according to Taylor, 2008: 43). In that sense, snow and sheet are obviously more typical and stable than, say, goose, pearl or cloud, which are all white but are marginal members of the category WHITE and therefore are not used in adjectival color similes.

Finally, as for translating similes, Pierini gives six potential strategies for translators to choose between:

"S1: literal translation (retention of the same vehicle)
S2: replacement of the vehicle with a different vehicle
S3: reduction of the simile, if idiomatic, to its sense
S4: retention of the same vehicle plus explication of similarity feature(s)
S5: replacement of the vehicle with a gloss
S6: omission of the simile" (2007: 31).

Similes such as "*as black as coal*" (Serb. *crn kao ugalj*), "*as red as a rose*" (Serb. *crven kao ruža*), "*as white as ivory*" (Serb. *beo kao slonovača*) and "*as yellow as a quince*" (Serb*. žut kao dunja*) are only some of the examples of the literal translation strategy. As for the second strategy, examples include "*as black as pitch*" (Serb. *crn kao katran*) and "*as red as a lobster*" (Serb. *crven kao rak*). The third strategy, the one which reduces an idiomatic simile to its sense, yields the following in the case of color similes: "*as black as your hat*" (Serb. *crn crncat*), "*as brown as a berry*" (Serb. *preplanuo*) and "*as green as grass*" (Serb. *još zelen*). Retention of the same vehicle plus explication of similarity feature(s) is one of the most rarely used strategies in general, and there are no conventionalized color similes that are translated this way. When it comes to the replacement of the vehicle with a gloss, this is a strategy used only in the case of similes which contain allusions – "literary quotations and references to people, places, events, songs and films," that is, "culture-bound elements whose interpretation depends on world knowledge" (Leppihalme 1997, as cited in Pierini, 2007: 34). Lastly, the omission of the simile can be witnessed within a context, that is, a translation of any text from source to target language where there is a simile in the source text but not in the target text as well.

3 Methods

The corpus of our research consists of 26 English adjectival color similes and their Serbian counterparts, all obtained from Kovačević (1991; 1997; 2002). We sought for dictionary entries related to colors first, and then we identified similes under each example. The similes were then grouped according to their properties into three different groups, some of

which contain subgroups. The three groups are made of similes which, when translated from English into Serbian, have: complete correspondents, partial correspondents and equivalents. Complete correspondents have the same ground and vehicle in both English and Serbian, partial correspondents are characterized by having the same ground but a different vehicle, and finally, equivalents have a different syntactic structure but are semantically the same[5]. All English similes from our corpus incorporate the following color names: black (10), red (8), white (5), yellow (1), green (1) and brown (1)[6].

4 Results
4.1 Complete correspondents

The first group, including its subgroups, contains 18 English adjectival color similes and their complete correspondents in Serbian (69% out of the total number). These similes do not involve any kind of symbolic motivation, but are solely based on the colors (grounds) of different entities (vehicles), and are the same in both English (L1) and Serbian (L2):

(1)	as black as *coal*	crn kao *ugalj*
(2)	as black as *the devil*	crn kao *đavo*
(3)	as black as *ebony*	crn kao *abonos*
(4)	as black as *ink*	crn kao *tuš*
(5)	as black as *a raven*	crn kao *gavran*
(6)	as black as *soot*	crn kao *gar*
(7)	as red as *a beetroot*	crven kao *cvekla*
(8)	as red as *blood*	crven kao *krv*
(9)	as red as *a peony*	crven kao *božur*
(10)	as red as *a rose*	crven kao *ruža*

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[5] For a more detailed classification of relations see Đorđević (2004: 57–63).

[6] The numbers in brackets indicate in how many similes each color term appears.

(11) as red as *a ruby*   crven kao *rubin*

(12) as white as *a ghost*   beo kao *sablast*

(13) as white as *ivory*   beo kao *slonovača*

(14) as yellow as *a quince*   žut kao *dunja*

The simile with *coal* (Serb. *ugalj*) in example (1) is first mentioned in a Saxon manuscript from A.D. 1000, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* by Christine Ammer (1997). Coal is a combustible rock obtained by carbonization, typically by heating or burning, or during fossilization, and as such is black in color, which explains the meaning of this simile, both English and its Serbian translation c*rn kao ugalj*. Also, this simile has a synonym[7] in the form of an adjective[8] obtained through clipping, and that is "coal-black." The simile (2) with *devil* (Serb. *đavo*) is used in these two languages to denote the blackness of something, which in and of itself implies predominantly negative characteristics of the entity being described, due to the fact that devils are supernatural beings associated with the concepts of evil, cruelty and hell. As the epitome of evil is Satan, that is, Prince of Darkness, and the word black is itself associated with darkness, it is evident why there is such a simile that includes the noun *devil*. The example (3) contains the noun *ebony* (Serb. *abonos*) which is used in similes due to the fact that this type of fine wood, obtained from the heartwood of the tree growing predominantly in India, Ceylon and Sri Lanka, is known for its density and intense black color. The similes under (4), (5) and (6) are self-explanatory as well, since *ink* (Serb. *tuš*), *raven* (Serb. *gavran*) and *soot* (Serb. *gar, čađ*) are all black.

As for the color red, the meaning of all six similes is transparent since these entities, namely, *beetroot* (Serb. *cvekla*), *blood* (Serb. *krv*), *peony* (Serb. *božur*), *rose* (Serb. *ruža*) and *ruby*

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[7] Other examples of synonymy based on the similes from our corpus are: soot-black, ink-black, jet-black, pitch-black, blood-red, rose-red, ruby-red, and snow-white (WordNet).

[8] According to Parizoska and Novoselec, these cognate adjectival forms occur with a different set of nouns and have different meanings in relation to similes in English (but also in Swedish and Croatian). Their results also showed that adjectival forms are used with a wider range of nouns and typically occur in prenominal positions (2014).

(Serb. *rubin*) are red and are strongly correlated with it. First of all, despite the fact that *beetroot*, in the example (7), is dark purple or reddish purple in color, it is still used both in English and Serbian to make a comparison between two entities that are red. Example (8) includes *blood*, which is also transparent in meaning as blood is red in color. However, in the example (9) with the noun *peony* not everything is so clear-cut. Even though it is used both in English and Serbian unambiguously, the blossom of this species of flower ranges from red to white, pink or even yellow. The most representative color in the case of peonies seems to be red, probably because it is most intense and eye-catching. The same is applied to *rose* used in the example (10). Despite the fact that this flower has a lot of beautiful and vibrant colors, each carrying certain symbolism, red is employed in similes together with the noun *rose* simply because red roses might be the most popular ones, as they are the symbol of love, romance, passion and beauty. The next simile (11) from this group employs the noun *ruby*, which is one of the most beautiful and most precious gemstones and which is, of course, red in color.

The two similes with the term white that have complete correspondents and that are also transparent in meaning, involve entities that are genuinely white. These are the examples (12) and (13), and they involve the nouns *ghost* (Serb. *sablast*) and *ivory* (Serb. *slonovača*). Whereas *ivory* does exist in the real world, *ghosts* can only be witnessed in tales, movies etc. They represent a soul of a dead person, and their shape may vary from a misty, wispy form to a full-blown, humanlike shape. With respect to human body, white is mostly associated with pale skin as a result of some kind of disease, or an emotional reaction, such as fear. However, sometimes it is not perfectly clear whether the target domain is someone's face or his/her entire body, so the meaning most probably depends on the context in which it is used.

One last example from this group of similes is (14) *as yellow as a quince*, or *žut kao dunja* in Serbian, the simile whose meaning is transparent, since this type of fruit is bright yellow when ripe. Yellow, just as red and white, signalizes certain changes in our organism. This particular color stands for cowardice and illness, hence the use of the noun "žutica" in Serbian to denote the kind of disease characterized by a

yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes caused by an accumulation of bile pigment (bilirubin) in the blood (WordNet).

In all the examples above, the similes are used literally, meaning that objects appear in that particular color in nature (*devil* and *ghost* being taken with reservation). The understanding of these two similes may be ascribed to encyclopedic rather than dictionary knowledge.

4.1.1 Subgroup with multiple vehicles in English (L1)

This first subgroup includes two similes, which have complete correspondents. While there is one ground in both English and Serbian, there are two different vehicles in English (L1) and one vehicle as their correspondent in Serbian (L2):

(15) as   black   as   *a crow/crake*   crn kao *vrana*

(16)   as white as *(the driven) snow*   beo kao *sneg*

The English example (15) contains the nouns *crow* (Serb. *vrana*) and *crake* (Serb. *prdavac*) but only the former one is present in the Serbian simile, namely *vrana*. It is worth noting that crake itself is not black, but the species called "black crake" is. One reason for not saying *(as) black as a black crake* in English is probably the attempt to avoid pleonasm. Thus, we are lead to believe that it is black crake that the simile refers to, instead of crake. As for Serbian speakers, they use *crows* as they are more familiar with this species of birds. On the other hand, the example (16) has a variation. The *driven snow* refers to clean, untrodden snow, but this subtype of simile is not literally translated into Serbian since there is no such a comparison as *beo kao neugažen sneg* but only *beo kao sneg*. As for its motivation, it is more than obvious why *snow* is used here. Not only is it white, but it is also a widespread entity that can be seen in many areas of the world.

4.1.2 Subgroup with multiple vehicles in Serbian (L2)

A second subgroup of complete correspondents consists of a simile, which in English (L1) has one vehicle, but in Serbian (L2) it has two:

(17)   as red as *a poppy*   crven kao *mak*; crven kao *bulka*

Both English and Serbian languages use the noun *poppy* in similes since this flower is bright red and very common. However, in Serbian there are two synonymous nouns used in this case – *mak* and *bulka*. They only differ in the sense that *mak* is a broader term that refers to the family of plants to which *bulka* itself belongs.

4.1.3 Subgroup with multiple vehicles and grounds in Serbian (L2)

This particular subgroup of complete correspondents is made of one simile, the simile that has one ground and one vehicle in English (L1), but two different grounds as well as two different vehicles in Serbian (L2):

(18)   as white as *a sheet*   bled kao *krpa*; beo kao *čaršav*

In this example (18) there is the noun *sheet* in English and the nouns *krpa* and *čaršav* in Serbian. Whereas *čaršav* is a Serbian word, meaning *sheet*, *krpa* (Eng. *cloth*) is not its synonym. Moreover, the grounds differ in Serbian simile. The adjectives used are *white* and *pale*, where the former one is a basic color term but the latter may refer to any other color which is very light and highly diluted with white.

4.2 Partial correspondents

A second group of similes includes all the similes which have the same ground, that is, the name of a color, but a different vehicle, and there are 5 of them in total (19%), one of which makes a subgroup with multiple vehicles:

(19)   as black as *jet*   crn kao *zift*

(20)   as black as *pitch*   crn kao *katran*

(21)   as red as *a lobster*   crven kao *rak*

(22)   as red as a *turkey-cock*   crven kao *petlova kresta*

The vehicle *jet* (Serb. *gagat*) is used in the English example (19) and it is a hard black form of lignite that takes a brilliant polish and is used in jewelry or ornamentation (WordNet). However, in Serbian, the noun *zift* (Eng. *tar*) is employed instead, and it is a solid substance that forms a residue in tobacco pipes and mouthpieces (Vujaklija, 1980: 314; Skok, 1971: 654). Also, *pitch* (Serb. *crna smola*) from the example (20) is a thick black sticky substance used on roofs and ships to stop water getting through (MacMillan, 2002). But, Serbian employs the noun *katran*[9] (Eng. *tar*), a thick black residue deriving from the distillation of paraffin oil used instead of asphalt (Vujaklija, 1980: 185).

As far as the simile (21) with *lobster* is concerned, it does not have a complete correspondent in Serbian, as the speakers of this language do not say *crven kao jastog*, but *crven kao rak* (Eng. *crab*). So, both English and Serbian similes are transparent in meaning, but they use different species of crustaceans. Next in a row of partial correspondents is the simile (22) that employs *turkey-cock* as the vehicle for a comparison probably because of the red loose flesh on this bird's neck. However, this simile in Serbian employs a fleshy growth on a male rooster's head – *petlova kresta*. In addition, this Serbian lexeme ambiguously refers to two different entities, one of which is already mentioned above, whereas the other one refers to a species of flower called *petlova kresta*, or *cockscomb* in English, whose shape and color truly resemble a comb on a rooster's head. Whichever of these two motivates the Serbian simile, the reason is obvious – both entities are red.

4.2.1 Subgroup with multiple vehicles in English (L1)

A subgroup of partial correspondents contains only one simile, the one that has two different lexemes acting as vehicles in English (L1), but only one in Serbian (L2):

(23) as white as ashes/chalk   beo kao kreč

In the example (23), c*halk* (Serb. *kreda*) is used to describe something white since *chalk* itself is white, however with *ashes* (Serb. *pepeo*) one does not really get a clear picture of why it may be used. *Ashes* refer to the residue of something

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[9] Also *gudron* (Fr. goudron) (Vujaklija, 1980: 185).

burned and they are rather grey or off-white, rather than pure white. This simile may derive from the idea that *ashes*, referring also to the remains of a cremated person, may associate these remains to ghosts, which are traditionally believed to be white. On the other hand, in Serbian there is no such a simile which uses *pepeo* in a combination with white, but there is one which includes *lime* (Serb. *kreč*), a white substance obtained by heating limestone and used for various purposes, mainly for painting walls.

4.3 Equivalents

A third group of similes is the one where there are no complete or partial correspondents in Serbian, but phrases which act as translation equivalents, the ones that have the same meaning but usually a different form than the English examples, and there are 3 such similes in our corpus (12%):

(24) as black as *your hat*   *crn crncat*

(25) as green as *grass*   *još zelen*

(26) as brown as *a berry*   *preplanuo*

The adjective phrase *crn crncat*[10] (ADJ + ADJ) is used in Serbian as the most appropriate translational equivalent to the English simile (24) *as black as your hat*, in which *hat* most likely stands for a miner's hard hat with a candle stuck in a lump of clay at the front (Wilkinson, 2002: 361).

When it comes to the expression *još zelen*, it is a Serbian adjective phrase made of an adverb *još* (Eng. *still*) and an adjective *zelen* (Eng. *green*), which semantically corresponds to the simile (25) *as green as grass*, the simile which is transparent in meaning as *grass* is a type of vegetation of green color. However, it does not describe someone's physical appearance, but is rather used to describe a person who is young and inexperienced.

Finally, in the example (26), there is a different type of correspondence than in the two previous examples. Namely, here the equivalent for the English simile is a single word – *preplanuo*

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[10] Forms such as *crn crncat* are called "absolute superlatives" and are made by reduplication (Ivić, 1995: 319, according to Bulić, 2011: 29).

(Eng. *tanned*, *suntanned*). The origin of the simile *as brown as a berry*[11] goes back to the 14th century and Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," where he wrote "His palfrey was as broun as is a berye" which in Modern English would mean "His horse was as brown as a berry."[12] However, it is not known to which berry Chaucer referred in this case. One of the theories is that berry might be an obsolete word for some kind of seed or grain which is brown. One might also think of e.g. a coffee bean as a "brown berry." However, Venetian traders introduced coffee into Europe in 1615 (Ukers, 1922: 53), at the time when Chaucer was already dead, so this theory is instantly refuted. He simply could not have referred to coffee. Another theory is that he might have referred to any kind of berry which changed its color under certain circumstances, e.g. as a result of some kind of plant disease or as a result of dry spell. As we know, *as brown as a berry* refers to someone whose skin color has noticeably changed due to exposure to sunrays, therefore, the change in color does make sense. Yet another possible theory is that the motivation for this simile is alliteration, as in similes *as frisky as a ferret*, *as dead as a dodo* etc.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we analyzed 26 conventionalized English adjectival color similes and provided their Serbian counterparts with the aim of determining the semantic similarity between English and Serbian with regards to this specific semantic field. In other words, we investigated why certain objects or abstractions are posited as prototypes for the conceptualization of the colors in question. The results showed that the two languages exhibit many similarities, as 69% of English similes have complete correspondents in Serbian, 19% have partial correspondents and 12% of similes have equivalents. The results also provide evidence for the fact that color similes are culturally motivated to some extent. That is, they reflect the beliefs of a community in which they are used. At the same time, we provided possible theories for the motivation of each and every simile and pointed out that colors refer either to people's face or their entire body,

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[11] Interestingly enough, there is a surname "Beribroun" originating from this simile (Reaney, 1991: 476).
[12] See <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/37600.html>.

but also to someone who might be in an early period of life, development or growth (as in the example *as green as grass*).

Further study could encompass a broadened list of color similes, even those similes created ad hoc (for example, in poetry, prose, advertisements etc.), since this paper includes only the conventionalized similes found in dictionaries. Moreover, one could analyze color similes from a different aspect – collecting a number of Serbian color similes and then trying to provide their English counterparts. The results could be used both in translational studies as well as during the preparation of EFL classes with a specific topic, that is, similes, or more specifically, color similes.

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