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#### SEMANTICS OF WHITE COLOUR IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS (IN RUSSIAN, ENGLISH AND GEORGIAN)

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#### *Abstract*

Phraseological units originated in the language represent the reflection of the culture of people and create rich lexical material and demonstrate a close connection between the existing language and the society spoken in this language. The lexical group of colour designation is significant in creation and expression of a language picture. Colour names are widely used to describe different things, the environment, human appearance, features, and actions, emotional and physical state.

Colors are represented by a rich phraseology both in English, Russian and Georgian languages. The present paper aims at studying of biblical phraseological units containing colour component “white”, considering cultural aspects of perception and symbolism as well. White is one of the dominant colours in phraseological units. In English, Russian Georgian phraseological units white is a colour of the sky or heavens. It is known that white is considered as the color of heavens, embodies the sun or day light. At the same time, it is the color of happiness, gladness and exuberance.

We have conducted comparative analysis of biblical phraseological units in Russian, English and Georgian languages with colour component, and also have touched upon the problem of translation equivalents, as many of them are multi-valued making them difficult for interpretation and comparison.

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**Keywords:** Phraseological units, colour, white, comparative analysis, symbol, linguistics.



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## 1. Introduction

Language reflects our reality and interprets it, creating the reality in which we live. It expresses mentality of the nation, views of ancient people in the world. Echoes of previous years remain today in proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, metaphors, culture symbols, etc. Language is the most complex phenomenon, and a spirit of nation. In this connection E. Benveniste points out: Language reproduces reality. This is to be understood in the most literal way. Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as in his discourse. All the characteristics of language, its immaterial nature, its symbolic functioning, [...] properties of language are so peculiar that it is possible to speak actually about existence of language having not only one, but several structures, each of which could form the basis for emergence of complete linguistics (Benveniste, 1958, p. 224).

Echoing E. Sapir (Sapir, 1921, p. 7), we maintain that language is a “purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols”.

Each language in its own way divides the world into segments and classifies them, i.e. it has its own conceptualisation. It should be stressed that every language has its own world-view, and the language personality is obliged to organise contents of the statement according to this picture. The human perception of the world is recorded and shown in language.

Units with a component of a colour naming take the important place in phraseological fund of English, Russian and Georgian languages. The system of a colour naming is widely developed; every color has broad semantics and is used at the description of the most different phenomena of surrounding reality.

### 1.2. Colour Concept in Linguistics

In linguistics, the study of colour concepts in different languages has a long tradition, presented by lots of publications. Colour is a physical, psychological, and linguistic phenomenon, and a subject of analysis in many fundamental sciences, a component of many arts, and plays a great role in the life of society. It is a significant feature of the universe that has many practical applications, as well as being important aesthetically. The ability to perceive colour gives us vital information about the world we live in, and can have a profound influence on the human temperament, from cooling to warming, from soothing to stimulating, and from calming to exciting.

Colour categorisation came from a study originated by Berlin and Kay (Berlin & Kay, 1969, p. 1 78) who introduced a concept of *basic colour terms*, and identified 11 basic terms in English (*black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, pink, orange, purple* and *grey*). They discovered regularities in the bulk of the basic colour vocabulary and, having studied colour etymology, investigated processes of emergence and development of colour designation in various languages. The authors based their analysis on a comparison of colour words in 20 languages from around the world.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Problem of Translation of Phraseological Units

The concept of colour is represented by compact and easily defined lexical groups, which can be used for various methodical procedures in the lexical analysis. Studies of semantic features of terms of colour help to see their correlations in languages of various types.

For linguists colours are one of the most popular lexical groups. Scientists started to study a problem of language perception of colour in the middle of the 19th a century. There is a number of universal features in the system of a colour naming.

The human eye is assumed to be so sensitive that it can distinguish between up to ten million different nuances. David Crystal draws attention to the way the semantic field of colour shows “patterns of lexical use in English”, because the visible spectrum is a continuum. He suggests that modern English has eleven basic colour lexemes, namely: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey (Crystal, 1992, p. 1-529).

The problem of translation of phraseological units is always characterized with considerable difficulties for the translator. Many phraseological units clearly express national character. It is necessary to consider features of words, for example colour names used in phraseological units. It is possible to reveal semantic and the lexical universals indicating the general conceptual basis on which human language, thinking and culture are based. Material of three compared languages demonstrates that phraseological units are characterized by high semantic activity.

The comparative approach which is the basis for the given paper allows to obtain information about similarity or distinction of colour perception of different languages, national specific, linguocultural features and interpretation of the white colour of the Biblical expressions.

Emergence of concrete comparative construction primary represents observations, and comparison is result of the analysis of perceptions.

## 3. Research Questions -Phraseological Units as a Phenomenon of Culture

### 3.1. ‘White’ - the colour of Christianity

The language world-view is created by different paints, the brightest ones, from our viewpoint, are myths, figurative and metaphoric words and word-combinations, etc. Each concrete language comprises a national, original system, which defines native speakers’ outlook and forms the world-view.

Language is very rich with phraseological units, proverbs and sayings that the native speaker constantly comes across in literature, in movies, in mass media, and in everyday communication. The correct use of them gives speech a unique originality and special expressiveness. V. N. Teliya writes that phraseological structure of language is “a mirror in which the lingo-cultural community tries to identify their national self-consciousness for it is phraseological units that impose upon language carriers particular viewing of the world, situation” (Teliya, 1996, p. 87).

Phraseological units play a very important role in creation of a language world-view. They are “a mirror of the nation’s life” (Fedulenkova, 1996, p. 95). The nature of phraseological units is closely

connected with the background knowledge of the native speaker, with practical experience of the personality, with cultural and historical traditions of the people speaking the language (Fedulenkova, 1997b, p. 67).

The urgent issue of the day is complex studies of phraseological units as the object of linguistic research, from the point of semantics and a lingual-cultural aspect. In the language of the native speaker they play a considerable role, having accumulated national-cultural features of a language world-view of the nation (Fedulenkova, 1999, p. 134). One of the most significant problems in modern linguistics is comprehensive study of lexical units in connection with phraseological units. Study of phraseological units as a phenomenon of culture is investigated in linguo-cultural context. The relation nature between language and culture revels in a variety of language phenomena. Phraseological units show the features of a culture and convey the way of thinking and values of each nation. The European countries and peoples, professing Christianity, used to rely on the knowledge in the field of classical philology, folklore, myths and legends, the array of which were borrowed from biblical texts and underwent different modifications throughout centuries (Fedulenkova, 1997a, p. 147). Those centuries changed both translators' skills and consumers' tastes of translations. On the other hand, characteristic features of church translation from the corresponding originals remained unchangeable in the recipient languages, and, as a result, a number of phraseological units got a thin coating of archaism, or actually became archaic from the point of view of modern language. A lot of biblical expressions, especially proverbial ones in different peoples' folklore, are universal from the point of view of typological analysis (Fedulenkova, 2000b, p. 290-299; 2006a, p. 51-52; 2014a, p. 4-11).

For centuries people have used colour to symbolise particular beliefs. Having analysed the colour components "white" as being considered as a Christian colour, we describe some peculiar features of connotative meanings and problems of translation of biblical phraseological units into Russian, English and Georgian languages.

We have carried out comparative analysis of biblical phraseological units in Russian, English and Georgian languages with the chosen colour component, and also touched upon the problem of translation equivalents, as many of them are multi-valued, which makes them difficult for interpretation and comparison. As to the features of phraseological units in general, they also refer to phraseological units of Slavic languages. The world of Slavic languages is huge, both territorially and in the lingual-cultural relation. It is well seen in the names of area segmentation of Slavic languages, i.e. West Slavic languages, South Slavic languages, East Slavic languages. They dispersed from each other many centuries ago, however, feeling of their relationship and unity by origin is acknowledged more nowadays. This unity is felt both in phonetics, and in morphology, and especially in lexicon. It doesn't mean that they simply repeat each other. Over the course of centuries many distinctions developed in every one of the language aspects, lexicons of Slavic languages, as well as their phraseocons, inclusive.

### **3.2. Cultural Aspects of Perception and Symbolism**

Quite often, a colour designation can become symbolic. Colour symbolism is the use of colour as a representation or meaning of something that is usually specific to a particular culture or society. People can

look at the same subject, but perceive its colour differently. Colour terms differ across languages, and the differences were viewed through the prism of culture.

A symbolic approach focuses attention on the use of symbols in culture. Culture is ‘the symbolical Universe’ (Lotman, 1990, p. 228) A phraseological fund of language is the most valuable source of data on culture and mentality of the people; it is phraseology that preserved ideas of the people of myths, customs, ceremonies, rituals, habits, morals, behaviour, etc. Phraseological units always indirectly reflect people’s views, the social system and ideology of the era.

In many languages there are numerous expressions in which colour plays an important role for expressing moods and feelings. Symbolism of colour meanings is based on analogies and associations, connected with the vision of colour, and it possesses the ability to carry cultural and significant information.

Practically in all cultures people have noticed usability of colour as symbols. Proceeding from different living conditions and development of civilizations, the same colours in different peoples symbolize various phenomena.

‘The Bible is the text exclusively orthodox and canonized. It seemed that this fact maybe guaranteed a considerable monotony and similarity of various translations among themselves. However it is far not so. Perhaps Russian and Georgian translations of Biblical phraseological units considerably coincide among themselves, than perhaps Georgian and English or Russian and English ones’ (Adamia 2013a, p. 66-67, 2016b, p. 36-37),

‘Language of the Bible has huge impact on formation of the literary languages of many peoples since ancient times acquainted with Christian culture. The translations of the Holy Writ into national languages became a basis of book languages of Europe, including Slavic. Thus that commenting of the text of the Bible is one of the most ancient and most traditional occupations of the philologists, many aspects of this difficult perspective should be referred to the little developed. Questions of specifics of assimilation by concrete languages of those elements which go back to the Bible text, about nature of their further development in each of these languages, etc. are that, in particular’ (Mokienko, 2003, p.144).

The treatment of issues on specifics of assimilation of those elements by different European languages, going back to the biblical texts, on the nature of their further development in each of those languages, etc. is found in a number of new books and papers published at the beginning of the new millennium (Mokienko, 2003, p. 144; Dubrovina, 2010; Adamia, 2013a, p. 67, 2016b, p. 36-37; Adamia & Chabashvili, 2014 c, p. 26, Fedulenkova, 2014b. p. 4-16). Different orientation of the most ancient translations of biblical texts into different languages and unequal embodiment of the general semantic potentialities in development of biblical expressions cause differentiation of pithy words and expressions that have the same general source. At the same time, the all-European language space, and a generality of Christian culture, also becomes a basis for the deletion of this differentiation. The quantity of biblical expressions and their variants increases in Russian not only thanks to an increase of interest to orthodox book learning, but also thanks to continuous communication with European literature and art. Many Russian biblical expressions are calques from German, French and other European languages that have been assimilated by our aristocracy since Peter’s times. And nowadays the stock of biblical expressions is still growing in Russian.

A lot of biblical expressions, especially those of proverbial character, are registered in different peoples' folklore, and have developed a tendency to become universal. Folklore can be defined as the creative spiritual and cultural heritage of a people, handed down, mainly by oral tradition, from generation to generation by the various communities. With the spread of Christianity, similar processes happened both in English, in Georgian, and in other Christian languages. Let us give some examples from the Georgian language. Georgia has been in the sphere of world culture since ancient times. The Georgians are a very ancient people with distinct national and cultural traditions. The Georgian church was one of the first of Christendom. According to Orthodox tradition, Christianity was first preached in Georgia by the Apostles Simon and Andrew in the 1st century. It became the state religion of Kartli (Iberia) in 337 (Toumanoff & Cyril, 1963, p.374-377; Rapp & Stephen, 2007, 2012, p.138).

The final establishment of Christianity in Georgia was due to the preaching of Saint Nino, who was equal to the Apostles, and was born in Cappadocia. St. Nino converted the King of Georgia, Mirian (265-342), to Christianity and, in the reign of the latter, Christianity became the state religion of Georgia (in the 330s). The cross made of vine ("Jvarivazisa"), which was miraculously received from the Most Holy Theotocos and which St Nino brought to Georgia, is reverently preserved to this day in Sioni Cathedral Church in Tbilisi as one of the greatest Christian relics.

The Georgian Orthodox Church, originally part of the Church of Antioch, gained its autocephaly and developed its doctrinal specificity progressively between the 5th and 10th centuries. The Bible was also translated into Georgian in the 5th century, as the Georgian alphabet was developed for that purpose.

'The Georgians and Russians keep to one direction of Christianity, namely – Orthodoxy. It has been this way for centuries. It has put its mark on their understanding of Christian dogmas, and a role of religion in believers' everyday life. The Georgians and Russians keep to one direction of Christianity–Orthodoxy. It has been gone on for centuries. It has put its mark on their understanding of Christian dogmas, a role of religion in believers' everyday life' (Adamia.2013a, p. 66-67, 2016b, p. 36-37).

The Lord often uses symbolism in the form of colours, concepts and numbers to convey a deeper meaning in His messages than what is self-evident. The Bible is rich with imagery and signs interwoven through its pages.

As the population of the countries profess Christian belief, it is possible to find some similarities in symbolism of liturgical colours. The regularly used colours in Christianity symbolise spiritual values of celebrated events.

Through the ages, many of the colours found in the Bible have had meanings attached to them. The colour white is used quite extensively in the Old Testament to describe the various hangings in holy places. Similarly, languages are selective when deciding which hues are split into different colours on the basis of how light or dark they are. There is a significant relationship between language and colour meaning. Since ancient times symbols of white colour in the Russian traditional culture is light, purity and freedom, nobility and frankness.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

##### **– Study of the ‘white’ colour in Biblical phraseological units in English Russian and Georgian Languages**

The purpose of this paper is to study biblical phraseological units containing colour component ‘white’ in English Russian and Georgian languages, comparative analysis -cultural aspects of perception and symbolism and problems of translation. The comparison (finding similarities) and contrast (finding differences) analysis process helps us to understand things in greater depth. Comparative studies of phraseological units will give the chance of understanding of specifics in the Russian, English, and Georgian mentality and culture. It should be noted that the richness of paremiological fund opens wide prospects for further studies of phrases containing a great treasure of folk wisdom. Comparison is the most ancient type of intellectual activity preceding the evaluation. The culture is inseparable from comparison, and comparison is inseparable from culture. Every culture has its unique features, and this uniqueness demands appreciation. The cultures around the world are very different and very much alike at the same time. There are endless questions that can be asked to compare or contrast culture from culture, nation from nation, and language from language.

#### **5. Research Method**

Comparison of different languages is a reliable method to find out linguistic universals, and to find out peculiarities, or specific features of every individual language under study (see also Fedulenova, 2001, p. 128-129, 2006b, p. 51-52; Lyubova, 2006, p. 12-13). As Sapir put it: Human beings...are very much at the mercy of the particular language that has become the medium of expression for their society... The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. (Sapir, 1929, p. 209) Ethnic stereotypes, which serve as a base for appearance of phraseological units, become explicit through ethnic interrelation. Due to comparative studies of the Russian, English and Georgian languages, which are not closely related languages (the latter is not an Indo-European one) we hope to find the subtlest nuances of sense of language units, which can be most widely presented in biblical expressions. In this connection, our analysis is targeted at studies of common and specific features in phraseological units of biblical origin in the three chosen languages, with the view of the problem of their translation.

#### **6. Findings- Peculiarities of Translation**

##### **6.1. Similarities and Differences of the Colour ‘White’ in Biblical Expressions**

The era of acceptance of Christianity by these or those people strongly affected the character of translation of biblical texts, in particular the lexicon and syntax of translation.

The problem of translation equivalence is closely connected with the stylistic aspect of translation. First of all, a translator is to distinguish between neutral, bookish and colloquial words and word combinations, translating them by relevant units of the target language. In the example of the Russian

expression (Numbers, 15:38) the word “кисти” is used instead of “бахрома”, the same as for the English word “fringes” and Georgian “ფორები”, they are relevant.

In Georgian folklore the three colours are mainly dominated: black, red, and white. According to Christian legends the white colour is a reflection of those events connected with the first light of the birth of the universe. White is a constructive creative genesis, which in itself includes all the colours of the integrated form of the Christian faith. Only white, its lightness enters into the creative world and, therefore, imposes the burden of morality. White objects reflect in our perception all range of light waves. It symbolises creator; righteousness acquired through the blood of Christ; bride's garment; salvation; surrender; holiness, saints; angels, peace; triumph; victory; glory; joy; light. Cf.:

‘And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in **white** raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.’ (Revelation, 4: 4)

„И вокруг престола двадцать четыре престола; а на престолах видел я сидевших двадцать четыре старца, которые облечены были в **белые** одежды и имели на головах своих золотые венцы.” (Откровение Иоанна Богослова 4: 4)

„ტახტისირგვლივოცდაოთხიტახტიიუმ, ხოლოტახტეისხდაოცდაოთხიუბუცესი, რომელთაცემოსათთეთრისამოსლებიდათავებზეოქროსგვირგვინებიედგათ. (იოანემოციქულისგამოცხადება.” 4: 4).

In all the following expressions (Genesis 30:37, Revelation 19:14, 19:14, Exodus 16:31, Leviticus 13:10, Matthew 17:2, Mark 16:5, John 20:12, Acts 1:10, Revelation 19:14) the meaning of white appears to be essentially the same.

‘As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a **white** robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. (Mark 16:5)

“И, войдя во гроб, увидели юношу, сидящего на правой стороне, облеченного в **белую** одежду; и ужаснулись.” (От Марка 16:5)

„შევიდნენსამარხშიდაიხილესმარჯვნივმჯდომარეჭაბუკი, თეთრისამოსითმოსილი, დაშვრობენ.” (მარკოზისსახარება 16:5)

‘and saw two angels in **white**, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.’ (John 20:12)

„, и видит двух Ангелов, в **белом** одеянии сидящих, одного у головы и другого у ног, где лежало тело Иисуса.” (От Иоанна 20:12)

„დადაინახათეთრისამოსითმოსილიორიანგელოზი, ერთითავით, მეორევიფეხთითრომიჯდაიმადგილას, სადაცესვენაიესოსგვამი.” (იოანესსახარება, 20:12)

‘And I saw, and behold a **white** horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.’ (Revelation, 6: 2)

„Я взглянул, и вот, конь **белый**, и на нем всадник, имеющий лук, и дан был ему венец; и вышел он **как** победоносный, и чтобы победить.” (Откровение Иоанна Богослова, 6: 2),

„შევხედედა, აპა, თეთრიცხენიდაზედმხედარი, რომელსაცჲქონდამშვილდიდამიცემულიჲქონდაგვირგვინი. დაგამოვიდაგამარჯვებული, რათაგაემარჯვა. (იოანემოციქულისგამოცხადება, 6: 2)

I be held ‘till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient days did sit, whose garment [was] **white as snow**, and the hair of his head like the pure **wool**: his throne [was like] the fiery flame, [and] his wheels [as] burning fire. (Daniel, 7: 9)

Видел я, наконец, что поставлены были престолы, и воссели Ветхий дни; одеяние на Нем было **белое, как снег**, и волосы главы Его – как чистая **волна**; престол Его – как пламя огня, колеса Его – пылающий огонь. (Даниил, 7: 9)

„ვიყურებოდი, სანამტახტებიარდაიდგადაძველიდღეთაარდაჯდა.  
მისისამოსელითოვლივითთეთრიიუოდამისითმა – სუფთამატყლივით.  
მისიტახტიცეცხლისალიიყოდატახტისბორბლები – მოგიზგიზეცეცხლი.” (დანიელი, 7: 9)

The Georgian word- **სპეტაკი** - spetaki, comes from Middle Persian, its Georgian meaning is  
**ძალიანთეთრი, წმინდა, უმწივლო** – **too white, pure,**  
[impeccable.en.wiktionary.org/wiki/სპეტაკი](https://impeccable.en.wiktionary.org/wiki/სპეტაკი). In Biblical Georgian expressions this word is often used instead of white.

‘His clothes became shining, exceedingly **white**, like now, such as no launderer on earth can whiten.’  
(Mark, 9: 3)

„Одежды Его сделались блестающими, весьма **белыми**, как снег, как на земле белильщикне может выбелить”. (От Марка, 9: 3)

„დასამოსიმისიგახდამოელვარედათოვლივითსპეტაკი,

როგორცერცითმრეცხავივერაფერსგაასპეტაკებსამქეყნად.” (სახარებამარკოზისა, 9: 3)

‘His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were **white** as snow.’(Matthew, 28:3)

„вид его был, как молния, и одежда его **белая**, как снег;” (От Матфея, 28:3)

„სახემისიყოროგორცელვადამისი -სპეტაკი,როგორცთოვლი” (მათეს,სახარება 28:3)

The Georgian expression coincides with the English expression translated by King James, and doesn’t coincide with new international version.

‘And his raiment became shining, exceeding **white** as snow; so as no **fuller** on earth can **white** them.’  
(Mark, 9:3)King James Version

‘His clothes became dazzling **white**, **whiter** than anyone in the world could **bleach** them.’ (Mark, 9:3)  
New International Version)

“Одежды Его сделались блестающими, весьма **белыми**, как снег, как на земле **белильщик** не может выбелить.” (От Марка, 9:3)

„დაგაბრწყინდამისისამოსელიდაძალზესპეტაკიგახდა, ისეთი,  
რომგამთეთრებელსამქეყნაზეარძალუძსისეგათეთრება.” (სახარებამარკოზისა, 9:3).

In the Georgian Expression instead of თეთრი and სპეტაკი the synonymous word ქათქათა is used. ქათქათა - ძალიანთეთრი, თოვლივითთეთრი - too white, white as snow.

‘Moreover, his head and his hair were **white** as **white** wool, as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame,’  
(Revelation, 1:14)

‘His head and hair were white like wool, as **white as snow**, and his eyes were like blazing fire.’  
(Revelation, 1:1)

„глава Его и волосы **белы**, как **белая** волна, как снег; и очи Его, как пламень огненный;” (Откровение, 1:14)

„თავიმისიდათმანი - სპეტავი, როგორცქათქათამატყლიდაროგორცოვლი, ხოლოთვალნიმისნი, როგორცალიცეცხლისა.” (იოანეგამოცხადება, 1:14)

In these examples, both English and Georgian versions are identical related other word ‘white wool’. Instead of the word ‘white wool’ in the Russian variant the word „**белая волна**” - ‘white wave’ is given.

## 7. Conclusions

All the foregoing can be summarised into the following statements: Lexical units are a treasury of language elements that allow us to research and get information on certain linguistic phenomena. The lexical group of colour designation is significant in creation and expression of a language picture.

Phraseological units as the most valuable source of culture and mentality of certain nations underline vividness in speech.

Colour is one of the categories of perceiving the world, which is equal with other categories as space, time, movement, and is also one of the main cultural concepts. It is one of the component parts of phraseological units making speech more colourful, expressive and rich. As it is known, biblical expressions concentrate on wisdom of all nations and cultures. Religion is an important part of culture. In every religion colours are perceived and associated differently.

The present research makes an attempt to investigate the usage and perception of white terms considered as Christian colour concept in English, Russian and Georgian biblical expressions. The comparative approach allows us to reveal similarities and distinction of colour concepts, as well as lingual-cultural peculiarities and interpretation in separate languages. The research in question focuses on comparative analysis of some peculiar features of connotation meanings and translation problems of the white colour terms. The research has revealed identical and non-identical translations of English Russian and Georgian expressions, as colours in different languages have various meanings. In some expressions colour terms are replaced with synonymous words. Some colour equivalents are difficult for comparison and translation. Therefore, in some cases colour terms cannot be adequately and effectively translated.

It is noteworthy that comparative analysis is a necessary precondition of profound studies of lexical units and the essence of languages.

This investigation can be used in comparative and cultural studies and cognitive linguistics (colour linguistics, colour semantics). The present paper may also foster intercultural research of phraseological units which, on the one hand, arouses a special scientific interest in the phenomena and, on the other, makes it a subject of interdisciplinary studies.

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