

COLOUR IDIOMS IN BUSINESS LANGUAGE

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Abstract. *Globalisation and the growth of e-business and e-commerce have fuelled the need for English as the lingua franca for business communication worldwide. Business internationalisation means that language learners should be prepared to communicate with native speakers who often use rich idiomatic language in business communication. Non-native speakers have a need to master business idioms not to be at any disadvantage in business communication. Colour idioms are an important part of business vocabulary as they carry certain colour symbolism which enhances business communication. Knowledge of colour idioms also helps to build cultural awareness of certain differences, especially between foreign language users and native speakers. The current study focuses on idioms that incorporate specific colours and are related to the broad area of business (economics, finance and management). The main aim of the paper is to focus on colour idioms and colour symbolism in business language, to provide contextual analysis of the symbolism of colours in business by providing an extensive resource for the learner of Business English.*

Key words: *Idioms, Colour Symbolism, Business Communication, Finance, Economics, Management, Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

Colour symbolism plays an important role and is an essential element in human life. It has found application in many fields and disciplines of science, in particular literature, anthropology, art, architecture, psychology, cartography and linguistics. Increasingly, it is possible to see the interpenetration of these research areas and the connection of, for example, matters of colour symbolism in linguistics and business.

Successful interactive business communication requires building awareness of cultural differences, especially between foreign language users and native speakers. Learners need to acquire both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. The use of idioms in business communication should be given special attention in the teaching and learning process of a foreign language, as it equips learners with the necessary knowledge to improve communicative skills in business environments where English has become lingua franca. The English language is particularly rich in idioms and English has become an essential

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language in business communication. Learners need to be equipped with English knowledge for working in multinational companies or abroad and the ability of proper use of idioms may enhance learner possibilities to build relationships, join discussions, understand the nuances of conversations, etc. To ensure full functioning in an English-speaking business environment, it is essential to grasp the benefits of teaching and learning idioms to be able to improve personal and professional lives.

The study's primary objectives are to: 1) identify idioms containing a particular colour used in business language, i.e., in finance, economics and management, 2) to provide their definitions, and 3) to determine the symbolism of colours in business based on colour idioms providing learners with knowledge resources.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The popularity of Business English courses offered by many universities all over the world has been fuelled by globalisation. Business English course often involves the language of a high technical content featuring common business terms and business-related idioms. To ensure effective business communication, it is necessary to acquire business terms, collocations and idioms used in business environments. The significance of idioms in business communication has interested international community of researchers (Nishiyama, 2000; Ward, 2012; Sim and Pop, 2015).

Sinclair (1987) indicates two main principles working in the language discourse construction. The first one represents the open-choice principle, based on the prerequisite that language in communication is constructed relying on free choice while arranging words into phrases and sentences, constrained only by grammaticality. The other one indicated by the scholar is the idiom principle, which is based on the presumption that language users have an available repertoire of semi-preconstructed expressions including collocations, idioms and etc. providing resources the language user single choices. Idioms have the potential of enhancing and enriching communication, and often are considered as the characteristic of mature written or spoken discourse.

Liu (2008) characterizes idioms based on three main criteria. The scholar observes that idioms represent a semantic unity, which means that the whole unit of an idiom acquires only one meaning. Idioms also demonstrate structural stability because the lexis is not interchangeable within idioms, except the rare cases when the language user chooses to apply creativity in order to sound novel. Finally, some idioms demonstrate ungrammaticality; however, they still remain recognizable. Thus, an idiom is a combination of a number of words with a firmly fixed structure and the fixed meaning. As idioms represent impressionistic delineations of some aspects of the physical, social, and emotional worlds of a language community (Hrdličková, 2017), they allow the language user to represent the matters of a certain area in an image related, impressionistic way and metaphorical ways. The use of idioms make communication more convincing and effective by awakening an interest of the recipient, because due to the use of idioms the linguistic expression acquires humour, irony, etc., as idioms are much more expressive and make the language of expression more intense (Sim & Pop, 2015). Idioms intensify and augment of expressivity of the text and serve as synonymic variants of lexemes and also allow communication progression. Idioms are culture specific elements which may cause certain problems in intercultural communication so it is vitally important to master idioms for

successful communication, especially in business domain. Geographical location of a culture plays an important role in idiom formation because people use language to speak about their life realities including behaviour specifics of that particular group of people, knowledge facts, ideas, beliefs and norms (Yang, 2010).

Colour symbolism goes back many years and changes over time, influenced by socio-cultural processes, which means that the same colours can take on entirely different meanings in various countries, regions, or even communities. The literature on the subject has formed three main theories of colour association, i.e. 1) colour-emotion association theory; 2) colour-object association theory and 3) colour-in-context theory (Tham et al., 2019). According to the first theory individual colours are associated with the perception of a particular type of emotion and influence psychological functioning (Gil and Le Bigot, 2016). Based on the second theory, it can be stated that people join given colours with objects, whereby their meaning can, among other things, be culturally conditioned or colour preferences arise from people's average affective responses to colour-associated objects (Ecological Valance Theory) - people like/dislike colours associated with objects they like/dislike (Palmer and Schloss, 2010). Following the third theory, the meaning of colours changes with a specific context.

Zettl (1999) stresses a powerful role of colour in everyday life by identifying that colour has a strong visual code to help people in everyday situations, proving an example of map colour code to guide map reading. Many scholars carried out colour-related scientific research based on the classification provided by Berlin and Kay (1991) identifying 11 basic colour terms by observing the main characteristics of the colour terms: a) The meaning should be easily recoverable from the meaning of its part (for example greyish - grey); b) The term cannot be used for signification in any other colour term; c) The term is applicable to an unlimited number of objects; d) The term must be psychologically easily recognizable.

Colour primarily is as part of visual perception thus, it could be assumed that different cultures perceive colours differently (Segall, Campbell, and Herskovit, 1968). Colours may reveal a lot about the culture the language user belongs to. The evidence of the fact that colour is a culture-specific element could be supported by the fact that the same colour may demonstrate different meanings across different geographical locations. Yu (2014) discusses non-European understanding of colour by focusing on colour symbolism in Asian countries. Bortoli and Maroto (2008) provide an extensive study of colour perception comparing various cultures. The scholars discuss the meanings of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and brown, also including black and white colours. Red colour is associated with positive emotions like love, luck, success or passion in many cultures (Bortoli and Maroto, 2008; Yu, 2014). However, the cultures of Western Europe, South Africa, Latin America, and Mexico associate red to negative phenomena such as death, evil or warning and danger. Orange colour, according to Bortoli and Maroto (2008), is often associated with harvest and creativity. It may also be related to religion, especially in Asia (Yu, 2014). Yellow is mostly a positive colour associated with joy, royalty, and wisdom; however, it may denote treason in such European countries as Spain and Portugal (Bortoli and Maroto, 2008). Green is described by the scholars as representing positive concepts in most of the cultures. It is usually associated to life, hope, and money. Speaking about the blue colour scholars indicate the colour mostly acquires a positive meaning of heaven, mystery and love; however, the meaning of it varies from culture to culture (Bortoli and Maroto, 2008). It could acquire the meanings

of mourning, judging, unfriendliness, and coldness. The colour purple in Europe is related to royalty and nobility but in Brazil is referred to the colour of mourning (Bortoli & Maroto, 2008). Yu (2014) observes that brown is viewed as undesirable colour related to uncleanness in European cultures; however, in business it may represent seriousness and reliability (Ohtsuki, 2000). White colour in Western cultures is almost always related to purity; however, in Japan or China white acquires the meaning of mourning. In European cultures black is related to death and mourning; however, in business it may also represent glamour, sophistication, security (Ohtsuki, 2000). It is evident that colours acquire different meanings across different cultures and business-related colour idioms become an important element for successful business communication and an essential part of teaching and learning goals.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study identified idioms that incorporate a specific colour and relate to the broad area of business (economics, finance and management). A selection of 11 primary colours in English was made (black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, orange, pink, purple, grey), and additionally, based on the long experience of those who have carried out research in the business area, the colours silver and golden were also added. Some of the identified idioms directly relate to the area under study, while for some of them, in specific contexts, their use can be found.

After a preliminary analysis, the authors concluded that relying solely on a single source, such as a single dictionary of idioms, was ineffective. This was due to the fact that in some sources, the number of idioms is limited, or the vocabulary is universal rather than business-related. In addition, the authors also wanted to take into account possible differences found in British and American English. Consequently, analysing more sources and applying additional methods in the search for idioms containing colour and referring to business can lead to a more extensive base of idioms. Thus, the following data sources and tools were used to search for these idioms:

1. Online idiom dictionary - The Idioms, which describes itself as the largest idiom dictionary (<https://www.theidioms.com/>). For this dictionary, there is an option to search for idioms with the possibility of selecting those idioms that contain colour in the content (<https://www.theidioms.com/topics/>). The authors used this option. As of the analysis date, i.e., 1.02.2024, there were 46 idioms containing colours in the database, 10 of which, according to the authors, are directly or indirectly applicable to the business area.
2. Idioms & Phrases Proverbs application, hereafter abbreviated as I&PP (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.app.englishidioms&hl=en_US), which was used to search for idioms as of 10.02.2024.
3. McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms compiled by R.A Spears (2005), which contains more than 24,000 phrases and expressions.
4. Oxford Business English Dictionary for Learners English edited by D. Parkinson and assisted by J. Noble (2005), in which 50-million-word corpus of business English was used.
5. ChatGPT 3.5 version (OpenAI, 2024). For this tool, a search was conducted as of February 12, 2024, asking the following questions:

- What are the idioms in business containing colours?
- What are the idioms in finance containing colours?
- What are the idioms in economics containing colours?
- What are the idioms in management containing colours?

After identifying idioms, those that directly apply to the business field and are used commonly in various areas but are also reflected in business were singled out. Based on the sources mentioned above, their definitions were then presented, and in the next step, contextual analysis was carried out to determine the symbolism of colours in business.

4. RESULTS

Based on the research process indicated in the earlier section, results were obtained in the form of idioms containing colours and referring to the business area, along with their definitions. They are presented in Tables 1 through 12, considering the alphabetical order of colour names. Idioms that directly relate to business are shown in bold, while those that relate indirectly are shown in italics. No idiom was identified for the colour orange.

Based on the identified idioms, it can be deduced that the symbolism of the colour black in business can be varied and depends on the given context, i.e.:

1. The colour black has a negative meaning concerning the economy and the market and signifies actions against the law and accepted rules. With specific days in the past, it signifies a crash, that is, a significant drop in the prices of the financial assets. In this regard, the only exception is “Black Friday”, seen as a time of shopping, when retailers significantly reduce the prices of products and offer various types of promotions. This is a day that customers positively perceive, but analogously, as it was for other days, it is further associated with price reductions. Also, in relation to other economic and financial objects and processes, it is perceived as a danger or threat. For example, a “black knight” is viewed negatively from the point of view of a company that may be taken over. In this case, it refers to a so-called hostile takeover, an unwanted takeover by the entity being purchased. Similarly, negative connotations are associated with the idioms “black hole”, “blacklist” or “blackleg”.
2. It can mean unknown about the processes being performed when the end result is given (see “black box”).
3. In accounting and banking, black signifies a positive result, i.e., profit generation, solvency or lack of debt.
4. A specific term is “the black swan event”, which refers to a specific concept proposed by Nassim Taleb (2008) and refers to rare events that generate significant costs. The occurrence of a black swan in the environment is much rarer than swans of other colours. Hence, this author used just such a reference to describe events.

Table 1 *Black* idioms in business

<i>black box</i>
<p>1) A complicated piece of equipment or process that you know produces particular results, but that you do not completely understand: The decision-making process is seen as a black box—things go in and decisions come out [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p> <p>This concept is often used in complex economic or financial models, in which it is difficult to determine the mechanism responsible for the end result. Such an example would be some models for corporate bankruptcy prediction.</p>
black economy
<p>1) Business activity or work that is done without the knowledge of the government or other officials so that people can avoid paying tax on the money they earn [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>
Black Friday
<p>1) A day of a financial disaster.</p> <p>2) The day after Thanksgiving Day that is also known as the first day of the Christmas holidays and shopping time of the year when sellers provide attractive sale offers and huge discounts on items (theidioms.com).</p>
<i>black hole</i>
<p>1) In commerce it is used to describe an organization into which large quantities of money is poured but no profit is shown (theidioms.com).</p> <p>1) Something that costs you a lot of money or effort but does not provide any real benefit [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>
black knight
<p>1) A company that tries to buy (take over) another company that does not want to be bought or offers too low a price [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>
<i>blackleg</i>
<p>1) An offensive way of referring to a worker who refuses to join a strike or who works instead of sb. on strike [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>
<i>blacklist</i>
<p>1) Noun - a list of the people, companies, products or countries that an organization or a government cannot trust and tries to avoid.</p> <p>2) Verb - to put a person, company, product or country on a blacklist [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>
black market
<p>1) An illegal form of trade in which goods that are difficult to get or foreign money are bought and sold [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p> <p>2) Describes illegal or unofficial trade outside of regulated channels (OpenAI, 2024).</p>
Black Monday
<p>1) Monday 28 October 1929, when prices on the New York Stock Exchange fell to a very low level.</p> <p>2) Monday 19 October 1987, when there was a sudden large decrease in the prices of shares (a crash) on the New York Stock Exchange [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].</p>

Black swan event
1) An extremely rare and unpredictable occurrence with severe consequences (OpenAI, 2024).
Black Thursday
1) Thursday 24 October 1929, when there were signs that a severe crash (= a sudden large decrease in the prices of shares) was about to occur on the New York Stock Exchange [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
Black Wednesday
1) 16 September 1992, when the British pound stopped being part of the Exchange Rate Mechanism and decreased in value by a large amount [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
in the black
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To not be in debt. 2) To be in a profitable condition (usually referred to businesses). 3) To be making more (money) than spending. 4) To be solvent or have money (theidioms.com) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Not in debt. 2) In a financially profitable condition (Spears 2005). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Having positive net worth (I&PP). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Refers to a business making a profit or being financially successful. Describes a financial situation where there is a profit or positive balance (OpenAI, 2024).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

Blue in business phraseology is associated with strictly defined objects like “blue-collar” and “blue books”. For example, the phrase “blue-collar” stems from the image of manual workers wearing blue denim or chambray shirts as part of their uniforms [Lynch and Strauss (Eds.) 2014, p. 68], while “blue book” dates back to the past, when large blue velvet-covered books were used for record-keeping by the Parliament of the United Kingdom (Fickers, 2012). The phrase “blue chip,” on the other hand, was initially used by Oliver Gingold in 1923 or 1924 to refer to high-priced stocks (Prestbo, 2008) and refers to the game of poker, where blue chip means the highest value among all chip colours (Saikrishna and Rahul, 2022). The phrase “blue-sky laws” originated in the United States, and most likely, the term referred to the fact that the fly-by-night operators in Kansas operated so blatantly that they would “sell building lots in the blue sky in fee simple.” (Mulvey, 1916, after Macey and Miller 1991, p. 359). Finally, the word “blue-sky” refers to ideas or manager, which means something or someone out of the box and creative. In the field of management, it is associated with the implementation of innovations.

Table 2 *Blue* idioms in business

blue book
1) A report on the economic state of the UK that is published every year [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
blue chip / blue-chipper
1) The shares of the best-known companies on the stock market, which are considered to be a safe investment. / A blue-chip company [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1) High-quality, stable, and financially sound stocks from well-established companies (OpenAI, 2024).
blue-collar
1) Relating to industrial work, especially the semiskilled and unskilled (theidioms.com).
1) The lower class or working class; a job or a worker, having to do with manual labour (Spears 2005).
1) Connected with workers who do physical work in industry [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1) Describes manual labour or industrial workers (OpenAI, 2024).
blue-collar economics
1) Pertains to economic policies and considerations that primarily affect manual labourers or industrial workers (OpenAI, 2024).
blue-sky laws
1) State laws in the US that prevent the dishonest buying and selling of shares [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1) State regulations designed to protect investors from securities fraud (OpenAI, 2024).
blue-sky manager
1) A manager who encourages creative thinking and innovation (OpenAI, 2024).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour brown has only been identified in one idiom, and its meaning is associated with using conventional energy sources. In business, it is often associated with producing so-called "dirty energy" i.e., coming from conventional sources. In this view, it is the opposite of the meaning of the colour green, i.e., depicting different kinds of environmentally friendly investments.

Table 3 *Brown* idiom in business

brown power
1) The production of electricity made from conventional sources, such as coal, oil, natural gas and nuclear power (I&PP).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour golden in many idioms means a high amount of money. It is seen through the prism of wealth, prosperity, and the right to make key decisions. In addition, it can mean something is important and should be strictly adhered to. Such a meaning is found in the word formula.

Table 4 *Golden* idioms in business

golden formula
1) In the UK, a rule that says that strikes organized by unions are only legal if they are about matters that are connected with employment rather than about political matters, and that workers involved in legal strikes should not lose their jobs [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
golden goodbye [also golden fare well]
1) A large amount of money given by a company to a senior employee when they are forced to leave their job before they want to [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
golden goose
1) Something that generates much profit or gives great advantages (I&PP).
golden handcuffs
1) Any arrangement or agreement designed to provide extremely favourable benefits or pay, so as to discourage a participant from wanting to leave it, especially to retain a choice employee (I&PP).
1) A large amount of money and other financial benefits that are given to sb. to persuade them to continue working for a company rather than leaving to work for another company [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
golden handshake
1) A generous severance payment, especially as an inducement to leave employment (I&PP).
1) A large amount of money given by a company to an employee when they retire or when they are forced to leave their job [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1) A generous severance package or financial benefit offered to an employee upon retirement or departure (OpenAI, 2024).
golden hello
1) A payment offered to an employee as an inducement to join, especially if currently working for a competitor (I&PP).
1) A large amount of money or other financial benefits given by a company [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
golden key can open any door
1) Sufficient money can accomplish anything (Spears 2005).
golden parachute
1) An agreement between a company and an employee, usually an executive, specifying that the employee will receive certain significant benefits if employment is terminated (I&PP).
1) A part of a contract in which a company promises to give a large sum of money to a very senior employee if they have to leave their job [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1) A financial arrangement in which executives receive substantial benefits if the company is taken over (OpenAI, 2024).
golden share
1) A share in a company that gives the holder, usually the government, the power to stop any changes to the company that they do not approve of [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].

kill the goose that lays the golden egg(s)
1) To destroy something that is profitable to you (Spears 2005).
1) To seek short term gain at the sacrifice of long-term profit (I&PP).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The meaning of the colour green is multi-contextual, i.e.:

1. It is associated with the colour of USD currency bills. It is worth mentioning here that the phrase “greenmail” also refers to the US dollar. It is a neologism created from the words “blackmail” and “greenback” (Carlisle 2014, p. 5).
- 2 It refers to any environmentally friendly activities and initiatives. In this view, the colour green is the opposite of brown.
3. Denotes positive changes in the economy. Green is often equated with increased value and price quotations of securities and other economic metrics.

Table 5 *Green* idioms in business

green audit
1. An official examination of the effect of a company or an industry on the environment [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
greenback
1. An American dollar note or other note; the dollar when it is traded on currency markets [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
green consumerism
1. When customers choose to buy and use products that cause the least harm to the environment [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
greenmail
1. The act of buying a significant amount of a company's stock to pressure the company into buying it back at a premium to avoid a hostile takeover (OpenAI, 2024).
green marketing
1. Marketing that tries to present a product or company as not harmful to the environment [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
the Green Revolution
1. The dramatic increase in the quantity of crops such as rice and wheat produced, which happened in the second half of the twentieth century as the result of more scientific methods of agriculture
2. A dramatic rise in concern about the environment in countries with developed industries [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
green shoots
1. Refers to early signs of economic recovery or improvement (OpenAI, 2024).
green stuff
1. Money; U.S. paper money (Spears 2005).
long green
1. Money, especially in the form of cash (I&PP).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour grey, also in business, is seen as an intermediate between white and black; that is, it is not unambiguously positive or negative. In addition, the second meaning refers to the elderly and is related to their hair colour. In this view, it refers to any economic process or finances of people most often referred to as 50+. The focus of this research area includes creating a pension system and employment issues for the elderly and their spending.

Table 6 *Grey* idioms in business

<i>grey area</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An area of a subject or question that is difficult to put into a particular category because it is not clearly defined and may have connections or associations with more than one category (Spears 2005). 1. A topic that is not clearly one thing or the other, that is open to interpretation (I&PP). 1. A situation with unclear or ambiguous rules (OpenAI, 2024). <p>Among other things, the concept of <i>grey area</i> is used in financial and economic models and denotes the absence of an unambiguous forecast result. For example, in bankruptcy forecasting models, it denotes the result when it is not possible to clearly determine whether a company is or is not at risk of insolvency.</p>
grey knight
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A third company or person that is a possible buyer for another company. They are 'grey' because it is not known if they will be good or bad for the company [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
grey market
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Stock Exchange) The buying and selling of new shares before they are officially issued on the stock market. 2. (Economics) The buying and selling of goods that have not been obtained from an official supplier, usually at a lower price than the official price. 3. (Also, silver market) Older people, when they are thought of as customers for goods; the goods that are produced for them or that they buy [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005]. 1. Refers to the trading of goods through unofficial or unauthorized channels (OpenAI, 2024).
grey power
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (chiefly Britain, Canada, Australia) The collective political, economic, and social influence of senior citizens, especially when they are mobilized by a common interest (I&PP).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour pink refers to objects and has different meanings depending on the context. The stereotype is that it is a feminine colour (Kaniol 2011, Clarke and Costall 2008). This meaning is associated with the origin of the phrase “pink collar”, which was proposed by sociologist W.J. Baumol in the 1960s and popularised by L.K. Howe in the 1970s. The term “pink collar” workers refer to occupations that are dominated by women and at the same time are low-paid and of low social prestige, i.e., teacher, florist, child care, secretary, nurse, domestic helper, etc. (Pink Collar Jobs), while it is worth mentioning that with time in many countries, some of them, such as teacher and nurse have changed

status to white collar jobs (Basu et al. 2015). Another idiom “in the pink” most likely comes from the *Dianthus* plant, a favourite flower of Queen Elizabeth I. At that time, the trend was to imitate everything the royal family preferred, so the colour pink and the idiom symbolised the pinnacle of perfection (McLeod). The idiom is rarely used in business and denotes an excellent financial situation. The notion of “Pink Sheets” dates back to 1913, when the National Quotation Bureau began presenting daily inter-dealer quotes of OTC stocks on pink paper (Jiang et al. 2016). Similarly, the idiom of “pink slip” is rooted in the past, when employees were given a white or pink piece of paper at the end of the workday. The former meant a job well done and an invitation to come to work the next day, while the latter meant that they were fired (Mofit 2003, p. 297).

Table 7 *Pink* idioms in business

pink- collar
1. (especially American English) Connected with jobs, with low pay that are done mainly by women, for example in offices: pink-collar workers [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
<i>in the pink</i>
1. This is an informal expression that denotes the peak of one’s health or an optimal state. You may also use the phrase to show a situation where an economy or an investor is in a favourable financial position. It shows that there is a good reason for optimism (theidioms.com).
1. In very good condition (Spears 2005).
Pink Sheets™ (also spelled pink sheets)
1. In the US, a list of the latest prices of over-the-counter shares (shares that do not appear in an official stock exchange list), that is published every day [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1. Refers to a daily publication listing over-the-counter (OTC) stocks that do not meet major exchange listing requirements (OpenAI, 2024).
pink slip
1. A letter given to sb. to say that they must leave their job [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
1. Represents a notice of termination or layoff (OpenAI, 2024).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour purple is relatively rarely used in business idioms. The idiom “purple patch” was originally used by Horace (Lysyk 1980, p. 50; Canfield 1994). However, its message evolved, and in the 20th century, it was used in a positive sense, i.e., as a “colourful period” or a “run of good luck or success” (Leyang and Lijiao 2019, p. 59; Hamilton 2014, p. 158; Hamilton 2016, p. 207). This is how it is currently understood in business, while it is worth mentioning that it is also often used in other areas of life, including sports.

Table 8 *Purple* idiom in business

<i>purple patch</i>
1. A period of exceptional success or good fortune (OpenAI, 2024).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The meaning of red in idioms used in business varies, with three areas that can be distinguished here:

- 1) It is most often seen through the prism of debt, the losses and danger generated, that is, in very negative terms.
- 2) In one idiom, there is a reference to the colour of a pure copper coin. The cent is characterised by being the lowest monetary unit in the US. Hence, the phrase is exclusively negative (Lisowska and Kucharska 2023, pp. 96-97, 111).
- 3) The “red tape” idiom comes from the ribbon used to tie up legal documents in England. Lawyers wishing to use these documents very often spend much time resolving and tying up these documents. This is where the current meaning of the phrase came from (Kaufman 2015, p. XV).

Table 9 *Red* idioms in business

haemorrhage red ink
1) (often used in newspapers) To lose a large amount of money [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
in the red
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More money going out than coming in. 2. Spending more than you earn. 3. Owing money to the bank. 4. In debt. 5. Negative bank balance (theidioms.com). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Losing money (Spears 2005). 1) Having net losses, in debt (I&PP). 1) To be operating at a loss; to be spending more than you earn [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005]. 1) Describes a business operating at a financial loss. 2) Indicates a financial situation with losses or a negative balance (OpenAI, 2024).
not worth a red cent
1. Worthless (Spears 2005).
out of the red
1. Out of debt; into profitability (Spears 2005).
red- circling
1) The situation when a job has been moved to a lower grade with a lower rate of pay, but the people who are already doing that work are still paid the old rate [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
<i>red flag</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A sign of a particular issue requiring attention (theidioms.com). 1) A sign or signal that something is wrong cue, it is a warning, or alert (I&PP). 1) A warning sign or indicator of potential issues (OpenAI, 2024). <p>The term is often used in business, for example, defining problems and risks that may occur in investment projects, financial reports etc.</p>

red ink
1. Debt; indebtedness as shown in red ink on a financial statement (Spears 2005). 1) A euphemism for financial loss (I&PP). 1) Used to talk about a situation in which a business is losing a lot of money [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
redline
1) To refuse to provide loans, insurance or other financial services to people or businesses in particular areas [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
red tape
1. Over excessive or time-consuming rules and bureaucracy that hinder progress (theidioms.com). 1. Over-strict attention to the wording and details of rules and regulations, especially by government workers (Spears 2005). 1) Time-consuming regulations or bureaucratic procedures (I&PP). 1) Official rules that seem more complicated than is necessary and prevent things being done quickly [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005]. 1) Represents excessive bureaucracy or administrative procedures that slow down decision-making. 2) Excessive bureaucratic procedures or administrative obstacles (OpenAI, 2024).

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

Concerning the market, in one sense, the colour silver is considered synonymous with the colour grey and is seen as all kinds of financial and economic activities concerning the elderly. The phrase “born with a silver spoon in one's mouth” comes from the English language and is related to the tradition of God-parents giving a silver spoon with images of apostles to God-children. The silver spoon was synonymous with wealth compared to a plastic spoon or wooden ladle, which signified poverty (Tréguer; Turaev 2023). And the phrase “cross someone's palm with silver” refers to the old practice of placing silver coins across a gypsy fortune-teller's hand before having one's fortune told (dictionary.com).

Table 10 *Silver* idioms in business

born with a silver spoon in one's mouth
1) Born into wealth and privilege (Spears 2005). 1) Born rich or in a wealthy family (I&PP).
cross someone's palm with silver
1) To pay money to someone in payment for a service (Spears 2005).
silver market
1) Synonym to grey market described above [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour white appears in many business idioms and takes on different meanings. It occurs as the opposite of the colour black, such as in the idiom “white knight”. It forms an antonym for “blue-collar”. In addition, it means to stay with nothing. The origin of the idiom “white elephant”, on the other hand, refers to the successive kings of Siam who gave

a white elephant to any courtiers they disliked. It was so expensive to maintain such an elephant that it led them to bankruptcy (Poluzhyn 2020, p. 240). The phrase “white paper” was originally used in the 1920s by the British government and referred to an authoritative report made on white paper (Malone and Wright 2017). Finally, the term “white sale” was coined by John Wanmaker in 1878. The entrepreneur, in an effort to encourage customers, mainly hoteliers, to buy his surplus bedding, which at the time was only produced in white, offered them vast discounts (Lovett and Miranda 2014, p. 3; Lisicky 2010).

Table 11 *White* idioms in business

bleed someone white
1) To take all of someone’s money. 2) To extort money from someone (Spears 2005). 1) To take away all one's money [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
white collar
1) Antonym to blue collar (theidioms.com). 1) Working in an office rather than in a factory, etc. 2) Connected with work in offices [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005]. 1) Pertains to professional or office-based work, typically in administrative or managerial roles (OpenAI, 2024).
white elephant
1) An expensive item with no use or purpose (theidioms.com). 1) Something that is large and unwieldy and is either a nuisance or expensive to keep up (Spears 2005). 1) A thing that is useless and no longer needed although it may cost a lot of money to keep it [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].
white knight
1) A person or an organization that rescues a company from- being bought by another company at too low a price [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005]. 1) A person or company that comes to the rescue of another company facing a hostile takeover (OpenAI, 2024).
<i>white paper</i>
1) Official report. 2) Guide concise. 3) Complex information of changes future planned laws. 4) Government policy (detailed and authoritative) (theidioms.com). 1) A government report or authoritative guide that provides information or proposals on a particular economic issue (OpenAI, 2024). This term refers to documents devoted to various areas, such as politics, artificial intelligence, law but also economics and finance.
white sale
1) (especially American English) An occasion when a shop/store sells goods at a much lower price than usual [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

The colour yellow is very rarely used in business idioms. Like the idiom “red flag”, “a yellow flag” means warning. In the case of the “yellow flag”, this danger is described as less than it is for “the red flag”. The term “yellow sheets” has a similar origin to the previously described “pink sheets”, with bond quotes being presented on yellow sheets.

Table 12 *Yellow* idioms in business

<i>yellow flag</i>
1) A cautionary signal or warning in financial or investment contexts (OpenAI, 2024).
Yellow Sheets™ (also spelled yellow sheets)
1) In the US, a list of the latest prices of bonds and other information about them, that is published every day [Parkinson (Ed.) 2005].

Source: own elaboration based on the data sources in the table.

In addition to the idioms identified above from the research, it should be noted that other phraseological funds are used in business language that contains colours. Below, based on the authors' knowledge and experience, the meaning of the most frequently used ones is presented, i.e.:

1. “Grey rhino” was coined by Wucker (2016). In analogy to a “black swan event”, “grey rhino event” is a highly probable, high-impact yet neglected threat.
2. “Purple squirrel” was invented in the 1990s, refers to the recruitment process and means a super-talented candidate with a multifarious mix of core skills - education, competencies and experience. Such a candidate is as challenging to find in practice as a purple squirrel, hence the reference (Austen Lloyd 2023; Dumeresque 2014, p. 42).
3. In the economy, various types of colours are used to convey different messages. In many cases, the same meanings are also used in finance. As mentioned above, the “silver economy” concerns economic processes related to the functioning of older people (including issues such as shaping the pension system and providing products and services for people 50+). “White economy” refers to those products, services, and activities related to health care and care, including dependent, disabled and the elderly (OECD 2014, pp. 89, 166). In 2015, thanks to D. McWilliams (2015), proposed by the term “flat white economy” became popular, which means the financial recovery that's being powered by startups, entrepreneurs, small businesses and co-workers. In addition, according to the meaning of colours described above, “grey, black, brown, green economies” are distinguished. “Grey economy,” also known as the “informal or shadow economy,” refers to economic activity conducted beyond the purview of official regulations (Etim and Daramola, 2020; Chen and Carré, 2020, p. 14). Some authors view “black economy” and “grey economy” as synonymous (Koufopoulou et al. 2019). Others point out that grey signifies an intermediate state between white and black. This means that actions taken in the “grey economy” are not as negatively perceived as in the “black economy.” In this view, the “grey economy” refers to, among other things, trading in legal products and hiring people without entering such information in business records, resulting in under-taxation. The “black economy” is characterized by, among other things, the circulation of prohibited products (e.g.,

drugs, weapons, and human organs without the required authorization) or trafficking in people and children (Canna 2020). "Green economy," on the other hand, is all kinds of economic activities aimed at protecting the environment and achieving the goals of a socially responsible economy. Its opposite is the "brown economy," which is an economy that uses fossil fuels that have an impact on environmental degradation. On the other hand, the term "blue economy" has a twofold meaning, which depends on the context. The first relates to water, i.e., economic activities to protect the marine ecosystem or coastal areas (Smith-Godfrey 2016). The second meaning opposes the so-called "red economy" and simultaneously shows the differences from the "green economy." Between these three types of coloured economies, there are differences in the relationship between natural resource use and consumption. In the case of „red economy” is no concern for the excessive consumption of natural resources to support the production of energy and manufactured goods. Green one is an economy that is intended to be resilient, but which does not offer a definitive and permanent solution. And the “blue economy” as defined by Gunter Pauli is that of the regeneration of ecosystems in a logic of abundance and autonomy. Drawing inspiration from nature in order to take what is necessary and to function in symbiosis with it (The Blue Economy does not recycle, it regenerates; Pauli 2010, 2017). In addition, in another context i.e., historically, the "red economy" is seen as the communist economy, where the red is associated with the two central communist countries, i.e., the Soviet Union and China (Buheji and Ahmet 2021). In contrast, the "orange economy," also known as the "creative economy," includes cultural and creative industries and refers to economic activity where creativity, talent and intellectual capital play a crucial role (Sandri and Alshyab 2023; Restrepo and Márquez 2013). A relatively new economic trend is the "purple economy," sometimes called the "care economy." Purple is the symbolic colour of women's movements in many countries, which often fought for gender equality. The main focus areas of this trend are gender equality, caring, life sustainability and social order, while the fundamental four pillars are: 1) Investing in a universal social care services infrastructure; 2. Regulation of labour markets and social protection for work-life balance, decent jobs and gender equality; 3. Investing in time-saving and sustainable physical infrastructure and ecological agriculture in rural settings; 4. Creating an enabling macroeconomic environment for inclusive and sustainable economies (İlkkaracan 2023). A relatively infrequently used phrase is "golden economy," whose synonyms are "solar economy" or "sunshine economy." This is a component of the "green economy," which includes economic activities for applying renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, and tidal (Khutorna and Herasymenko, 2023, p. 31). However, in the context of using energy from the sun, the more fitting and associated colour, in this case, should be yellow. Another trend related to sexual diversity is the "pink economy," also known as "pink capitalism," "pink money," "pink market," or "rainbow capitalism. Pink is associated with the LGBTIQ+ community, so this form of economics deals with the study of economic processes, including consumer behaviour, purchasing power and spending, adaptations of marketing campaigns, business models, and the labour market to the people mentioned above (Ramirez 2011, Yeh 2018, Del Río 2012). Yellow, combined with economy, is rarely used in practice. Referring to colour psychology, the term "yellow economy" has been proposed. It applies creativity, innovation, and new technologies to utilize resources better, improve competitiveness, optimize production

processes, etc. (Santander 2022). Another meaning of "yellow economy" is identified with the concept of "attention economy," initiated in the second half of the 1990s (Davenport and Beck 2001, Crogan and Kinsley 2012, DeltecBank 2023, United Nations). Yellow also has a regional dimension in economics and refers to Hong Kong. "Yellow economy" or "Yellow Circular Economy" is a movement advocating support for a pro-democracy, pro-free market economy and was created in opposition supporting by the pro-Beijing and pro-police businesses, called blue (Chan 2022, Kane and Lee 2022). In this context yellow referred to the colour of the umbrellas people used in the 2014 democracy protests to protect themselves against teargas but blue relates to the colour of police uniforms (Batha 2023).

4. In management in the first decade of the 21st century, the concept of "blue ocean strategy", which was proposed in opposition to "red ocean strategy", has gained popularity. As written by the creators of this concept, Chan Kim and Mauborgne (2005, pp. IX-X), they used the metaphor of red and blue oceans because red oceans seemed to capture the reality that organizations increasingly face, while blue oceans captured the endless possibility that organizations could create. Thus, while the red ocean strategy refers to existing markets, the blue ocean strategy refers to future markets that companies should create independently. In both strategies, therefore, different mechanisms of action should be used (Iruthayasamy 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The knowledge of colour idioms and colour symbolism they carry is essential for learners in building their linguistic competence and cultural awareness for business communication. Advanced learners of English preparing to operate in international business environments should be able to use a wide repertoire of vocabulary for switching between speaking and writing and choosing the right words or expressions depending on the communicative context. Business idioms compiled from a wide range of sources and carefully analysed for colour symbolism could serve as a resource both for students and teachers ensuring effective access to contextual analysis and explanations of the latest international business colour idioms. Expanding learner business vocabulary would provide more confidence and ensure more effective functioning in international business situations by improving learner Business English communication skills.

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