

Color naming in Slavic languages and beyond: a diachronic perspective

Abstract

This paper consists of a study of the linguistic properties of color names in Slavic languages. The purpose of this study is to analyze the development of basic color terms in Slavic languages using the diachronic comparative linguistics framework. Specifically, the paper aims to reconstruct the proto forms and their original semantics of some basic color terms in Proto-Slavic, and to compare them with those of other Indo-European languages, arriving at the forms of the proto language. Two hypotheses are tested in this study. The first is that the large variety of color words in Proto-Slavic goes back to only a few roots in Indo-European. The second is that the additional varieties of colors in Slavic arose through a process by which the small group of basic color words acquired changes in the root structure, creating alternations of root clusters around focal color terms.

Additionally, the findings of the study are evaluated against cognitive theories that attempt to account for color naming in languages. One group of theories propose a linguistic universals approach, claiming that perception determines color naming in languages (Berlin and Kay 1969, Kay and McDaniell 1978, Dedrick, 1996, and others). Another set of theories claim that it is the language that determines perception, thus color naming happens within the context of specific cultures (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Wierzbicka 2008). Additional theories which either try to reconcile the two views or propose new approaches will be evaluated, as well (Ivić 2000, Popović 2007, Regier et al 2009, and others). Thus, this paper addresses the debated question of whether the color naming in languages occurs in the domain of language universals or in the cultural domain through a diachronic study, providing empirical data from proto languages, such as Proto-Slavic, Balto-Slavic, and Indo-European. Finally, the study will attempt to address the question of whether color naming can be correlated with certain stadial development in societies.

References

- Berlin B, Kay P. (1969) *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA).
- Don Dedrick. (1996) Color language Universality and evolution: On the explanation for basic color terms, *Journal Philosophical Psychology*, pp. 497-524, Vol. 9, Issue 4.
- Milka Ivić. (2000) The Markedness Principle and the Slavic Color Vocabulary, *History and Perspectives of Language Study: Papers in honor of Ranko Bugarski*, Ed. Olga Mišeska Tomić and Milorad Radovanović. University of Novi Sad.

Paul Kay and Chad K. McDaniel. (1978). The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Color Terms, *Language*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 610-646. Linguistic Society of America.

Lyudmila Popovic. (2007) Prototypical and stereotypical color in Slavic languages: Models based on folklore, *Anthropology of Color*, pp. 405-420, Ed. Robert E. MacLaury, Galina V. Paramei, and Don Dedrick

Terry Regier, Paul Kay & Naveen Khertapal. (2009) Color naming and the shape of color space. *Language* 85, 884-892.

Wierzbicka, Anna. (2008) Why there are no 'colour universals' in language and thought. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, 14, 407-25.