

Diachronic and Cross-cultural Semantics of Colours in Polish and English: Linguistic Universals and Individualism in Cultural Globalisation

Multiple researchers have studied the semantics of colours (e.g. Apresjan, 2018; Gheltofan, 2018; Dębowski et al., 2019; Kosik-Szwejkowska, 2019), often inspired by the concept of basic colour terms by Berlin and Kay (1969). Many of these works analyse colours by comparing their connotations and denotations in different languages (e.g. Golda et al. 2022), proving similar or different linguistic worldviews stored in colours. However, a significant part of these works presents merely the current state of language.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the linguistic worldview (LW) understood here, after Bartmiński (1999: 104), as a language-specific interpretation of reality that can be described as a set of judgments about the world. In this work, we compare Polish and English LW on the example of six selected basic colour terms, i.e., black, white, red, green, yellow, and blue. This work presents a cross-linguistic perspective, as well as a diachronic one, by comparing both modern and old English and Polish — old dated from the 14th century to the mid-19th century and modern from the mid-19th century till now.

The source material was mainly retrieved from sixteen monolingual dictionaries of general use — four per language form. First, we applied a lexicographic analysis to study the colours. Then a semantic analysis was used to examine the connotations and denotations stored in their definitions. The results of the analyses allowed us to form several statements on the Polish and English LW stored in the selected colours.

Despite belonging to two different language families, i.e. Germanic and Slavic, English and Polish share some similarities both in their modern and old forms. In both cases, the number of distinctive connotative and denotative meanings decreased throughout the years, probably due to ongoing globalisation. However, some associations remain culturally specific, e.g. English association of blue with Oxford or Cambridge University. Interestingly, modern Polish dictionaries note foreign denotations, e.g., green associated with American Green Berets and the American dollar. It shows both a lexicographic and linguistic openness to the non-native connotative and denotative meanings. The natural referents of colours, such as darkness for black, light for white, fire for red, grass for green, sun for yellow, and the sky for blue, remain firmly rooted in the colours' denotations. Interestingly, modern Polish is most abundant in denotative meanings; however, this may result from the structure of dictionaries.

The diachronic study of colours is worth pursuing since, if performed thoroughly and deeply enough can shed some light on the history of their connotations and denotations. It is also an interesting way of showing the progression of linguistic globalisation, as the study's results suggest.

References

- Bartmiński, J. (1999). Punkt widzenia, perspektywa, językowy obraz świata. In J. Bartmiński (Ed.) *Językowy obraz świata* (pp. 103-120). Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.
- Berlin, B. & Kay, P. (1969). *Basic Color Terms. Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Dębowiak, P., Vilalva, A. & Cardeira, E. (2019). Polish and Portuguese: shared etymons, digressive lexical outputs (on the basis of colour names). In A. Villalva & G. Williams (Eds.), *The landscape of lexicography* (pp. 319-336). Lisboa: Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa / Aveiro: Centro de.
- Gheltofan, D. & Pungă, L. (2018). *Colour-Based Phrases in Romanian, Russian and English*. Buletinul Stiintific al Universitatii Politehnica din Timișoara, Seria Limbi Moderne. 17(1), 19-31.
- Golda, P., Jedziniak, A., Mężyk, J., Ryszka, J. & Uchman, T. (2022). *Colour Terms in Five Linguistic Images of the World: The Semantic Perspective*. GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies. 22 (4), 39-58.
- Kosik-Szwejkowska, B. (2019). *Barwa czarna we współczesnym języku hiszpańskim i rosyjskim*. Studia Russologica. 12, 38-48.