

# Conceptualization of Colours in Sign Languages



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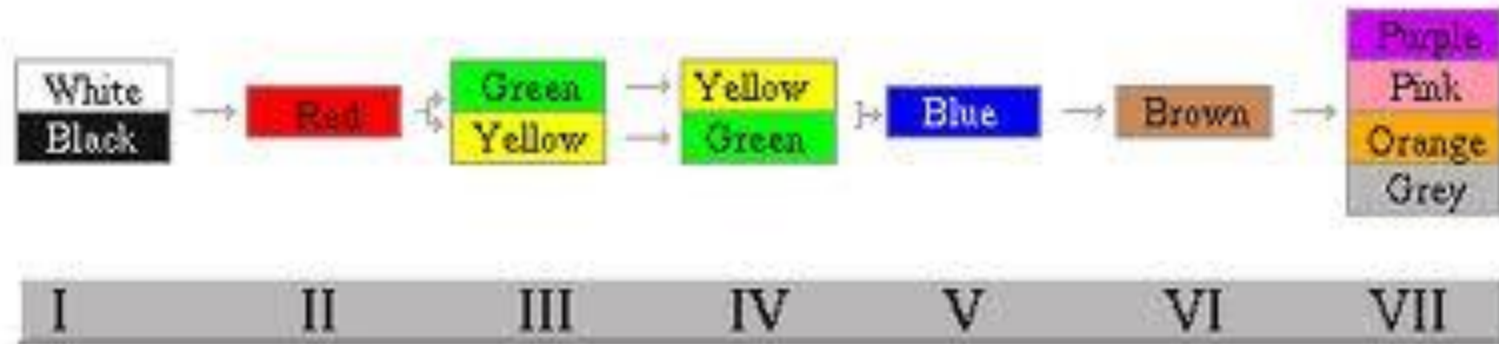
CISL – 25/8/2014

# Cognitive Linguistics and Colours: Basic Propositions

## **B. Berlin + P. Kay (1969): *Basic Color Terms, Their Universality and Evolution***

- 11 basic colour categories (terms for colours)
- 7 groups of languages according to the number of their terms for colours
- criteria for classifying a colour as a so-called „**basic colour**“

# Seven groups of languages



# Criteria:

the term for a **basic colour** is...

1. ... **single word + not a compound word**  
(blue X *light blue* X *blue-green*)
2. ... **hypernym** (red X *winy*)
3. ... **widely linkable with nouns** (yellow X *blond*)
4. ... **psychologically salient**
5. ... **opaque, unmotivated** (brown X *maroon*)
6. ... **not foreign loan word**  
(X in CS – *orange* = *oranžová*)

# Cognitive Linguistics and Colours: Polish and Czech Inspiration

- A. Wierzbicka
- R. Tokarski
- I. Vaňková
  
- terms for colours, related vocabulary, phraseology, folk poetry, songs, fairy tales (+literature)
  - **prototype** (typical bearer) **of colour**  
in language awareness  
**? UNIVERSALITY ?**

# Example – Czech Language: *RED COLOUR*

- **dictionaries** (SSČ, SSJČ):

- *červený* (*red*; adj.)= characterized by the colour of blood, of field poppy
- *červená* (*red colour*; noun) = traffic lights, blood
- *červenat se, zčervenat* (*be red, turn red*; verb.)

- **etymology:**

dyeing cloth by means of worms (ČERVI; Polish cochineal)

- **phraseology:**

- CS: (deep) red as a crayfish/peony (EN: red as a beetroot/peony) / CS: red cock (=fire);
- CS: turn red with anger (EN: ditto); CS: burst into flames with anger (EN: fly into a rage); CS: red-hot (EN: ditto) ...
- CS: blood-and-milk girl (EN: pretty, healthy, buxom girl of milk-and-roses complexion)

→ **prototype of red colour in Czech: blood + fire**

# Sign Languages and Colours

- **J. Woodward (1989):** *Basic Color Term Lexicalization across Sign Languages*
  - 10 different sign languages
- „criteria“ according to Berlin and Kay X sign languages
  - demotivation X visual motivation of signs, iconicity
  - loan words, borrowing X initialization
- other resources for examining colour terminology and searching for a colour prototype (X dictionaries, phraseology, folk art and other records of spoken languages)

**→ a prototype manifests itself in a different manner**

# Research – Methodology

(see the workshop task)

- 1) signs for colours (including variants)
- 2) related / derived signs (formal-articulatory connection, semantic connection)
- 3) motivation, origin of signs



Examples – Czech Sign Language:  
BLACK COLOUR – WHITE COLOUR  
– RED COLOUR

# BLACK COLOUR

1) this is what the sign looks like ...

2) related signs:

– DARKNESS/DARK; NIGHT; BLACK PERSON; AFRICA

3) motivation: **darkness, night**

→ **the prototype of black colour in CzSL**

!idioms! BLACK DAY; BLACK HEART

# WHITE COLOUR

1) this is what the sign looks like ... (3 variants)

2) related signs:

a. SNOW BLANKET; EGG WHITE; WHITE PERSON;  
PALE; EUROPE

b. FLOUR; SILVER / SILVER COLOUR

3) motivation: flour / white shirt

→ **the prototype of white colour in CzSL - ???**

→ **several typical bearers**

# RED COLOUR

- 1) this is what the signs look like ... (2 variants)
- 2) related signs:
  - a. JUNE; JULY; TURN RED; (RUST / RUSTY COLOUR);
  - b. PINK COLOUR; ORANGE COLOUR!!! COLOUR (var.)
- 3) motivation: **lips**  
→ **the prototype of red colour in CzSL**

colour	variants	motivation	related signs	prototype
black	1 (2)	darkness, night	DARKNESS/DARK, NIGHT, BLACK PERSON, (AFRICA)	darkness, night
white	3	flour / shirt	SNOW BLANKET, EGG WHITE, WHITE PERSON, PALE, EUROPE, (FLOUR, SILVER)	???
gray	3	ash / hair	?	ash / hair
red	2	lips	JUNE, JULY, TURN RED, (RUST) (PINK COLOUR, ORANGE COLOUR, COLOUR)	lips
pink	2	flower?	FLOWER	flower?
orange	2	orange	ORANGE	orange
green	3	grass / ?	VEGETABLES, MEADOW, GRASS	grass
yellow	2	„Y“ - yellow („J“ - jaune)	EGG YOLK, GOLD	???
blue	2	sky	SKY, (BRUISE)	sky
brown	1	coffee – grinding	COCOA, CHOCOLATE	coffee
violet	5	???	???	???