Lexicalization patterns in colour naming: A cross-linguistic perspective

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The workshop aims to provide a forum about “lexicalization patterns” in colour naming, mostly in Indo-European (IE) languages but also in non-IE languages. The term *lexicalization pattern* comprises word-formation patterns as well as other grammatical (e.g. syntactic) patterns used in colour naming. The workshop will provide new evidence regarding lexicalization patterns of colour terms from a cross-linguistic perspective. It will also point to some regular lexicalization patterns shared by different languages within the IE language family.

The workshop is based on results of the EOSS project (Evolution of Semantic Systems, 2011-2014, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen) on how meanings vary over space and change over time. Data from 50 IE languages were collected and some preliminary results were provided in Majid, Jordan & Dunn (2015). One of the project tasks was a colour elicitation task that consisted of 84 Munsell colour chips arranged in a single fixed random order (materials developed by Majid & Levinson 2007). Colour chips differed with respect to brightness, hue and saturation. Twenty participants were asked to name the chips that were presented to them individually and randomly. Approximately 1,680 full responses were collected in total for each IE language. These results point to some regularities and specificities of lexicalization patterns in colour naming in IE languages. For example, data from some Slavic languages (such as Croatian, Czech and Polish) show that compounding is more pervasive than derivation. Compounding allows for a more fine-grained naming of the colour spectrum and allows for greater creativity in colour naming than derivation does.

Preliminary research results led us to formulate the following topics and questions.

1) Colours have been investigated from many perspectives, and there is a constant debate between proponents of a relativist view and those of a universalist view. The relativist view considers languages as influential in the partition of the colour space, while the universalist view regards colour space as organized around universal focal colours (Rieger, Kay & Ketharpal 2007). The approach of the workshop is a relativist one, since its main goal is to investigate how language structures can provide answers regarding the differentiation and partition of the colour space. The focus is on investigating productive word-formation patterns in colour naming. According to our preliminary research, derivation and compounding are not equally productive in colour naming. Therefore, one of the important questions that will have to be answered is what types of meanings are conveyed via derivation in different languages, and what types of meanings are conveyed via compounding (some examples are given below). If compounding is more pervasive in colour naming, what patterns can be identified in different languages?
2) Different languages use different affixes to convey different types of meanings related to colours: these are mostly suffixes but occasionally also prefixes, such as Latin sub- in subalbus ‘whitish’. As the data show, suffixes convey two main types of meanings in colour naming. In Croatian, for example, the suffix -ast means ‘N-like’, such as in naranč-ast ‘orange-like’, whereas the suffix -kast has an approximative meaning, such as in zelen-kast ‘greenish’. In Croatian, the suffix -ast regularly realizes the metonymic shift OBJECT COLOUR FOR COLOUR. The same pattern of semantic differentiation between two types of suffixes can be identified in Polish as well. Polish has the suffix -owa/-owy to realize the metonymic shift OBJECT COLOUR FOR COLOUR. The Polish suffix is more productive than the Croatian one. It can be added to nouns referring to more types of entities (lososiowy ‘salmon-like’) than in Croatian where it is restricted to fruits or vegetables. In Polish, the suffix -awa/-awy, as in zielonkawy ‘greenish’, has an approximative meaning. Czech has a suffix -ov that corresponds to the Croatian -ast, realizing the aforementioned metonymic shift. However, Czech has no corresponding suffix for the approximative meaning and therefore has to resort to other grammatical devices like prepositional phrases (e.g. do modra ‘bluish’). We aim to provide insights into what types of suffixes are used and what meanings they convey in colour naming. Are these suffixes polysemous? Do languages have a tendency to be categorized as more of an “approximation”-type or more of a “metonymy”-type?

3) Results of previous research (Conklin 1973, Wierzbicka 2005, Malt & Majid, 2013) show that languages regularly and frequently use terms for familiar and well-known entities to name colours. The third important topic of the workshop therefore concerns the patterns used to lexically realize the metonymic shift OBJECT COLOUR FOR COLOUR in IE and non-IE languages. Preliminary research carried out within the EOSS project points to several lexicalization patterns. The first pattern is the [Nentity + suffix] pattern, as in the above-mentioned example of Croatian naranč-ast ‘orange-like’. Nouns for familiar entities (very often fruits and vegetables) are frequently used as stems in the formation of colour terms. The second pattern is the [N +Ngen] pattern. For example, in Croatian the noun boja ‘colour’ is often the head of a phrase, such as in boja breskev ‘peach colour’ or boja višnje ‘cherry colour’. Thus the phrase suknja boje breskev (lit. ‘skirt colour cherry’) would be used to name a colour of a skirt. In such a construction, the dependent element is a noun in the genitive case, usually referring to a fruit or a vegetable. In French, metonymy is realized by a single word, as in (jupe) saumon ‘salmon (skirt)’, by the [N+N] construction as in (jupe) couleur saumon ‘lit. skirt colour salmon’, or by the [Adj+N] construction, e.g. (jupe) bleu ciel ‘sky-blue (skirt)’, in which the adjective is a colour term and is the head of the construction. Croatian and French data show that different languages have different ways of syntactically realizing the metonymic shift of OBJECT COLOUR FOR COLOUR. What are the differences in lexicalization patterns that languages use to express this metonymy? Do cultural differences play a role? What other types of constructions can be identified? Can regular lexicalization patterns be defined that realize the OBJECT COLOUR FOR COLOUR metonymy in IE languages?

4) The final topic considers types of modifiers that are used in compounding. Modifiers differ with respect to part-of-speech and semantic content. They are mostly adverbs, such as Croatian tamno ‘dark’ and svijetlo ‘light’, or can be adjectives that form compounds, such as Croatian zelena-plava and French vert bleu, both meaning
‘green-blue’. Adverbs that are used as modifiers mostly refer to hue, and sometimes to brightness as well, e.g. the Croatian adverbs zagasito ‘dull’ and jarko, žarko ‘bright’. Adjectives used as modifiers form compound colour terms that could be characterized as headless compounds, e.g. zeleno-plava ‘blue-green’. The components of this type of compound may switch position. According to the Croatian EOSS data, zeleno-plava and plavo-zelena are used to name the same colour shade. In this context, it could be interesting to investigate whether headless compounds in colour naming can be identified in other languages as well.

We invite the submission of papers dealing with the proposed topics. Papers may have both synchronic and diachronic orientation. We strongly encourage corpus-based research and linguistic analysis stemming from the usage-based approach.

References

Wierzbicka, Anna. 2005. There are no ‘‘color universals’’ but there are universals of visual semantics. Anthropological Linguistics 47(2). 217–244.