

Mari Uusküla, Basic Colour Terms in Finno-Ugric and Slavonic Languages: Myths and Facts, Tartu 2008 (Dissertationes linguisticae Universitatis Tartuensis 9). 208 pp.

The book provides a condensed report (50 pages, including References) of a programme of empirical, linguistic and psycholinguistic work. Further details are provided in five papers reporting individual experiments. The book integrates the work into a thesis based on a detailed account of the nomenclature of basic colour terms (BCTs) in Hungarian, Finnish and Czech, the three languages whose colour term mapping has hardly been studied previously. With regards to Hungarian and Czech, Mari Uusküla focuses on the two terms for 'red' with controversial status and concludes that both languages possess only one basic term for 'red', whereby in each of the two languages the inventory includes 11 BCTs. For Finnish, ten BCTs are found to constitute the inventory, with the term for 'purple' emerging. The original findings are related to the BCT inventories in three other Stage VII languages that had been estimated by earlier researchers – English, Estonian, both with 11 BCTs, and Russian, with 12 BCTs. I am in general highly impressed by the quality of the author's scientific reasoning. In my view the work is clearly of sufficient quality to be approved as a doctoral dissertation.

The theoretical basis of the study. Introduction gives a brief, but good, historical account of the mainstream traditions in linguistic and psycholinguistic studies of basic colour terms – the universalist view of B. Berlin and R. Kay and their followers versus the relativist view (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and current adherents). By this she addresses the currently highly debatable issue on whether focal colours and boundaries of colour categories of BCTs are equal or differing across languages.

A good argument in the theoretical rationale for the studies is made that reliable estimation of BCTs requires the psycholinguistic approach (here realised via the mapping task) and cannot rest

solely on linguistic, or corpora analysis. After introducing and discussing the concept of a basic colour term, which embraces both lexical and semantic aspects of the term usage by native speakers, the considerations are underscored that the semantic consistency and psychological salience of a colour term should be weighted stronger than it is done currently. In this vein on p. 29 an amended definition of a basic colour term is suggested.

Further, the author gives an account of BCTs in languages representing different language families – Germanic, Finno-Ugric and Slavonic. She demonstrates familiarity with work studying dictionaries and corpora (linguistic analysis), as well as colour term denotata (psycholinguistic approach). Based on this, she indicates the niche for her own research – in studying three languages barely addressed within an empirical psycholinguistic framework: Hungarian, Finnish and Czech.

Methodology. The unquestionable strength of the book is the conjunction of linguistic and psycholinguistic approaches in its methodology. In addition, strong points of each should be emphasised. (1) Data from the elicitation task, namely the term frequency and mean position, following U. Sutrop's methodological elaboration, are used for deriving the salience index of each colour term – the powerful means of estimating its basicness. (2) The choice of the psycholinguistic method of estimating colour term denotata as elaborated by I. Davies and G. Corbett, has twofold advantages: brevity of the procedure – significant in a field study invoking a large number of respondents; and use of a Color Aid Corporation set – the colour material that enables mapping of colour terms on saturated (as does the Munsell array), but also on unsaturated tiles. The combination of these two methods allows the

author to frame her main arguments around the common thread of the criteria for estimating the inventory of BCTs in the studied languages.

R e s u l t s o b t a i n e d. The following findings and conclusions constitute the novelty of the reviewed study:

(1) The empirically sound estimation of the nomenclature of the BCTs in the three studied languages — Hungarian, Finnish and Czech. Also, relation of these to the BCT nomenclatures of English, Estonian and Russian, well estimated and abundantly studied by others. This comparison indicates that, though clustering, focal colours of the BCTs are “floating” across these languages, thus, providing additional evidence for a weak relativity hypothesis.

(2) Convincing evidence that Hungarian and Czech possess 11 BCTs, while resolving the problem of allegedly two basic terms for ‘red’ by demonstrating that only one of the two ‘red’ terms, *piros* in Hungarian and *červená* in Czech, have the basic status. The second ‘red’ terms, Hungarian *vörös* or Czech *rudá*, do not meet the criteria of basicness but exert strong connotations and firm collocations and are argued to function as culturally salient. The finding differs from that of *голубой*, the second term for ‘blue’ and culturally basic in Russian. Finally, the refining of the lexicalisation of the red range, similar in the two unrelated languages, is conceived to be the product of strong contacts between the two within the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

(3) The two Hungarian warm BCTs deviate from their counterparts in other languages in both the foci and violating the monolexic criterion of B. Berlin and R. Kay. Specifically, *narancssárga* is shifted away from the basic ‘orange’ to the yellowish and *citromsárga* is shifted away from the basic ‘yellow’ to the greenish. In my view, this case presents an interesting example of shifts of best examples of the basic colour categories and amendment of the corresponding BCTs (earlier *narancs* and *sárga* respectively). This phenomenon of modern Hungarian is worth further investigating

— with respect to the reasons of the BCT focus shifts and the possibility of mutual dependence of these.

(4) For the Finnish language, ten basic colour terms were found. The counterpart of the basic ‘purple’ is still emerging, with *violetti* as the most probable candidate for it. This term was assigned as the dominant to the violet-reddish tile. In this connection observations on other languages are worth noting — Russian and English; in both the purple region continues its lexical partitioning with emergence of additional colour terms for its pinkish and bluish shades.

C r i t i c a l c o m m e n t s a n d a p o s s i b l e f u t u r e o u t l o o k.

(1) In the text the concept of a culturally basic colour term is used while referring to Hungarian *vörös* and Czech *rudá*. Keeping in mind that the latter two colour terms were found by the author to be non-basic, I suppose that the above concept is either applied incorrectly or misunderstood.

The concept of a culturally basic colour term implies that (a) the certain colour term is definitely basic in the language under consideration; (b) it may not have counterparts among BCTs in other languages; and (c) its basicness does not imply an analogous emerging term in the colour nomenclature of other languages. Therefore the adverb *culturally* is added prior to the *basic*.

Recall that B. Berlin and R. Kay had questioned whether Russian, with its 12 BCTs, is a forerunner relatively to all other languages. To this latter question I would answer: No. The 12th basic colour term/category emerged in Russian as a result of certain cultural (and maybe environmental) factors.

In other languages other basic colour terms covering different parts of a colour space could emerge. Indeed, recently have been demonstrated that Mandarin Chinese possesses 16 culturally basic colour terms — with two counterparts for ‘red’, ‘orange’, ‘green’, ‘blue’ and ‘brown’. It is noteworthy that “duplicates” *ju* ‘red’ and *ching* ‘green’ are ancient terms related to the Chinese five-colour theory and symbolise fire and wood respectively,

thus prompting that (in our terms) they are culturally basic.

To retain the author's idea of second terms for 'red' in Hungarian and Czech being culturally specific and emotionally loaded, I would suggest referring to respective *vörös* and *rudá* not as culturally basic but as culturally salient colour terms.

(2) In addition to delineating the two competing paradigmatic views, universalist and relativistic, I would suggest to include the third, compromise view — the weak relativity hypothesis. Its gist is the claim that across languages (a) the focal colours, though not identical, nevertheless are very similar and cluster when mapped onto a colour array; (b) regardless of the foci, boundaries of basic colour categories may vary significantly among languages.

Also, I would suggest considering the author's own findings in the framework of the weak relativity hypothesis — as compared to the relativistic explanation exercised in the present version of the dissertation introductory part.

(3) The author may like to consider the elicited and mapped colour terms in more detail — contingent on the age (generation), rural vs. urban population, vocation etc. In particular, I am speculating that with respect to Hungarian and Czech (or languages in other Middle and East European countries) the generation stratification may bring to light significant differences in the colour vocabulary between those who received school education before and after 1991.

In addition, one could go through differences of colours terms dependent on the geographic neighbourhood — to find possible influences of abutting languages. (4) In future it is highly recommendable to accompany tabular presentations of colour term mappings by (psychologically more legible) graphic presentations. Also, manuscripts in English would benefit from consulting native speakers.

C o n c l u s i o n. In the previous sections I have discussed both strengths and relative weaknesses that I noted in reading the material. I would like to stress however that the strengths very much outweigh the weaknesses. The author undertook an ambitious and wide-ranging programme and succeeded very well in developing her data in an integrated and important way. Based on carefully chosen and pursued criteria, the candidate has convincingly demonstrated the epistemological aspects of basic colour terms in three studied languages. She has provided an integrated account of culture-modulated basic colour that deserves the attention of a range of workers in the area of colour term exploration. The work stands as an excellent example of the type of sustained and successful research programme expected at doctoral level.

GALINA PARAMEI (Liverpool)

Address:
Galina Paramei
Liverpool Hope University
E-mail: parameg@hope.ac.uk