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## GENESIS OF THE WHITE COLOUR TERMINOLOGY IN THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

**Abstract:** Colour is a diverse phenomenon which is manifested in different spheres and reflects world picture. All its aspects are interconnected and shown in semantic constituent and algorithm of usage. Being the part of common Indo-European lexis, colour terms obviously acquire particular features in specific languages. However semantic and etymological parallels are evident. The white colour belongs to in the triad of semiotically basic colours and possesses rather intriguing etymology. White is achromatic, minor informative, psychologically neutral, and evident in semantics. It has ambivalent semantics, discreteness of meaning, and enigmatic etymology. In the Indo-European languages the main constituent of these words semantics is characteristics of glitter. On the modern stage of language development this aspect is lost, sometimes together with the lexis itself. We can find certain parallels in modern languages, but not within the field of the main colour terminology. The difference between colour terms in the Slavic languages is rather slight, connected with phonetical changes rather than semantics and process of borrowing.

**Keywords:** the Indo-European, borrowing, connotation, paronymous, semantics, terminology, colour terms, etymology.

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**Received:** May 25, 2017

**Date of publication:** March 15, 2018

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г. Москва, Россия

## ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЕ ТЕРМИНОВ ДЛЯ БЕЛОГО ЦВЕТА В ИНДОЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ ЯЗЫКАХ

**Аннотация:** Цвет — разноплановый феномен, проявляющийся в самых разных сферах и отражающий картину мира. Все его аспекты тесно переплетены и отражаются в его смысловой составляющей и алгоритмах использования. Относясь к пласту общей индоевропейской лексики, цветообозначения в конкретных языках, конечно, приобретают индивидуальные черты. Однако семантические и этимологические параллели абсолютно очевидны. Белый цвет входит в древнюю триаду семиотически основных цветов и обладает весьма интересной этимоло-

гией. Белый цвет ахроматичен и малоинформативен, психологически нейтрален и очевиден по семантике. С другой стороны, обладает амбивалентной семантикой, дробностью значений и достаточно загадочной этимологией. В европейских языках основной составляющей значения белого цвета являлось наличие блеска. На современной стадии развития языков этот аспект утрачивается, порой вместе с самой лексикой. Некоторые параллели терминов можно до сих пор встретить в современных языках, но не в рамках основной цветовой терминологии. Для славянских языков разница в терминах наблюдается незначительная, связанная, в основном, с фонетическими изменениями в области языка, а не с семантикой или процессом заимствования.

**Ключевые слова:** индоевропейский, заимствование, коннотация, однокоренной, семантика, терминология, цветоименование, этимология.

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**Дата поступления статьи:** 25.05.2017

**Дата публикации:** 15.03.2018

Colour as physical, aesthetic, philosophical, psychological, linguistic phenomenon is used in different spheres of human activity, and its meaning differs according to the chosen criteria. All the cultural aspects, economics, and social background influence usage and understanding of colour. This aesthetic category affects the psychic state of human being, is strictly connected with memory, and is apprehended on its base.

One can not deny colour is also a semiotic phenomenon, «...it is vital necessity, it is such first-necessity as water and fire» [3, p. 288]. It has the ability to contain and transfer great amount of information, and colour terminology is strictly connected with semantics of colours and their physical characteristics. The attitude to colour as an element of culture and language depends on the environment, field of usage, national peculiarities, historical epoch, level of social and language development.

Traditionally in humanities it is analysed from semiotic, linguistic, psychological point of view. All these aspects are interconnected and can be arranged in chain: psychological impact — symbol — language unit. There are many researches dedicated to defined tint or its usage in particular context, although as constant changes in lingua-cultural sphere take place, there are always some aspects for further analysis. As a result it seems important to observe some diachronic algorithm of colour semantics and colour terms.

There are many theories about different ability of vision in ancient times, as our vision develops from ochreous to cold part of spectrum. People perceive colours, use them, give particular symbolic sense, create lexical units for colours.

Colour symbols are formed on the base of religious and philosophical context. Although from the very beginning it appeared on the background of association with different objects and phenomena. Then, with the development and complication of philosophical ideology, colour takes deeper sense, sometimes rather little but still connected with the very primary.

In Ancient world colour is mostly emotional category, evidently connected with brightness, associations with surrounding phenomena. In Medieval time it is very informative category, structuralized hierarchically, essential component of communication, gnosiological aspect of culture. So it accepts religious and philosophical criteria of existence. Then the interest to colour turns to the sphere of psychology and scientific base of usage.

There are three main colours, basic for the ancient cultures: black, white, red. This triad can be seen everywhere, and can be explained by the dualism of realization and by the importance of the notions «blood-sun-fire». Also these three colours correspond to three phases of human life and the process of pottery creation: white as a baby, red as a period of initiation, black as a mature human being. In some cultural traditions white correlates with particular age, sex, part of the world, season, and so on.

White colour is a very specific linguo-semiotic category. On the one hand it is achromatic, and as a result seems to be minor informative, psychologically neutral, and evident in semantics. On the other hand it still has ambivalent semantics, discreteness of meaning, many terms for designation and rather enigmatic etymology of nearly all of them.

White as an opposition of black means «nondifferentiation, absence, air, light, innocence, spirituality, sanctity, transcendental perfection». In the East, Ancient Greece, Rome white is used in mourning. A girl-bride dressed in white died for her family, and was born as a woman in her husband's family. A woman arrayed in white can have such semantics as «love-life-death». It was widely used in ancient poems of all the European nations. Also white means «surrender, armistice, goodwill, luminosity, kinship with God's light», it is a colour of eternal silence [1].

Mostly positive and negative semantics of this colour coincides in Indo-European cultures and languages. It can be seen in idioms, sometimes quite identical both in form and meaning or in one aspect: *white lie*, *белая зависть*, *anima candida*, *eine weiße Hemdbrust*; *white as a ghost* — *белый как полотно* — *bianco come un panno lavato* — *blanco como el papel*. The main meanings of the term are: «light, lustrous, silver, pale, good, kind, empty» etc.

This article aim is to review etymology of colour terms in some of the Indo-European languages. Colour terms belong to the basic Indo-European lexis, and a lot of words overlap, sometimes in a very strange way. Colour terminology progresses simultaneously with culture and language. Attention to some colour or nuance reflects mentality and the stage of language development.

It is impossible to speculate on absolute algorithm of colour terms for all the languages. Especially dead languages are irrelevant to it [5]. However in present days most of scientists [2] are inclined to consider the following chain of development of colour terms.

In the very beginning colour is expressed mediately, by pointing to colour of some particular but general objects, or by some comparative constructions (*цвета молока*, *bianco come un cencio*, *kreideweiß*, *blanco cual nieve*, *as white as a sheet* etc). Then terms, which express universal category of «light-dark» (good and evil) and «glitter» rather than colour, appear.

According to the researches of Kay P. and Berlin B. [7] all the languages with two basic colour terms focus on black and white (dark and light). Dualism must have manifested itself very early, and that opposition touched all the spheres of human activity. Rather frequently red was added (all the warm colours from yellow to brown can be included in such a notion) with limited collocation. It does not mean that all the ancient peoples were not able to percept different colours, but just the fact of interest to some detail of surroundings. The prevailed tints in the environment determine the type of appreciation of colour as a symbol and language unit.

Absence of pure colour terminology is quite typical for the ancient languages, as possibly an attempt to follow the style. As terminology is usually concrete and so as a fact down to earth. In Ancient literature there seem many constructions rather far from basic terminology, sometimes very metaphoric, e.g. *ροδοδάκτυλος* (*pink-fingered*). Glimmer is one

of the most popular category of that time. And some colour word item can have connotation of «shine», and vice versa some word with denotation of «brilliance» has the colour shade of meaning.

In Ancient Greek the main term for the white colour was λευκός. It goes back to Indo-European root *leuk* — «shine». Paronymous words are, for example, Latin *lūx* and *lūna*, Old English — *lēoht*, Russian — *луч*. This term mostly does not have restriction in usage, although is used more often in prose and corresponds to high style. Its main meaning is «luminous» together with «light» and prototypical «white». Also there was an additive meaning «happy» (happy day — *λευκή ημέρα*). Its rival in usage was later and colloquial *άσπρος*.

Besides in Latin there was a term with the meaning «glimmering-white» (*candidus*), as opposition to «lustreless-white» (*albus*). The first term is used mostly in poetry and as an attribute to the glimmering objects, though *albus* is used in combinatory with sun, snow, and other «glaring» phenomena, but in quite prosaic connotation. Both *albus* and *άσπρος* go back to Indo-European *albho* — white. Etymology of *candidus* is not quite clear, although it is congeneric with Indo-European *cand/scand/scend* — «shine». Paronymous to it are Italian — *accendere*, English — *candle*, *incandesce* (burning hot), possibly, *shine*, *sky*, Russian — *суть*. In English the words are not native, at least Anglo-Saxon. As it can be seen both *albus* and *candidus* mean «light, bright, good».

Such a picture with a special attention to luminosity is quite typical for antient languages. Then simultaneously with the development of national languages abstract terms for basic colours appeared. Some of the terms expressed several colours and then fixed on the particular or gave way to a new one.

Then the term derived from relevant object appeared: *молочный*, *milchfarben*, *niveo*, *ebúrneo*, *ivory*, made the chain as: *как молоко — белый — молочный* (*like snow — white — snow-white*).

Italian as the most of the Romanic languages lost Latin terms and opposition of lustrous — lusterless. *Candido* — «white, pure», *albo* — «white» are Latin words and are used in stylistically marked texts of poetic sphere. *Candido* aslo had the meaning «innocent, sincere». Modern term *bianco* is a Germanic borrowing, and goes back to *blank* — «lustrous» of 5–8th. c. or later period, and Indo-European *bhleg*, *bhl-*. *Bianco* is used together with object that can be of different colours but having the characteristics of lighter shade, e.g. *uva bianca*, *frati bianchi*. Also in Old Italian it was used as a description of light object, e.g. hair and skin of women. In the modern language the word has wide combinability and semantics indirectly connected with ambivalent symbolism of white colour, e.g. *matrimonio bianco*, *voce bianca*, *omicidio bianco*. Besides it has the connotation of «emptiness» — *dare di bianco*, or «failure» — *andare in bianco*.

Nearly the same picture exists in Spanish. *Albo* — «white» and *candido* — «snow-white, naive, innocent» are still in usage but only as poetic words. *Blanco*, the main term, is obviously Germanic borrowing as in Italian. Also it possesses the meaning of «coward», and «wind round one's little finger» — *dejar en blanco*.

In German there is Germanic word *blank*, that lost the meaning of colour, but kept the idea of glitter. Also the word *Weiß*, basic colour term, paronymous to the English one exists. In English the main term for the colour under discussion is *white*, in Old English *hwīt* from semantically close Indo-European *kueid* — light. The Russian word *свет* has the same origine.

*Белый* in Russian goes back to Ancient Indian *bhālam* — «glitter» and possibly Indo-European *bhleg/ bhl-*, that has parallels with Old Upper German (*blank*) and congeneric languages as Old English — *blanca* — white и *blāc* — «bright, sparkle».

The last word is influenced by Old English *blæc* — «black», also paronymous.

There is no particular difference in the Slavonic languages in the basic term for the white colour, and its semantics (*белы* — Bel., *білий* — Ukr., *бял* — Bul., *бео* — Serb., *biały* — Pol., *bílý* — Cz.). The variety is generally connected with the phonetic processes of particular language. Semantics focuses mostly on the notion «beautiful and good».

As we can see in all the languages under analysis the main constituent of these words semantics is characteristics of glitter. On the modern level of language development this aspect is lost, sometimes together with lexis itself. Some parallels can be found in modern languages, but not within the field of main colour terminology, e.g. *λευκός* — *luna* — *lume* — *luz* — *light* — *licht* — *луч*, *candidus* — *accendere* — *centellear* — *sky* — *schimmern* — *суть*, *blank* — *bianco* — *blanco* — *black* — *белый*. Although some of these examples are rather deniable.

Certainly there are also several minor terms for tints of white in all the taken languages. Some of them would have special collocations, e.g. *blond* — *fair-haired* — *rubio* and their varieties, or just denote some nuance of colour, e.g. *silver* — *silbern* — *d'argento* — *argénteo* — *серебряный*. Other terms can be connected with particular sphere of usage such as e.g. heraldry. White is one of the heraldic tinctures. Precisely white substitutes silver as a metal element of coat-of-arms. Among the terms for blazoning there are *argent*, *Silber*, *argento*, *серебро*. In some languages these words are not usually used as a term for white or silver, but only as heraldic term.

In modern language all the terms are used according to some stylistic norms. Despite the common mechanisms of linguistic development, there are specific rules including sociocultural constituent for a concrete language. Through the history distinct types of terms in different combinations appeared: abstract terms, close to abstract derivatives, compounds, composite words with the elements *light-*, *bright-*, *dark-*, and so on, colours of concrete objects, terms with suffixation. Besides there are a lot of borrowings, partly or fully assimilated, fictional terms connected only with the vivid imagination of an author or with the advertisement purpose, *монастырский шик*, *зов Арктики*, *царевна-лебедь*, *plumping pearl*, *iseberg white*, *biancheggiante Aurora* etc.

The modern languages of Europe lost many of Ancient Indo-European terms. Some of them changed their semantics, or were supplanted by borrowed words. Nevertheless language parallels in the sphere of colour naming are quite obvious. Parallels can be found in rather far from each other languages, although words of different roots exist in congeneric languages. Semiotically basic colours, to which white belongs, kept some elements of intuitive symbolism in their meaning, that can be found in idioms or phraseological expressions. As far as its semantics is concerned it would be easily understood by the representatives of the most European countries.

All the tints and all their aspects require separate fundamental researches. Comparative and interdisciplinary can be viewed especially productive. But in this work we just observe one colour and touch some points of mentioned sphere.

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