TRANSLATION: THE PUZZLE OF COLOUR

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This research contributes to the study of colour terms as a cognitive phenomenon. Since colour is not a universal concept and an ordinary mind does not perceive colour separately from the object, it is possible to observe the knowledge about colour, which exists in the language but does not exist in its physical sense. We hold that the given knowledge is the cause of significant difficulties arising in the translation of various colour terms, though the nature of these terms existence should not be complex in its essence, being a basic phenomenon of the natural world. Moreover, certain ambiguity rises when reference points of colour do not coincide with the indirect naming of colours and shades in different languages. Different pairs of languages apparently set their individual spectrum of translation difficulties. We characterise some typical colour-related English into Russian translation difficulties which arise at the cognitive level.

Keywords: *colour terms, concepts, categorisation, colour perception, translation difficulties.*

1. Perception and naming of colours

The object of analysis in this article is ambiguity which rises when reference points of colour do not coincide with the indirect naming of colours and shades in different languages. The nature of colour is a classic philosophical question, mainly because colour depends on our perception. Colour has long been the subject of research by psychologists and physiologists; they investigated the functions of the eye and nervous system for colour perception. Colour terms were studied from different perspectives, so two research traditions were created: linguistic proper, on the one hand, and psychological, cultural and anthropological on the other.

In psychology, colour sensations are a specific reaction of the eye and brain to light frequency oscillations. "The world is colourless, there is no colour in nature, there are impressions of a certain reality, visible in colour sensations. As a result, the reality of the colour range is apparent. The colour models created by the right and left hemispheres do not coincide: the right hemisphere is focused on the long-wave part of the spectrum (red) and is responsible for the colour pictures associated with sensory perception; the left hemisphere is focused on the mid-wave part of the spectrum (blue) and is responsible for the colour pictures associated with the conceptual complex. Consequently, the perception of colour includes a logical and sensual way of perceiving the world. Thus, the perception of colour in this aspect can be viewed as a transition of non-verbal, figurative thinking to the verbal level.

From the point of view of cognitive linguistics, colour is not a universal concept. And researchers have long studied the problem of the formation of concepts that represent colours in the languages of different peoples and their influence on perception. The classical work of B. Berlin and P. Kay (Berlin, Kay 1969) states that all people are able to perceive and differentiate all the basic colours (*Basic Colours Theory* — BCT), but not all languages provide means of indication for all the basic concepts of colour. The theory of the existence of central colours, at the same time, can shed light on the problem of the referential correlation of physical colours with their best prototypes and colour naming in various languages. It is the idea of the researchers that regardless of what particular concepts denoting basic colours are present in the language and whether they exist at all, users of the language choose practically the same best examples of basic colours for correlating with real physical colours. Even if, for example, in English, there is a concept that refers to two of the basic colour fields (BLUE and GREEN), the best example of such a concept, surprisingly, will be not TURQUOIS, even though it is located in the centre of the blue-green sector of the spectrum, but a central BLUE or a central GREEN. The presence of central colours, firstly, demonstrates that the members of the categories denoting colour are unequal. For example, some members of the BLUE category (namely, central BLUE) serve as better examples than others. Secondly, the presence of central colours allows us to compare the concepts of colours in different languages.

The undeniable conclusions drawn from these classic studies are the following: colour perception among representatives of different nations at the physiological level is almost identical; all people, regardless of ethnicity, are able to recognize 11 basic colours and choose almost the same best examples, but despite this, there are different numbers of concepts that represent colours in different languages; the number of concepts existing in a particular language, meaning the colours distinguished in a given culture, does not affect the perception of different colours among the representatives of a given culture. At the same time, it is paradoxical that in different cultures, different sensory concepts are formed in different quantities to denote the basic colours of the spectrum that are accessible to perception (Polyakov 2017).

The above described can be called *pure* perception of colour. However, ordinary consciousness does not perceive colour separately from the object. Consequently, we can speak about the information about the colour, which is present in the language and at the same time is not a part of the scientific truth. We believe that it is this exact information that is the cause of significant difficulties arising in the translation of various colour terms.

Thus, Oleg A. Kornilov (Kornilov 2003) writes that the almost total discrepancy between colour concepts in the languages of the world is probably due to the differences in the choice of reference points. Different communities choose their referents in their environment, which predetermines the divergence of their national prototypes at the level of "foci" which are "best samples" of colours.

We have no reason to talk about the identity of categorising sensory experience in different cultures because, for example, *blue* (English) is not "*синий/sinij*" (Russian) and *blue* is not "*голубой/goluboj*" (Russian). The following example demonstrates how the derivatives from the words «синий» and «голубой» (in bold) are translated into English with only one word "blue".

*«Над головой — густая сочная **синь**, бездонная глубь. Чуть далее, стекая по небосклону, **синева** светлеет, переходя в нежную **голубизну**, в бирюзу, а потом и вовсе в лазурь. Сияющая белизна облаков — кучевых, плывущих нескончаемым караваном, или далеких, перистых, их морозный узор оттеняет небесную **синь**» (*Ekimov 2016*).*

*"Above the head is a rich, juicy **blue**, a bottomless depth. Slightly further, flowing down over the sky, the **blue** brightens, turning into a gentle **blue**, into turquoise, and then into the azure. The shining whiteness of the clouds — cumulus, floating in endless succession, or distant, cirrus, their frosty pattern sets off the **blue** of the sky"* (*Voice of the Sky* by Boris Ekimov, translated by the authors of the article).

L. Hjelmslev (Hjelmslev 1963) writes that considering the colour designation system in different languages, we can see that the formless continuity, which is the colour spectrum, is arbitrarily divided by each language into a certain number of individual areas — blue, green, yellow etc. And these areas in different languages do not match (Weisgerber 2004). Similarly, the Latin and Greek concepts representing the colours of objects do not coincide with the corresponding concepts of modern European languages. In Latin, for example, there are no conceptual correspondences for the German "*blau*" (blue), "*braun*" (brown) and "*grau*" (grey), and some researchers even suggested that the Romans were unable to see colours. In Latin, the words "*albus*" — "*niger*" correspond to German "*weiss*" (white) and "schwarz" (black), but the intermediate link between them — the German "*grau*" (grey) — is not available as an equal abstract category. Instead, here you can find many specific concepts: "*canus*", "*rauus*", "*caesius*", etc. The word "*canus*" is used almost exclusively to denote grey hair and is also used only as poetic metaphors to denote the colour of the sea, snow, etc.; "caesius" — for grey eyes, similar to "*rauus*". But the universal generalising concept (as German "grau") is missing.

According to J. L. Weissgerber (ibid.), the discrepancy between Greek colour concepts and modern ones even led to the well-known discussion of colour perception in the 70s and 80s of the last century, in which some researchers stated that such discrepancies could be traced to the development of colour perception, while others seriously advocated the point of view that the Greeks were colour blind.

Thus, the correlation of physical colour perception and its naming in a language in translation perspective is in the focus of attention of the present article. Notable here is the fact that the use of English terminology as the metalanguage in BCT is argued in some research as leading to inferences making, i.e. see patterns where there are none to be found (Lucy 1992).

2. Colour Coding Systems in Languages as a translation problem

Colour can be expressed explicitly (by directly naming a colour or a trait by colour), and implicitly (by naming an object, the colour attribute of which is fixed in everyday life or culture at the level of tradition).

The colour naming system has the main features of the semantic field. Lexical units which are parts of this semantic field are the representatives of

various aspects of the concept COLOUR. Most of the lexical units of colour are structured in such a way that it is possible to distinguish their core and periphery. But it is possible to single out the centre of many colour terms, based on extralinguistic criteria — knowledge of physics, which means that the main colours of the spectrum (red, *orange, yellow, green, blue, violet*) will form the core of the semantic field of colour while all other shades will make the near and far periphery of this field. Structured in this way, the colour field will reflect the colour perception model, which is characteristic, with minor variations, for most people and, accordingly, for most languages.

Ambiguity arises when reference points do not coincide with the indirect designation of colours and shades. An illustrative example is the name of the shade found in one of the colour templates catalogues — the brownish-red colour was named *Siberian squirrel* (https://slidehelper.com/blog/150-custom-color-palettes-for-powerpoint-word-and-excel/) which does not give the clear idea of the physical colour for the Russian-speaking people, firstly because the squirrels change fur colours according to season, secondly, due to the fact that in colloquial speech and fiction in Russian, it is often referred to as *ginger squirrel (ryzhaja)*. The discrepancy in terms leads to confusion since in the United States and Canada the same term refers to the *red squirrel* — a member of the genus Tamiasciurus.

We assume that different pairs of languages will represent an individual spectrum of translation problems. Some typical difficulties in a pair of English — Russian arising at the cognitive level can be characterised by us as follows:

— Since the knowledge of colour, coded in the system of English and Russian languages, is intended for the user of a particular language, it is used in different scopes by native speakers at different degrees of its application. Thus health-food aficionados have a motto — "*Eat your greens*!", which is most often translated into Russian not through the use of the Russian equivalent of the word "*greens*" — "*зелень*/zelen'", but with the more general term "*овощи*" (vegetables), since the Russian-speaking receptor is more familiar with information about the healthiness of all vegetables, and not just green vegetables. Which means that depending on our culture and situation, we categorise differently and judge certain objects to be more representative than others [Tarnaeva 2013]. The meaning of the word "*greens*" is not defined across all cultures based on its characteristics as the edible leaves and stems of certain plants, eaten as a vegetable. Instead, humans associate it with the vegetable they are most familiar with or which is most prevalent in their society, thus instantaneously associating it with an individual and, at the same time, culturally dependent world of colours, shape, and taste. Consequently, the translator's understanding of a text necessarily depends on their nonlinguistic preconceptions.

Similarly, for example, in the Russian language, there is the concept of COLOURLESSNESS, i. e. an object can be 'colourless' or 'colour free': *бесцветное покрытие* (*colourless top layer*) or can have an ambiguous colour — UNIDENTIFIABLE COLOUR: *какой-то странный цвет (what a strange colour)* and *серо-буро-малиновый* (*grey-brown-crimson colour*). In the latter case, the less clear concept has a reference to somehow more visually represented matter.

— A feature of any language is the attribution of colour to abstract, visually imperceptible entities, e. g. *Black Monday, Black Friday, Black Saturday*. The meaning of the colour component in these phrases is obscure and cannot be subject to direct translation; it requires decoding: *Black Monday* — Monday, October 19, 1987 — the day on which the largest drop in the Dow Jones Industrial Average occurred in its history — 22.6 %. This event affected not only the United States, but quickly spread throughout the world, and the term has come to mean a severe financial crisis. The term *Black Friday* first appeared in Philadelphia and meant heavy traffic jams on Friday after Thanksgiving. The modern interpretation of this term in English is more positive — it is associated with the idiom "to be in the black" idiom (i. e., "to have positive balance", as opposed to "to be in the red"), implying that many sellers will gain significant profits on this day. The term *Black Saturday* originates from the Soviet Union times when it used to mean a Saturday which was a working day instead of a day-off. The name "Black Saturday" is derived from the colour of the ink that indicated working days and weekends on the calendar. Weekends, including Saturdays, were printed in red, working days — in black. Accordingly, the working Saturday turned out to be literally black. The translator here is the main cognizer in charge of constructing meaning from the mental stimulation. The meaning should be reconstructed out of the original communication act and conveyed to the receptor of the translated text in such a way that allows them to reconstruct it by themselves. But this process of mental simulation is extremely complex, and translators are restricted by many different factors, which comprise their conceptualisation processes, such as the restrictions of the textual context, those of the working environment, or the prevailing norms from the cultural and the historical context. All this advances the translators' mental experience which is constrained by their capacities, such as their knowledge, background, ideological and religious views, personality traits and idiosyncrasive reactions and so on.

— In Russian, it is possible to detect the connection between colours and emotional evaluation of the object, e. g. *синенький, нежно-зеленый, серебристый* (*blue, soft green, silver)* The first line of a famous war-time Russian song «***Синенький*** *скромный платочек…*» when translated into English as "*A* ***blue*** *modest shawl*" loses all the affectionate diminutive meaning encoded in the form of the word "*синенький*" as well as its pragmatic aspect — describing something distinctively feminine.

— The reference to colour produced with the help of metaphorical and metonymic models is particularly difficult when translating, because on the one hand, it is an endless source of replenishment of lexical compositions of languages, and on the other hand, the mismatch of reference points in two languages (*the colour of wet asphalt* and the above-mentioned example of *Siberian squirrel*).

As A. Steinvall puts it, colour terms may take on a classifying function (classifying a subtype), and in doing so they can refer to nuances which might well lie outside their normal area of designation (Steinvall 2002). Thus, *white wine* is usually far from *white* and *black bread (Russian rye bread type)* is definitely not *black*.

The advertising industry is another field where the problem of perceiving and translating words denoting colour is of crucial importance. The rapidness and intensity of the process of introducing new colour terms into the language use that it provides are unprecedented. According to A. Vasilevich (Vasilevitch, Kuznetzova, Mischenko 2005), if we talk about the development of the vocabulary of colour designations, then we must consider two crucial points. The first being the formation of a kind of "universal market" of goods and services — cars, perfumery, fabrics, painting paints, etc. are produced by a relatively small number of firms, while being sold throughout the world. The second — the emergence of such a form of sale as catalogue marketing. When dealing with a catalogue of merchandise a customer must choose a product by studying a description of a product in a catalogue or a magazine, and not only the product itself (for example, the brand of car), but also its colour is subject to assessment. As only an insignificant number of texts that advertise imported goods is written in the Russian language, the bulk of them has to be translated, which brings us back to the problem of the translation of colour terms, the names of colours and their shades in particular.

As it has already been established, the knowledge of colour, coded in the system of English and Russian languages, is intended for the speaker of a particular language and can be recognised differently by non-native and native speakers. The name of the colour of the goods is an inseparable part of the goods' "packaging" and a powerful selling tool: after all, to call a car "*red*", "*white*" or "*silver*" is not at all the same as giving such catchy names to its colour as "*Monte Carlo*", "*Brisket*", "*Safari*" or "*Aventurine*". Similarly, "*Red lipstick, No. 17*" is perceived differently than lipstick "*Mystery of the East*", "*Pink kiss*" or "*Pink nocturne*".

The names of the colours of the new type appeared: they can be called "advertising words". The main function of such words is to draw attention to a given shade of colour, and not to call it. Due to this trend, Russian users get the names of colours like *iguana, amaretto,* and *papaya whip*. In the proposed form, the terms of colour are completely alien to the perception of the Russian consumer and are completely devoid of the associations for which the original trademark was designed. This way the colours called "*Boston University Red*" and "*Bondi Blue*" (colour of the water at Bondi Beach in Australia) will turn into ordinary "*red*" and "*blue*" for a Russian-speaking person during translation, completely losing their cultural connotation in the process.

3. Conclusions

A translator, of course, chooses the category from which a certain concept will be extracted and processed. He/she is free to experiment by giving greater explicitness to the implicit, adding subtle explanations of cultural differences, inventing new terms and adding metaphors to reveal meaningful connections and to manifest an implication that cannot be expressed directly.

Perspective area of further research into the nature of colour terms translation difficulties is the analysis of the usage of colour terms in classifying function are vantage and reference point as suggested by A. Steinvall (Steinvall 2002). The vantage represents the perspective of the conceptualiser, and the reference point is a salient landmark through which the target, the classi-

fied entity, is accessed. The choice of the reference point is largely based on the vantage point of the conceptualiser, and since it is a matter of characterising a type, generality (and thus, salience) is striven for.

Our research supports the hypothesis that for a full picture to emerge when translating colour terms, both the structure of the conceptual domain and the lexical field should be thoroughly examined.

We demonstrated that it is possible to observe the knowledge about colour, which exists in the language but does not exist in its physical sense. The given knowledge is the cause of significant difficulties arising in the translation of various colour terms, though the nature of these terms existence should not be complex, being a basic phenomenon of the natural world. Moreover, certain ambiguity rises when reference points of colour do not coincide with the indirect naming of colours and shades in different languages.

We have tried to show some typical English into Russian translation difficulties which arise at the cognitive level.

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ПЕРЕВОД: ЗАГАДКА ЦВЕТА

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Данное исследование лежит в русле изучения цветообозначений как когнитивного феномена. Поскольку цвет не является универсальным понятием и обыденное сознание не воспринимает цвет отдельно от объекта, представляется возможным определять такую информацию о цвете, которая присутствует в языке, но не существует в физическом смысле. В статье обосновывается тезис о том, что данная информация является причиной значительных трудностей, возникающих при переводе различных цветовых терминов, хотя природа существования этих терминов должна быть однозначной по своей сути, будучи базовым явлением окружающего мира. Более того, определенная неоднозначность возникает в том случае, когда эталонные точки референции цветов не совпадают с непрямым наименованием цветов и оттенков на разных языках. Различные пары языков, очевидно, обладают индивидуальным спектром трудностей перевода цветообозначений. В статье определены некоторые типичные трудности перевода цветотерминов, которые возникают на когнитивном уровне в паре таких языков, как английский и русский,

***Ключевые слова**: цветообозначения, наименования цвета, категоризация, референция, восприятие цвета, переводческие трудности.*

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