

The categorization of colours and their expressions in German and French: a contrastive and pedagogical study

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1. Introduction

- **Cognitive Linguistics** (CL) advocates strong link between language and cognition (Dirven & Ruiz de Mendoza 2010)
- Speakers express 'categories' = result from conceptualizations
- French and German belong to Western culture, we can expect similar conceptualizations
- Is not the case!
- This applies to conceptualization of colours and colour terms.

Structure of presentation

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Different languages = different conceptualizations
- 3) Literature on colour terms and categories
- 4) Contrastive study of colour terms in causal constructions in F & D
- 5) Meaning and use differences: Survey with F and D speakers
- 6) Conclusions

2. Different languages = different conceptualizations

- “*Cognitive Grammar [...] equates meaning with conceptualization*” (Langacker 1987: 5)
- **all linguistic meaning is conceptual** in nature and linguistic entities reflect underlying concepts
- **Different speech communities** privilege different conceptualizations + different expressions/ ‘lexicalization patterns’ (Talmy 2000)
- **Several possibilities:**
 - (i) **1 similar word for different concepts**
 - e.g. E/F/D: *Marmelade*
 - E = jam of orange;
 - D = jam;
 - F = stewed fruit

(ii) 1 word in L1; several words in L2, e.g.

a) F/E: *manger/to eat*;

D: *essen* (for persons)/*fressen* (for animals/for persons when eating greedily) (Jing-Schmidt 2010)

b) In causal constructions with colour adjective,

1 French preposition *de*, 2/3 German prepositions *von*, *vor* (*,aus*)

(i) *Les étiquettes étaient brunes de poussière* (SketchEngine, 17335)

Lit. 'The labels were brown from the dust'

Germ. 'Die Etiketten waren braun vom Staub'

(ii) *Ihre Augen scheinen blaß vor Erschöpfung* (DWDS, Die Zeit, 05.01.1996, Nr. 2)

Lit. 'Her eyes appear pale of exhaustion'

(iii) different words for similar reality

=> different conceptualizations

e.g. colour terms for traffic lights:

F: *orange*; D: *gelb* ('yellow'); E: *yellow/amber*

- Different perception of this reality
- Leads to problems for FLL

- But the selection of a specific colour term does not simply depend on the conceptualization differences in different speech communities
- Topic of this presentation

3. Literature on colour terms & colour categories

- Many studies on colour terms:

seminal study by Berlin/Kay (1969); more recently: Biggam et al. (2011) and Hardin and Maffi (1997); bibliography: Caivanio and Becerra (2007)

- Favourite issues:

- how do different speech communities conceptualize colours (Choungourian 1968, Van Leeuwen 2010)
- universal (Berlin & Kay 1969) vs. relative status of colour terms (Wierzbicka 1990)
- colours and emotions (Osgood et al. 1975, Soriano and Valenzuela 2009, Wyler 1992)

- Weakness of many studies: study of colour terms out of context (cf. Lucy 1992: 186 or Wierzbicka 1990)
- Critique is justified:
 - Comparison of colour terms and concepts out of context shows more similarities between F and D: similar number of colours, similar hues; e.g. red
 - But if study in a specific linguistic context => differences at several levels
- CL advocates a usage-based approach

=> **Study of colour terms in specific construction**

4. Contrastive study of colour terms in causal constructions in French and German

4.1. Examples of causal constructions with colour terms

F [*être* + colour term + *de* NG]; D [*sein* + colour term + *von/vor* NG]

(1a) F. *Il est vert de jalousie*

lit. 'He is green with jealousy'

(1b) D. *Er ist gelb vor Neid*

lit. 'He is yellow with envy'

(2a) F. *Marie est rouge de colère*

lit. 'Maria is red with anger'

(2b) D. *Peter ist rot vor Aufregung*

lit. 'Peter is red with excitement'

4.2. Polysemous causal construction with colour adjective

Colour adjective in causal constructions can refer to:

(i) the colour category itself

(3) *Hoffmann, son nez était noir de tabac* (SketchEngine, 09713)

Lit. 'Hoffmann, his nose was black from tobacco'

(ii) The colour of the face as place for emotion expression

(4) *Peter ist rot vor Wut*

Lit. 'Peter is red with anger'

- Soriano/Valenzuela (2009: 423): the colour change is the 'result of a rising body fluid'
- Colour term = metonymical expression of a particular physical state caused by the feeling or the emotion depicted in the following nominal group

(iii) a specific state, by metaphor

(5) F. *Je suis rose de bonheur*

Lit. 'I am pink of happiness'

[\(http://www.gazette-besancon.fr/2010/02/23/jean-louis-fousseret-je-suis-rose-de-bonheur/\)](http://www.gazette-besancon.fr/2010/02/23/jean-louis-fousseret-je-suis-rose-de-bonheur/)

4.3. Frequency differences between F/D

A. Basic colour term in F/D corpora

- Corpora of 'Sketchengine': French corpus frWaC and German corpus deTenTen (<http://the.sketchengine.co.uk>)
- Basic colour terms *white, black, red, green, blue* and *yellow* in F & D corpora independently of the construction
- First observation: Frequency differences F/D

Colour term	Number of hits in German corpus	Frequency per million	Colour term	Number of hits in French corpus	Frequency per million
weiß	901 683	317.0	blanc	251 230	154.3
schwarz	301 424	106.0	noir	222 122	136.4
rot	294 935	103.7	rouge	172 734	106.1
grün	219 397	77.1	vert	179 844	110.4
blau	143 606	50.5	bleu	120 977	74.3
gelb	87 928	30.9	jaune	65 648	40.3

Table 1: Frequency of colour terms in French and German corpora

➤ Except for ‘white’, more hits in F than in D

B. Colour terms in causal construction

Colour term	Number of hits in German corpus	Colour term	Number of hits in French corpus
weiß	5	blanc	11
schwarz	10	noir	67
rot	8	rouge	14
grün	3	vert	19
blau	0	bleu	0
gelb	0	jaune	3

Table 2: Frequency of colour terms in causal construction

- French uses colour terms more frequently than German in causal construction

Reasons for frequency differences are **typological**:

➤ F= 'analytic language' vs. D= 'synthetic language'
(Siemund 2004)

➤ Causal constructions with colour term express excessiveness, exaggeration:

(1a) F. *Il est vert de jalousie*

lit. 'He is green with envy'

(1b) D. *Er ist gelb vor Neid*

lit. 'He is yellow with envy'

(2a) F. *Marie est rouge de colère*

lit. 'Maria is red with anger'

(2b) D. *Peter ist rot vor Aufregung*

lit. 'Peter is red with excitement'

➤ D privileges compounding

- German ‘**augmentative compounds**’ (Lohde 2006: 64) for expression of excessiveness:

Examples:

(6a) F. *Marie est verte/morte de peur* (causal construction)

lit. ‘Maria is green/dead of fear’

(6b) D. *Maria hat Todesangst* (compound)

lit. ‘Maria has death fear’

(7a) F. *Je suis bleue de froid*

lit. ‘I am blue of cold’

(7b) D. *Mir ist eiskalt*

lit. ‘to me is ice cold’

- German focuses on comparison meaning, French on causality

5. Differences in meaning and use between F/D

- Survey with F and D speakers
- Earlier surveys by Soriano and Valenzuela (2009) and Simmons (2011) with pre-selected associations
- Our survey: contrastive, no pre-selected associations

5.1. Participants and survey design

- 26 French-speaking students of Romance languages at the Université catholique de Louvain in Belgium
- 26 German students of different subjects (Romance languages, cultural studies, politics, history, but also engineering, biology, and so on) at the University of Jena in Germany

Part I:

- 11 basic colours defined by Berlin and Kay (1969)
- which emotion associated with the specific colours?

Part II:

- Both groups of participants received example of causal construction in their mother tongue:
 - Pierre/Marie est ... de joie/jalousie/bonheur/...*
 - Peter/Petra ist ... vor Freude/Eifersucht/Glück/...*
 - ‘Peter/Petra is ... from/of joy/jealousy/ happiness/...’
- + list of basic emotions, e.g., happiness, jealousy, anger, rage,...
- Task: add a colour term to the construction containing a specific emotion
- several combinations possible

5.2. Results of Part II

Some tendencies:

Emotions positive (+) or negative (-)	French	German	Metaphor/Metonymy
(+) love, passion,...	Red	Red	Metaphor
(-) anger, ire,...	Red	Red	Metonymy
(-) jealousy, envy	Green	Yellow	Metonymy
(-) fear, worry	Blue	White	Metonymy
(-) hate, pain, trouble	Black	Black	Metaphor

Table 3: Selection of colour terms in causal construction by F and D participants

- Most colour terms associated with emotions by metonymy
→ 'fluid rise' (Soriano/Valenzuela 2009: 423)

- **Differences between F & D in colour term selection**
for some emotions
- Statistical significance of the differences in the use of the colour terms in F & D calculated with a chi-square test
 - Green is very significant (with $df = 14$, $p < .001$)
 - Blue is slightly significant (with $df = 14$, $p < .05$)
 - Other colour terms do not differ from each other in a significant way in German and French
 - But: small number of participants!

5.3. Results of Part II and I

- Different associations dependent on context

Colour term	in causal construction (Part II)	out of linguistic context (Part I)
<i>White</i>	(-) anxiety, fear	(+) purity, cleanliness, clarity, well-being, freshness, calm, peace, new beginning, innocence, respect
<i>Green</i>	(-) jealousy, rage, fear or disgust	(+) freedom, hope, freshness, peace, calm, goodness, optimism, balance, affection

6. Conclusions

- **Conceptualizations** of colours are language-specific
- No complete overlapping in the use of colour terms in French and German:
 - Selection of different colour terms in the causal construction
 - Different associations with colour terms
- Frequency differences
 - due to typological differences
 - depend on favoured 'lexicalization patterns',
D: compounding vs. F: analytic expressions

➤ **Conceptualizations differ:**

- In one and same language:
 - dependent on context (general or specific linguistic structures, e.g. causal constructions)
 - 1 colour category can be associated with positive or negative feelings
- In one and same construction:
 - different speech communities will use one concept/category/colour in different ways;
e.g. *green* in F vs. *yellow* in D

➤ Pedagogical issues:

Topic of **categorization** is not dealt with in teaching manuals

But important:

(1) For **authentic** foreign language learning

(2) To learn to avoid misunderstandings

Ex. F. *devoir*; D. *müssen* ('must') or *sollen* ('should')

(3) To experience entering different worlds → see one's own world in a more differentiated way

Thank you!

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