The universalist hypothesis on evolution of color referents—archeology through linguistic means

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Berlin & Kay (1969) proposed that (1) there is a restricted universal inventory of color categories across most languages; and (2) a language adds basic color terms in a constrained order, interpreted as an evolutionary sequence order. It was followed by vast research and data that supported the hypothesis (see Kay et al. 1997, Kay et al. 2015, Cook et al. 2005). This study explores the evolutionary trajectory of color referents in Albanian through the linguistic patterns and evidence present at various levels of entrenchment and linguistic extension, shaped within a complex framework of historical and environmental influences. The evidence in this presentation validates the said hypothesis for the Albanian BCTs, with black, white, and red forming a distinct triad, followed by yellow as part of the initial stage array. The emergence of terms for green and blue may have occurred during the Latin period, marking the transition to the second stage, with only minor subsequent changes (cf. Cane 2003). The depth and extent of linguistic developments, the mainstream trends and qualitative and quantitative patterns, as well as the variations or capillary developments, the depth and span of the life cycles of the main lexical patterns, together with the cessation of lexical developments after the second array BCTs, tell us the history of BCT emergence and development. The Swadesh list (Swadesh 1952) includes the core BCTs, but it is too simple to capture the evolutionary dynamics. Each language may reveal idiosyncratic developments and trends.

The investigation focuses on the BCT framework, which is small enough and large enough for long-term development, with comparable and interrelated effect and force dynamics, features, aspects, trends, and patterns that are within a sort of "habitat," sufficiently autonomous to organize comparable measurement and evaluation, demonstrating a prototypical as well as idiosyncratic and detailed scenario of language development and evolution.

The evaluation is through a usage-based and cognitivist framework (see Langacker 1987, 1991, Croft & Cruse 2004, Bybee 2006, 2010, Verhagen 2007, Diessel 2017). This study exemplifies the intensive dynamics between usage and structuring, and how the former provides for and leads to the latter. The BCT development showcases that usage is not always direct and transparent, and may turn out ineffective if certain circumstances are insufficient, or even pre-emptive.

This approach offers to reconstruct the BCT history in particular, with broader implications for the language evolution in general. We can see traces of different ages and contexts on linguistic constructions, their extensions and their entrenchment. The linguistic evidence from this investigation outputs a mapping (with trends, distinctions, and classifications) that matches well with the history of the people.

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