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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO BASIC COLOUR TERMS IN ENGLISH

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Every colour has an essential semantic value in the world and in the people's life. Colours can influence the way of thinking, change people's mood and actions, thus causing various reactions. It can irritate or calm people's eyes; it can raise one's blood pressure or can restrain one's appetite. It is said that colours are responsible for at least 62% of one's first impressions.

People have classified colours into two categories: the warm and cool colours. The warm colours evoke feelings of happiness, love, optimism and energy. They are associated to daylight, sun, warmth, fire. The cool colours on the other hand are considered as calming and relaxing, but they are also associated to sadness, depression, and loneliness [3].

Everyone knows that the interpretation of colours differs in each culture. *Red* in Western cultures means love, passion, energy, anger, Valentine's Day; in Eastern cultures it means prosperity, good fortune, the colour worn by brides. *White* – in Western cultures means brides and weddings, angels, doctors, peace, purity; in Eastern cultures it means death, mourning and funerals, sadness[4].

An extremely important work upon basic colour terms was made by the anthropologists Berlin and Kay in their research "Basic Colour Terms". They discovered that a total inventory of exactly eleven basic colour categories exist of any given language. These are *white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey* [1]. Colour terms are used both with their literal meaning when the object it is referred to, is easily identified and with figurative meaning if its signification depends on the context it is placed in [4].

For further explanation of the two main basic colour terms (black and white) the *Black* colour will be analysed. As an adjective it is of the very dark colour due to the absence of or complete absorption of light, which makes it the opposite of the white. However it has also the meaning related to black people as in *black culture*. Black is associated with power, formality denoting strength and authority as in *black tie*. It is a mysterious colour connected with death, evil and mystery as in *blackmail, black market, or black propaganda*.

White is considered the opposite of black in all aspects. It is situated at the opposite side of the colour spectrum and thus reflects all the rays of light. White is associated with light, innocence, purity, virginity, goodness, free from malignity or evil intent, spotless, flawless, clean, bright. It is considered to be the colour of perfection. In other words, white means safety, purity, and cleanliness [2]. White usually has positive connotations as in *white lie* with the meaning of harmless. *White propaganda* is the opposite of the *black propaganda*. It can be defined as an attempt to clear unpleasant or incriminating facts about a person, in contrast with the meaning of *black wash* which means deliberately attempt to damage the reputation of a person, institution by emphasizing faults or mistakes.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that colour terms have been studied for centuries and they are of great significance for people of various cultural backgrounds. Being used in different expressions they have either a literal or a metaphorical meaning; being used separately colours evoke different emotions and feelings.

References

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