

## Balkanisms of Color: Black, and White and Red All Over

Victor A. Friedman

University of Chicago

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The title of my presentation plays on two American expressions: the first half references interethnic relations and the second half refers to an old elementary school riddle-joke. In the US, the expression “people of color,” although attested as early as 1813, did not acquire wide circulation until the 1970s. At issue was how to refer to people treated as non-white—particularly in the context of racism—without their necessarily being black (i.e., African-American). The usage raises the question of “color” as a cultural, evaluatory criterion, and such issues are of concern in all sorts of relationships of humans to the world around them including other humans, animals, objects, abstract concepts such as ‘fate’, etc. The opposition white/non-white has become defining in a number of ethnic studies dealing with class and so-called “race” in the United States, where, for example, Italians, Poles, and especially Jews were not part of the “white” social category until after World War Two (e.g. Jackson 1998, Roediger 2002, 2006). In the Balkans, too, a similar sort of opposition between “black” and “white” has been operative and remains in folklore, although “dark” vs “fair~pale” can also be relevant. Thus for example, the lustful and/or dangerous “Arab” of epic song is *crn* in Slavic or *i zi* ‘black’ in Albanian, while the beautiful maiden is *bela* or *e bardhë*. Moreover, the English translations of the latter category are revelatory of traditional cultural values: “fair” implies beauty while “pale” implies the same complexion but owing to ill health or some negative emotion. As we shall see later, color words index culture and inter-ethnic relations in other ways via loanwords.

The riddle joke goes like this: Question: What’s black and white and re[a]d all over? Answer: A newspaper. The joke depends on a combination of orality and literacy that relates to both the theme of color terminology and the theme of the Balkan sprachbund. (A brief digression: I consider the term *sprachbund* to be a German loanword in English, like the French *genre*. As such, I will neither capitalize nor italicize the term henceforth, and the plural will be sprachbunds.) Despite recent attacks on the concept of sprachbund (e.g., Stolz 2006), some of which curiously ignore Trubetzkoy’s (1923, 1928) original conceptual point that language similarities owing to diffusion display certain fundamental differences from language similarities owing to transmission (a point recently made in different terms by Labov 2007, albeit with certain problematic claims), the term nonetheless is a useful heuristic for discussing certain kinds of historical linguistic phenomena (cf. Hamp 1977). Among Truetzkoy’s (1928) original marks of the differentiation of the sprachbund from the language family was that the former shared “cultural words” while the latter shared core vocabulary. While the precise definition of both these terms is subject to more than a small amount of debate and variation, nonetheless as notional concepts they are well understood and, with due diligence and caution, can be properly distinguished. Moreover, the essence of the distinction, i.e. vocabulary that is cognate owing to regular sound change (i.e., core or “inherited”) and vocabulary that finds its way from one lexicon into another by some

other means (often called “borrowing”, sometimes “copying” [Gołąb 1976, Johanson 1992] and, on occasion, “stealing” [Müller 1854]) is, in the vast majority of cases, discernible enough. In fact, for the terms “core” and “culture” lexicon, what is actually at stake is “transmitted” and “diffused”.

Color terminology, like discourse particles, demonstrate that “core” and “culture” are not so much semantic concepts as diachronic ones: genealogical and areal, respectively. In both areas of vocabulary, some terms are generally genealogically inherited while others are more or less subject to areal diffusion. It is precisely this crossing of the notional core/culture divide, that would attract typologists (whose interests are achronic, as opposed to the diachronic concerns of genealogical and areal linguistics) seeking to quantify the “likelihood” of a term’s or concept’s transmission versus its diffusion. In the case of discourse particles, their very nature guarantees that their diffusion must be oral, i.e. the result of multilingual diffusion among speakers. Approaches to vocabulary—be they typological or glottochronological—that lack nuance cannot account for linguistic reality. Thus, for example, in Macedonian both *crn* and *kara* mean ‘black’, one of the two basic of colors, but their semantic fields are by no means isomorphic, although they do overlap. Thus, e.g., *kara sevda* ‘unrequited love’ and *crn Arapin* ‘Blackamoor’ have similar associations albeit in different semantic fields. A wine may be ‘red’ or ‘black’ or even “strawberry blond” (the problem of *rujno vino* versus *rusa kosa*, both probably from etymological ‘red, rust, etc.’). This is not to say that ‘black’ cannot be beautiful in the Balkans, but when it is, it either refers to some decoartive feature such as hair, brows, or eyes (e.g., *karakaşlı Haticem*) or is exceptional, as in the Pomak song *Nanurke, černa peperuda*. This song stands in contrast to standard Pomak images, which are the same as Bulgarian Christian ones: *rusa kosa* (Turkish *sarı saçlar*, but in Vitolishte also *sarija* instead of *rus[a]*), *bâli roki*, *bâli nogi*, and so on (Buruci n.d.). The connotations of ‘black’ and ‘white’ have even been internalized in Romani, where *kaljarel* ‘blacken, darken’ has negative meanings as in the song lyrics from *Uljum pišmani* ‘I regretted’:

*Ako daje, ako dado,*

*ako, ako, me oleske ka džav.*

*Ako daje, ako dado,*

*Te džanen tumaro muj na kaljarav*

OK mother, OK, father,

OK, OK, I will go to him.

OK mother, OK, father,

Know [that] your face I will not blacken’

Berlin and Kay (1969) and Jašar-Nasteva (1981) can be taken as the two opposite poles of Balkan color study. On the one hand, Berlin and Kay (1969) is the foundation for the modern approach to the bio-linguistic study of color perception and expression, arguing that the progression of basic distinctions is universal. On the other hand Jašar-Nasteva (1981) shows how color systems from different languages that come into contact, specifically in Macedonian in the Balkans, can form a new, and richer, system. In a sense, the approach of Berlin and Kay (1969) assumes the necessity of what Silverstein calls a monoglot standard. On the other hand, for example, Albanian *verdhë* and *gjelbër* as well as *yeshil* demonstrate how contact can affect color categories. And yet, it is also true that after ‘black(blue/green)’ and ‘white’, ‘red(/yellow)’ is the next

universally differentiated color. In the Balkans (and elsewhere) ‘red/yellow’ is the next most important in after ‘black’ and ‘white’ (cf. the comments on hair and wine, above). While this can be taken as a kind of universal, the fact that precisely these colors are most subject to Turkish influence can be taken as either universal or Balkan. It is especially noteworthy in this regard that *kara* ‘black’ is the only Turkish color-borrowing in Aromanian noted by Polenakovikj (2007).

Another example of culture-specific color-terms can be found in the hobby of dove-raising (*golubarstvo*) in Macedonia, where Turkish terms are used for the names of different types of birds, e.g. *ak kuruk* ‘white tail’, *kara kuruk* ‘black tail’, *beaz* (Tk *beyaz*) ‘[pure] white’, *sija* (Tk *siyah*) ‘[pure] black’ (Vlado Cvetkovski pc). This terminology can be treated as a technical subset of the colloquial standard. At the same time, it utilizes two layers of color vocabulary in Turkish itself, native and Arabo-Persian. Jašar-Nasteva (2001:48) also gives Turkish terminology for horse color in Macedonian: *abraš* ‘horse with white spots’, *dorija* (*doru*) dark-red, brown horse, *alčo*, *alatest* red horse.

A different domain of color terminology is found in relation to domesticated animals. Here, for example, the various terms that involve white coloring on small cattle recently compiled in Sobolev (2009:124-137, 184-189, 433-436, 482-487) involve the extent and distribution of Slavic, Romance, and Albanoid roots that turns out to have more interesting complexities than would be expected given the primacy of substrate theory in relationship to the terminology of animal husbandry. Thus, for example, in the Peloponnesian point the Slavonicisms *<sup>m</sup>b'elo* and *<sup>m</sup>b'ela* are used for ‘white ram or lamb’ and ‘white ewe’, respectively (Map 56), the Latinism *fλ'oro*, *fλ'ora* for ‘white goat’ (Map 86) and the Albanoid terms *λ'ara* or *<sup>m</sup>b'artsa* for ‘white-bellied goat’ (Map 88). This Albanoid root turns up with the meaning ‘white-bellied’ in Turia for sheep (Map 58), in Gega for goats (Map 88), but is not recorded for Peštani despite being used in Standard Macedonian, albeit with yet another meaning not covered in Sobolev (2009) ‘sheep or goat with white spots on the head or body’.

The division of labor between Turkish, on the one hand, and Slavic-Albanian-Aromanian, on the other, is reminiscent of Romance and Germanic words for domestic animals in English, which dates from after the Norman Conquest (1066): the live animal is often Germanic while its meat is Romance, e.g. cow-beef, sheep-mutton, calf-veal, swine-pork. The implication of this division is that the herders were Germanic-speaking, while their Romance-speaking masters consumed the meat that they prepared. At the same time, the linguistic ecology of color terminology in the Balkans, as demonstrated by the data in Sobolev (2009) evidences complexities of multilingual relations that defies the simplicity of binariness beyond Turkish/non-Turkish. Even such a division is misleading, however, since Turkisms occur strikingly in other parts of stock-breeding vocabulary. Thus, for example, in all the points covered by Sobolev (2009) the word denoting ‘breed’ (sort, kind) is invariably borrowed from Turkish—*cins*, *soy*, or *damar*—except for the points in Dalmatia, Montenegro, and Gegëri, where the source is Italian—*raca*, *sorta*, this latter not represented on the map—(Map 1). In the context of our comparison with English, the economic importance of ‘breed’ could be compared to the position of ‘meat’.

A comparison of this map with Map 1 of *Čelovek—Sem'ia* (Sobolev 2005), which is for *rod* in the sense of ‘family, clan, group of descendents of a common ancestor’, however, yields the interesting result that in Ravna (NE Bulgaria) *cins* is used for both

humans and animals, but in the meaning ‘family, clan’ it is marked as archaic. In Eratyra (Macedonian Selce, Greece), the Turkisms *soy* and *damar* are for people while *raca* is for animals. On the other hand, Kastelli (Peloponnese) uses all three Turkisms for animals but only *soy* and *damari* for people. The one Aromanian point in Sobolev (2005, 2009) uses a Turkism (*dāmār<sup>i</sup>*, etc.) for ‘breed’ but *soy* as well as a native formation based on the meaning ‘root’ for human descent group. The data for Albanian give only *fis* for the human unit, and indeed this word translates roughly ‘tribe’, as opposed to *vllazni* ‘clan’ (Geg) derived from *vlla* ‘brother’. The Slavic etymological equivalent of *vllazni*, however, *bratstvo*, is the term used for descent group in Zavala (Montenegro), where the usual Slavic *rod* is normally used for the bride’s family. Given that this usage occurs precisely in Montenegro, we can posit Albanian semantic influence. It is also interesting to note that while *cins* occurs for human descent group in the two Slavic villages with the strongest Turkish or Muslim contact, i.e. Ravna in northeast Bulgaria and Gela in the Rhodopes, both also have Slavic *rod* whereas the Greek points have no native term for either concept, and Turia has a native term for human descent group but not for animal breed.

Thus, in discussing what is Balkan about Balkan color terminology, we are faced, as in other areas, with the special position of Turkish. Even the word for ‘color’ itself shows the layers of language contact in the Balkans, with the Persian Turkism *reng* and native Turkish *boya*, in competition with Balkan Indo-European forms like Macedonian *cvet* and Albanian *ngjyrë*. In terms of distribution, Balkan color terminology is an excellent locus for studying both the specific and the universal. The more basic the color in universal terms, the more likely it is to have a Turkish doublet in the Balkans. Moreover, the less basic the term is, the greater the likelihood that if there is a Turkism for it, it will be the only color (e.g. *pembe* ‘pink’), although between these two poles there are shades of meaning just as there are shades of color (see especially Jašar-Nasteva 1981). At the same time, the deployment of color terms from different languages marks a variety of socio-economic features. In stock-breeding, we see contact among the Balkan Indo-European languages that no doubt reflects the social structure of the relevant period of vocabulary transfer, and yet the word for ‘breed’ itself shows the importance of the languages associated with socio-economic power (Turkish, Italian), as do color terms associated with prestigious animals that were not raised for consumption, such as pigeons and horses. We can conclude that as in other areas, the study of Balkan colors gives us insight both into the specificities of Balkan history and the possibilities of language contact.

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