SYMBOLISM OF COLOUR NAMES WITH THE MEANING "FREEDOM" IN GERMAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This article analyses the functioning of the adjectival colour names grün and blau in modern German political discourse when they take on a political connotation. It studies the specific patterns of their functioning in German political texts. The examples prove that the colour names have a political connotation, conveying both traditional and new meanings which reflect the modern realities of the social and political life in Germany. In addition, it reveals how frequently separate meanings of these linguistic units are displayed in German political discourse. The colour term grün turns out to be the most common in political publications to name the party Die Grünen, its policy and the political views of the electorate. Nowadays this colour name also represents ecology and environmental protection, freedom, and hope. It acquires a meaning "renewable" in the phrase grüne Energie and "misleading about environmental effects" in grün waschen. As in many other cultures, the colour name blau symbolizes truth, freedom, infinity, devotion, loyalty, tranquility, liberalism. Linguistic analysis shows that blau in modern German political discourse carries many meanings as well. It is associated with the FDP, the EU and NATO. It also relates to Ukraine, the US Democratic Party, the German police, and appears in various national campaigns and programs – "bunt statt blau" and "Aktion Blau plus" in particular. The results of this study significantly expand the information available in political linguistics and modern Germanic studies on the semantics of basic colour names in the German language and illustrate their political connotation.

Keywords: Political discourse, colour names, freedom, adjectives

1. Introduction

Along with such categories as time, space, movement, colour also appears to be a form of cognition. It is always associated with the objects of the world around us. Deciphering these objects and phenomena, a person expresses their own attitude towards them through colour designations.

The study of colour-denoting vocabulary in linguistics has been carried out for many decades (Gericke, 1970; Gipper, 1957; Ludwig, 1966; Sveshnikova, 1969; Wittmers & Pfütze, 1967) – to name a few). But the study of colour names as a linguocultural phenomenon began only in the second half of the 20th century. They were later reconsidered at the turn of the century also taking into account the examples of various linguocultures amid fundamental principles of foreign and Russian political linguistics (Altmann, 1999; Babaytsev, 2007; Bernhart, 2008; Borisova, 2008; Braem, 1985; Riedel, 1999; Heller, 2005; Kukushkina & Gaydukova, 2009; Kulinskaya, 2002; Nikonova et al., 2020; Nikonova & Soloveva, 2019; Vendina, 2000; Zolnikova, 2010).

The most detailed description of the symbolism of colour names in German political discourse is presented in the works of psychologists and culture experts (Gerike, 1990; Kaiser, 2006; Kerimov, 2013; Lehmann, 1998; Schüler, 2006; Späti, 2010; Vasilevich, 1987, 1988). Though the colour names in the German language have always been the subject of scientific interest, their functioning in German political discourse still requires a lot of study today. Moreover, the current global changes are directly reflected in the realities of the political world and the language of politics.

Escalation of tension, open confrontation, military conflicts, defamation, and bullying have become common not only among people and social groups, but also between individual states and coalitions of countries. Emotions are running high around the world. The escalating political atmosphere gives rise to acquiring new meanings and contexts for linguistic units.

The aspects mentioned above determine the relevance of this work.

2. Problem Statement

A wide range of colours, tones and shades in the surrounding world predetermines the necessity to nominate various colour designations in all spheres of human life.

The problem of their functioning in the political discourse of modern Germany has been poorly studied. In politics, colour names have a lot of symbolic meanings. Specific colours in politics can relate to certain political parties, state institutions, various social groups, political regimes, international organizations, etc.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this research is the functional potential of basic adjectival colour names and their substantive derivatives in modern German political discourse, with the colour names acquiring a political connotation. Two colour names are to be considered as basic ones – grün and blau.

The material for the study includes extracts from modern German publications in recent 15 years, German online publications on political topics, and examples drawn from the German Reference Corpus

COSMAS II (Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System) hosted at the Institute for the German Language (IDS) in Mannheim. The total volume of empirical evidence is 480 text units. The total number of color names selected for analysis comes to 730 units.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to identify the functioning features of the basic adjective colour names *grün* and *blau* in modern German political discourse, illustrating the political connotation of adjectival colour names and their substantive derivatives in political texts.

5. Research Methods

We used the following methods of linguistic analysis: continuous sampling; component analysis of the meanings of lexical units; contextual analysis of the meanings of basic colour names; linguistic description and classification of linguistic means; generalization of factual material and mathematical calculation.

6. Findings

Linguistic analysis of the study in which contexts the basic colour names in German political discourse are used showed the following results.

Grün

The colour name *grün* in modern political discourse carries a lot of semantic meanings. Green is the colour of life, pure nature, harmony, health, tranquillity. This colour is the one to represent freedom, security, and reliability. It is not surprising that green is a symbol of nature, environment, and ecology. The symbolic meanings of green are displayed in modern German political discourse either way. The analysis of practical material allows us to highlight the following main meanings:

1) the traditional meaning of green as **the colour of hope and freedom**, for example:

Am Armgelenk trägt Maede Soltani zwei grüne Bändchen. Grün ist die Farbe der Demokratiebewegung in ihrer Heimat. Und grün ist die Farbe der Hoffnung. Die will sie nicht aufgeben: Schon einmal hatte ein Richterspruch gegen ihren Vater vor dem Revisionsgericht keinen Bestand, das Verfahren endete mit einem Freispruch in allen Punkten. "Meinen Vater", sagt Maede Soltani, "wird dieses Regime nicht brechen." (Maede Soltani wears two green ribbons on her wrist. Green is the colour of the democracy movement in their homeland. And green is the colour of hope. She does not want to give it up: already once a judge's verdict against her father failed at the court of appeal, with the proceedings resulting in an acquittal of all charges. "This regime will not break my father," says Maede Soltani.). (Süddeutsche Zeitung. Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System, [SDZ], 2012 p. 33)

Maede Soltani hopes for a better fate for her father, who has been accused of propaganda and actions to undermine the state regime in his country. Green here symbolizes hope for a change, hope for a better future.

2) **the name of the political party** in Germany ***Die Grünen*** that appeared amid rising environmental problems in the 70-80s and uses "green" as its official colour. Having established green as the colour of the party, Die Grünen paved the way for the politicization of green in general. The colour designation in the form of a substantive adjective is used directly in the official name of the party:

 Die Grünen haben nach ihrem schlechten Wahlergebnis ihre bisherige Führung fast komplett abgeräumt, die SPD hat sich mit den Grünen für ihre herbe Wahlniederlage noch nichternsthaft befasst (After their poor election result, the Greens have almost completely cleared their previous leadership; the SPD has not yet dealt seriously with the Greens for their bitter election defeat) (Die Zeit (Online-Ausgabe). Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System [DZ], 2013, p. 9).

The indicated colour name bears other meanings in German political discourse, which, however, are closely related to this meaning:

3) **the party policy** (*grün regieren*) with the colour designation *grün* being the adverbial modifier of attending circumstances which modifies the predicate regieren:

An diesem Dienstag ernennt das Kabinett deshalb nur die parteilose Bärbel Schaefer, bislang Leiterin des Rechtsamtes im grün regierten Freiburg, zur neuen Präsidentin in eben diesem Regierungsbezirk (On this Tuesday, the cabinet will only appoint the non-party Bärbel Schaefer, who was previously in charge of the legal office in the green ruled Freiburg, as the new president in this same administrative district). (SDZ, 2012, p. 6)

 The green colour here indicates that the city council of Freiburg holds the absolute majority of the "green party" representatives.

4) **the political position of the electorate** (*grün wählen*), where the colour name *grün* also acts as the adverbial modifier of attending circumstances modifying the predicate *wählen*:

München - Die Grünen wollen sich im Bundestagswahlkampf mit sozialen Themen profilieren. Soziale Gerechtigkeit ist eines der Hauptmotive, grün zu wählen (Munich – The Greens want to distinguish themselves in the federal election campaign with social issues. Social justice is one of the main reasons for choosing green) (SDZ, 2012, p. 1).

This example indicates that the party Die Grünen is to be voted for. In the sentence *"Ich wähle grün, weil ich Umweltschutz wichtig finde. Die Wirtschaft zu stärken finde ich aber auch wichtig - deswegen bin ich eigentlich auch für die Elbvertiefung, da sind die Grünen aber dagegen. Aber es gibt eben keine Partei, bei der alles passt." ("I choose green because I find environmental protection important. But I also think it's important to strengthen the economy - that's why I'm for deepening and widening the River Elbe, but the Greens are against it. But there is no party where everything fits.")* (Braunschweiger Zeitung. Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System [BZ], 2013, p. 21)

the speaker makes a choice in favour of Die Grünen to stand for their political program.

5) **ecology and environmental protection**, closely related to the symbolism of green:

Horst Frank trat die grüne Welle los, die inzwischen ganz Baden-Württemberg erfasst hat: Die alten Jeans hat der ehemalige Maoist längst gegen ein Sakko eingetauscht. Manche fragen sich, was eigentlich noch Grün an dem Politiker sei. Die Konstanzer sagen dann: "Der OB fährt viel Rad." (Horst Frank started the green wave that has now spread through all of Baden-Württemberg: the former Maoist has long since exchanged his old jeans for a jacket. Some wonder what is still green about the politician. The people of Constance then say: "The lord mayor cycles a lot.") (SDZ, 2012, p. 6).

In this example, the colour name *grün* designates environmentally friendly behaviour and care for the environment.

Let us analyse the following example:

Brüssel. Bundeslandwirtschaftsministerin Ilse Aigner (CSU) ist der Plan grün genug: Was sie in zweitägiger Sitzung mit ihren EU-Kollegen ausgehandelt habe, werde für "ein wirksames Greening" des gemeinsamen Agrarmarktesgen. In den nächsten sieben Jahren werde also in Europa Ackerbau und Viehzucht auf eine viel schonendere Weise betrieben: mit mehr Rücksicht auf die Natur, Tierwelt, Ressourcen, Klima. Grüne und Umweltschützer können indes in dem Paket nur grüne Spuren-Elemente entdecken (Brussels. For German Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner (CSU) the plan is green enough: What she negotiated with her EU colleagues in a two-day meeting would ensure "an effective greening" of the common agricultural market. In the next seven years, agriculture and animal husbandry will be practiced in Europe in a much gentler way having more consideration for nature, wildlife, resources, and the climate. The Greens and environmentalists, however, can only find green trace elements in the package). (BZ, 2013 p. 32)

It conveys an idea that there should be more focus on environmental protection and improvement in Europe to boost agricultural development, and the colour name *grün* here reflects the environmentally oriented nature of future changes.

Environmental issues largely determine the politics in Germany now. It is not surprising that the green colour has become so commonly used in a political discourse and took on new meanings, for example, *grüne Energie*, which could be translated into Russian as "green energy" or "renewable energy":

In den nächsten zehn Jahren werden sich die Kapazitäten in Deutschland von 45 auf 90 Giga- watt verdoppeln. Damit lässt sich bei idealen Bedingungen - wenn die Sonne scheint und der Wind weht - das ganze Land mit grüner Energie versorgen (In the next ten years, capacities in Germany will double from 45 to 90 gigawatts. With ideal conditions provided - when the sun is shining, and the wind is blowing - the whole country can be supplied with green energy) (SDZ, 2012, p. 16).

The adjectival colour name *grün* in this context means "extracted from natural sources, renewable".

Nowadays ecological issues are of particular importance for Germany in general; hence the reason the colour name *grün* in political discourse has acquired a new meaning. Let us take as an example the phrase *grün waschen* which is false advertising aimed at misleading the consumer about the company's commitment to providing sustainable products or services in order to gain political and public support and pretend to be eco-friendly. Here *grün* means 6) **misleading about environmental effects**:

Opfer der Giftgas-Katastrophe im indischen Bhopal protestierten am Donnerstag in London gegen den Olympia-Sponsor Dow Chemical. Der Chemie-Konzern hatte 1999 die Firma Union Carbide aufgekauft, die 1984 eine der größten Industrie-Katastrophen der Geschichte verursacht hatte. Schätzungen zufolge starben damals bis zu 25,000 Menschen, die meisten aus einem Elendsviertel in unmittelbarer Nähe der Pestizidfabrik. Etwa eine halbe Million Menschen leidet bis heute unter den Folgen der Katastrophe. "Wir protestieren, weil Dow versucht, seine Verbrechen grün zu waschen (Victims of the gas leak disaster in Bhopal, India protested against the Olympic sponsor Dow Chemical in London on Thursday. In 1999, the chemical company bought Union Carbide, which in 1984 caused one of the greatest industrial disasters in history. It is estimated that up to 25,000 people died at the time, most of them living in the slums in proximity to the pesticide factory. Around half a million people are still suffering from the consequences of the disaster. "We're protesting because Dow Chemical is trying to greenwash its crimes). (SDZ, 2012, p. 33)

Dow Chemical, which once was involved in the toxic spills scandal, was claimed to be using their sponsorship of the London Olympic Games as green marketing. This meaning is conveyed precisely through the phrase *grün waschen*.

In general, mathematical calculations of how frequently separate meanings of the colour name *grün* are used in German political discourse have shown that the political party Die Grünen is the reason why the green colour bears a political connotation in the German language. Most often, green in political texts is associated with Die Grünen (35%) or reflects the party policy (19.8%) and the political views of the voters (14.2%). Green in German political discourse also relates to ecology and environmental protection (11.7%) and is the colour of hope (5.6%). In addition, *grün* in the phrase *grüne Energie* means "extracted from naturally resources, renewable" (9%), and in *grün waschen*, green acquires the meaning of misleading about the environmental effects or impact of something (4.7%).

The colour name *grün* prevails as the most common among the basic colour designations analysed in the study (27.1% of the total number of linguistic units).

Blau

Traditionally, the blue colour symbolizes infinity, truth, devotion, loyalty, tranquillity and is associated with aristocracy and liberalism. This is the colour of nature: the colour of the sky, the colour of the water. In national flags all around the world the blue colour is used to represent freedom, national unity and belonging to a larger whole.

We analysed examples of colour naming in the German political discourse and the results show that most commonly the colour name *blau* is used to symbolize 1) **the Free Democratic Party (FDP)**, a liberal political party in Germany which recognizes blue – along with yellow – as the official party colours. Moreover, in German media the colour name *blau* is often used to refer to 2) **the European Union** and **NATO**, with blue being the colour of their flags, e.g.:

Es gibt keine andere vernünftige Erklärung für das, was Moskau mit der Ukraine macht, als Geopolitik. Und nach deren Regeln verhält sich Russland logisch: All die Vasallen- und Pufferstaaten, die zur Sowjetzeit auf der Karte einen roten Wall an Russlands Westgrenze bildeten, sind heute blau eingefärbt - blau wie die Flaggen von EU und Nato (There is no other reasonable explanation for what Moscow is doing with Ukraine than geopolitics. And according to their rules, Russia behaves in a logical way: All the vassal and buffer states that formed a red wall on Russia's western border during the Soviet times are now coloured blue - blue like the flags of the EU and NATO). (SDZ, 2012, p. 15)

In the example above the colour name **blau** is used to symbolize the EU and NATO. The blue colour here indicates that the post-Soviet states and those previously focused on the USSR have changed their policy – and colour – and now identify with the economic and military institutions of the West.

The colour name *blau* is also used in German media to symbolize 3) **the Democratic Party of the US**, e.g.:

Das zweite Experiment heißt Chris Christie. Als republikanischer Gouverneur in einem Staat mit zwei demokratischen Parlamentskammern hat er keine andere Wahl, als dem politischen Gegner die Hand zu geben. Nach dem verheerenden Hurrikan Sandy im Herbst 2012 erhob Christie diesen Stil zum Markenzeichen. All seine Energie widmete er den Sturmopfern in seinem Küstenstaat. Die politischen Farben Rot und Blau waren wie weggespült, Christie umarmte sogar den demokratischen Präsidenten Obama, weil der schnell Geld und Helfer geschickt hatte (The second experiment is called Chris Christie. As the Republican governor in a state with two Democratic Houses of Parliament, he has no other choice but to shake hands with the political opponent. After the devastating Hurricane Sandy in the autumn of 2012, Christie made this style a trademark. He devoted all his energy to the storm victims in his coastal state. As the political colours red and blue were washed away, Christie even hugged the Democratic President Obama because he had quickly sent money and helpers). (SDZ, 2012, p. 18)

As we can see, the colour here is designated by a substantivized adjective *der Blau*. Chris Christie represents the Republican Party (the official party colour is red) in a state with a pro-democratic majority in both houses of the Legislature (the official colour of the Democratic party is blue). In this context both political colours – *Rot und Blau* (red and blue) – as well as the differences between the respective parties and traditional political rivals seem to have lost their meaning in the face of a common threat.

In Germany, the colour name *blau* is also associated with 4) **police** as the German police wear dark blue uniforms:

Aus BGS wird Bundespolizei. Den neuen Namen für den Bundesgrenzschutz beschließt das Kabinett im Januar, ab 1. Juli soll er gelten. Auch das Erscheinungsbild der Innenminister Otto Schily (SPD) unterstellten Truppe verändert sich: Die Beamten erhalten die Polizeifarbe Blau (The Federal Border Guard becomes Federal Police. The cabinet decided on the new name for the Federal Border Guard in January, and it will apply from July 1. The appearance of the troops subordinate to Interior Minister Otto Schily (SPD) is also changing: the officers are given the police colour blue). (FOCUS…, 2014, p. 13).

This example shows that in Germany blue is the colour of the Federal Police (formerly the Federal Border Guard) which after the renaming also changed the colour of their uniforms.

Recently, the colour name *blau* has also appeared in German media amid various national campaigns, projects and programs,

e.g. 1. Um ein Zeichen gegen das Rauschtrinken zu setzen, startet die Krankenkasse DAK-Gesundheit jetzt zum fünften Mal ihre Präventionskampagne „bunt statt blau — Kunst gegen Komasaufen". Seit 2010 wurden bei „bunt statt blau" bereits 52 000 Schüler mit ihren Plakaten zu Botschaftern gegen das Komasaufen (In order to set an example against binge drinking, the health insurance company DAK-Gesundheit is now launching its prevention campaign "colourful instead of blue - art against binge drinking" for the fifth time. Since 2010, 52,000 schoolchildren have already become ambassadors at "bunt statt blau" with their posters against binge drinking). (Rhein-Zeitung [RZ]…, 2014, p. 15)

In this example the colour name *blau* is used as a part of the campaign name and its motto – *bunt statt blau* (colourful instead of blue) – referring to the campaign against alcohol abuse and so-called coma drinking among young people which was organized by the German health insurance company DAK-Gesundheit. *2.*

Das soll sich jetzt ändern, und damit wollen die Verantwortlichen auch die EU-Wasserrahmenrichtlinie umsetzen, die den Mitgliedstaaten vorschreibt, ihre Gewässer in einen guten ökologischen Zustand zu bringen. „Die Renaturierung des Bachs ist eine erhebliche ökologische Aufwertung", betonte Rummel. Nach Angaben von Dagmar Menges kostet die Umgestaltung 80 000 Euro. 90 Prozent finanziere das Land über das Förderprogramm „Aktion Blau plus". 10 Prozent

kommen vom Kreis aus dem Ausgleichstopf für den Bau des Industriegebiets Plaidt Süd (That is about to change, and those responsible also want to implement the EU Water Framework Directive, which requires the member states to bring their waters to a good ecological status. "The renaturation of the stream is a considerable ecological upgrade," emphasized Rummel. According to Dagmar Menges, the redesign will cost 80,000 euros. The state finances 90 percent through the "Aktion Blau plus" funding program. The district gives 10 percent from the compensation pot for the construction of the Plaidt Süd industrial area). (RZ, 2014, p. 27)

As we can see, the colour name blau here is used in the name of the natural water restoration program *Aktion Blau Plus* (Blue Action Fund).

During our research we also came across several cases of using the colour name *blau* in the meaning of 5) **the national colour of Ukraine** (along with yellow),

e.g.: Lemberg in der Westukraine gilt den Menschen im Süden und Osten als Hort von Nationalisten und Separatisten. Die beherrschenden Farben in der Stadt sind Blau und Gelb, die Farben der Ukraine und Europas. Die große Mehrheit der Menschen hier will die Ukraine als Gesamtstaat erhalten (For the people in the south and east Lviv in western Ukraine is considered a refuge for nationalists and separatists. The dominant colours in the city are blue and yellow, the colours of Ukraine and Europe. The vast majority of the people here want to keep Ukraine as a state). (DZ, 2013, p. 4)

Blau und Gelb beisammen: Seit Dezember schwenken Demonstranten in Kiew nicht nur die ukrainische, sondern auch die europäische Flagge. Jetzt gibt es die Annäherung auch offiziell; beim Gipfel in Brüssel unterzeichneten beide Seiten ein Abkommen. Nun suchen sie einen Kurs gegenüber Moskau (Blue and yellow together: protesters in Kiev have been waving not only the Ukrainian but also the European flag since December. Now the rapprochement is also officially available; both sides signed an agreement at the Brussels summit. Now they are looking for a course towards Moscow) (SDZ, 2012, p. 8).

In both examples, the colour name *blau* is expressed by substantivized adjectives and used not only to symbolize the national colour of Ukraine, but also to refer to Europe. Considering the latest global political trends, the cases of using the colour name *blau* with the double meaning are becoming more and more frequent.

The frequency data of using the colour name *blau* are as following: «the Free Democratic Party of Germany (FDP) » (21.9 %), «the EU and NATO» (19.8 %), «the German police» (14.6 %), «Ukraine and Ukraine-related designations» (12.5 %), «the Democratic Party of the US» (10,4 %).

In general, it should be noted that the colour name *blau* does not appear very often in political media texts. The relevant frequency of its use from the total number of analysed colour names stands at 13.2 %.

7. Conclusion

A study of the functional potential of basic colour names *grün* and *blau* in German political discourse has shown that they have a political connotation, carrying both traditional and new meanings that reflect the modern realities of social and political life in Germany. The colour name *grün* is more common primarily due to wide-ranging political discussions of environmental issues and tensions around the world, as well as protesting moods in Germany.

One of the symbolic meanings of these adjectival colour names relates to freedom.

The results of the study expand the information available in political linguistics and modern Germanic studies on the semantics of basic colour names in the German language, illustrating their political connotation.

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