

## COLOUR TERMS OF WHITE IN THE NARYM AND TAZ DIALECTS OF THE SELKUP LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

The relevance of the study is determined by several reasons. Firstly, the languages of the indigenous peoples of Siberia belong to the category of languages that do not have an ancient written tradition, and the texts of these peoples present a valuable linguistic material that allows to obtain important data, as well as to draw significant conclusions about the specifics of the genesis of linguistic and cultural processes of the relevant ethnic groups. Secondly, in recent years there has been a certain increase in the field of the lexical systems' research of the aboriginal languages of Siberia in connection with the typological problems. However, up to the present time, no attempts to undertake a special study of the colour terms of the minor peoples of Siberia according to the unified methodology have been made. It is also true to the Selkup language, which belongs to the Samoyed branch of the Uralic languages and may be regarded as a set of dialects. On the material of prose folklore texts, as well as archive and lexicographical works on the Taz and Narym dialects of Selkup, an attempt to describe the semantic category of "white" is made. It is necessary to mention that the lack of texts in these unwritten dialects is evident. And that is why, the study was impossible without the creation of the set of necessary materials to interview the informants. Thus, the lexicotypological questionnaires on the basis of the frame theory (E. Rakhilina) (see [1]) were composed. It allowed us to obtain about 1000 separate sentences with colour terms and 170 texts in the Narym dialect of the unwritten Selkup language (the total number of lexical units of the new text corpora is more than 11,000). The analyses of date allowed as to distinguish four term for white in the Taz and Narym dialect. Colour terms *səry* in the Taz dialect and *cag* in the Narym dialect should be determined as basic ones. The method of investigation of the colour terms is based on the analyses of their compatibility. The constructions with the colour terms are put into comparative tables, which reflect the semantics of the same items in the Taz and Narym dialects of the Selkup language, attributed by the colour terms of white.

**Keywords:** Selkup language, colour terms, basic colour terms, white, black

### INTRODUCTION

According to the areal classification, the Taz dialect is a Northern dialect, it is spoken in the Krasnoyarsk region of the Russian Federation. It is mostly investigated by the researchers of the State Moscow University (see [2]). Narym dialect belongs to the Southern dialects and geographically covers the territory of the Tomsk region of the Russian Federation. It is mostly studied by the scholars of the so-called Dulson's school (Tomsk State Pedagogical University). But it will be true to mention that lexical and semantic structure of this dialect are practically not examined yet.

In the fundamental work on the Taz dialect, which is called the “Essays on the Taz Dialect” (1980) there is a small chapter on polysemy, which deals with the question of epy semantics of colour adjectives [2]. In 1978 L. Alitkina studied adjectives of the Selkup language, but her work didn’t aim to analyze the semantics of the colour terms of the Selkup language, it was the first investigation in the field of the Selkup adjectives of the descriptive nature [3].

Turning to the history of the study of the lexical system’s structure of the colour terms in the languages of the world, it should be noted that, as a rule, the review of the history begins with the famous work by B. Berlin and P. Kay devoted to the evolution of the colour terms and the universals in this ground. According to this theory for a determined period of time any language has a fixed set of “basic” colour terms (they are monolexic, i.e. non-derivative and simple, psychologically relevant (psychologically salient for informants), i.e. they occur in the idiolects of all informants, they are among the first answers of the elicited list of colour terms, they have a stable denotation, their significations are not included in the signified of any other colour terms, they have a wide compatibility). The authors concluded that a universal system of colour terms is composed of 11 colour categories: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, gray. In the course of the history of the language, this set of terms changes and any language goes through 7 periods of development: initially the terms of white and black appear. The methodology of B. Berlin and P. Kay belongs to the psycholinguistic one, grounded on the correlation of 320 colour chips with the list of “basic” colour terms of a particular language [4].

Another method of investigation of the colour terms in a language is based on the analyses of their compatibility. Analyzing the combinability, the technique developed by A. Dybo for studying semantic changes is used in the present work [5]. The technique by A. Dybo was modified by J. Normanskaya for studying the semantics of terms of colour [6]. The constructions with the colour terms which characterize one or another subject in natural language are put into comparative tables. This technique allows to study the semantics of the same items in different languages, to analyze the semantics of the colour terms characterizing different objects within one language and to reveal intra-system changes.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The dictionaries of the Taz dialect of the Selkup language contain the following entries of the colour terms for white. In the dictionary of the “Essays on the Taz Dialect” only the term *səry* ‘white’ is given, but in the Northern Selkup dictionary by E. Helinski there are three terms which are translated by the adjective ‘white’: *səry* ‘white; light, pale, gray’, *cāqy* ‘white’, and *štäl* which means ‘deer (stag)’ and ‘white, light’ when it describes the suit of the animal (but not of a deer or a stag) [7]. In the texts and lexicographical materials we have found attributive constructions only with the term *səry* ‘white’. It is the most commonly in use and has a wide compatibility. The etymology of the term is not entirely clear. Yu. Janhunen doesn’t unite *sər* ‘white’, *sər* ‘ice’ and *syrā* ‘snow’ into one dictionary entry. However, one can find that the dictionary entries of these three lexemes are etymological linked in the dictionary [8]. In the Narym dialect of the Selkup language there is the only colour term denoting white. This term is *cag*, which has the meaning of ‘white, light, grey (about the hair)’. The

examples of the constructions with *səry* and *cag* are given in tables, the material is distributed into several thematic groups:

Table 1. Objects denoting appearance.

| Object               | Translation  | Construction, its translation                     | Comments  |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| T. <i>kurās</i>      | appearance, image, look, shape; colour, colouring; beauty      | <i>səry kurāsyl'</i> 'of white colour'            | Noun <i>kurāsyl'</i> is used in a relative adjectival form, i.e. is used in the sense of 'referring to the colour'.   |
| T. <i>kōrāty</i>     |  | <i>səry kōrāty</i> 'white of the eye'             | The semantics of the <i>kōrāty</i> is not clear (there are no data in the dictionaries); probably the lexeme corresponds to <i>kora</i> 'bend', than the literal translation of the attributive construction is 'white bend'.   |
| N. <i>χajst pudz</i> | 'white of the eye' (literal translation – 'middle of the eye') | <i>cag χajst pudz</i> 'white of the eye'          | The literal translation of the attributive construction is 'white middle of the eye'.   |
| T. <i>sajy</i>       | eye  | <i>səry sajy</i> 'eyesore'                        | The literal translation of the attributive construction is 'white eye'.   |
| T. <i>olyl'</i>      | headed   | <i>səry olyl'</i> ~ <i>sərolyl'</i> 'gray-haired' | The literal translation of the construction T. <i>səry olyl'</i> ~ <i>sərolyl'</i> is 'white-headed'. The nouns T. <i>olyl'</i> and N. <i>olsl</i> are used in a relative adjective form. The meanings of the constructions in the Taz and Narym dialects are different; they denote two different colours of the hair. |
| N. <i>olsl</i>       | headed   | <i>cagolsl</i> 'blond'                            |   |
| T. <i>ōptyl'</i>     | haired   | <i>səry ōptyl'</i> 'gray-haired'                  | The literal translation of the construction is 'white-haired'. The noun <i>ōptyl'</i> is used in a relative adjective form.   |
| N. <i>kadzχ'ε</i>    | hair   | <i>cag kadzχ'ε</i> 'blond'                        | In the Selkup texts in the Taz dialect the noun <i>oly</i> 'head' is used more often in the meaning of hair. But Narym informants use the noun <i>kadzχ'ε</i> 'hair' more frequently instead of <i>ol</i> 'head' in the meaning of "hair".  |
| N. <i>ütēdz'ε</i>    | young man  | <i>cag ütēdz'ε</i> 'blond'                        | The literal translation of the contraction is 'a white young man'.  |
| T. <i>qum</i>        | man  | <i>səry ōptyl' qum</i> 'blond man'                | The literal translation of the contraction is 'white-haired man'.   |
| T. <i>wəntyl'</i>    | faced  | <i>səry wəntyl'</i> 'pale'                        | The literal translation of the contraction is 'white-faced'.  |
| N. <i>tar</i>        | animal hair  | <i>cag tar</i> 'white animal hair'                | The term <i>cag</i> determines the white colour of the animal hair.   |
| N. <i>tev</i>        | tooth  | <i>cag tev</i> 'white tooth'                      | This attributive construction has the meaning of "good-looking, healthy teeth"  |
| N. <i>təb</i>        | foot   | <i>cag təb</i> 'white foot'                       | The construction attributes the colour of the animal's hair on the foot.  |

Thus, such colours of the hair as “blonde” and “gray” are attributed by the term *səry*, but the objects of attribution are different. The term T. *səry* is also used to name the turbidity of the cornea *səry sajy* ‘eyesore’ and the convex outer part of the eye around the pupil *səry kōrāty* ‘white of the eye’. In the Narym dialect *cag* attributes only the blond colour of man’s hair (with different objects) and white colour of animal hair.

Table 2. Objects denoting the animals, fish and birds and the parts of the animal’s body.

| Object            | Translation | Construction, its translation               | Comments   |
|-------------------|-------------|---|--|
| T. <i>loqa</i>    | fox         | <i>səry loqa</i> ‘artic fox’                | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white fox’.   |
| N. <i>nülləga</i> | artic fox   | <i>cag nülləga</i> ‘artic fox’              | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white God fox’.   |
| N. <i>n’eva</i>   | hare        | <i>cag n’eva</i> ‘white hare’               | In the earlier date of the Selkup language the noun <i>n’eva</i> is not determined by the colour term.   |
| N. <i>kanak</i>   | dog         | <i>cag kanak</i> ‘white dog’                | The bog with pale colour of the hair may be determined by this construction.   |
| N. <i>kver’ε</i>  | crow        | <i>cag kver’ε</i> ‘white crow’              | This construction may be used in the meaning of ‘black sheep’, and presents the borrowing by means of replication from Russian <i>белая ворона</i> .   |
| N. <i>kurʃka</i>  | chicken     | <i>cag kurʃka</i> ‘white chicken’           | In the Selkup language there is no special system of colours for the animal hair or plumage. Domestic animals and birds don’t make the sense for the culture of Selkup, as this nation is a nation of traditional culture. The constructions where the objects are <i>tv’εg</i> ‘goos’ and <i>n’ab</i> ‘duck’ have the meaning “domestic”. |
| N. <i>təund</i>   | horse       | <i>cag təund</i> ‘white horse’              |  |
| N. <i>tv’εg</i>   | goose       | <i>cag tv’εg</i> ‘white goos’               |  |
| N. <i>n’ab</i>    | duck        | <i>cag n’ab</i> ‘white duck’                |  |
| N. <i>χyr</i>     | cow         | <i>cag χyr</i> ‘white cow’                  |  |
| T. <i>qopty</i>   | bull        | <i>səry qopty</i> ‘white bull’              |  |
| T. <i>štä</i>     | deer        | <i>səry štä</i> ‘white deer’                | Three white dears are the symbolic characters in the Selkup folklore.  |
| N. <i>aʃte</i>    | deer        | <i>cag aʃte</i> ‘white deer’                |  |
| T. <i>kury</i>    | ermine      | <i>səry kury</i> ‘ermine (Mustela erminea)’ | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white ermine’. The ermine in summer has two-tone colouring. It is brownish-red upperparts and yellowish white underparts, and in winter the fur’s colour of the animal is pure white.   |
| T. <i>qāly</i>    | fish        | <i>səry qāly</i> ‘white fish’               | In the Taz dialect there is also a set phrase <i>n’ār qāly</i> ‘salmon’ (The literal translation is ‘red fish’).   |

|                          |                     |   |   |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| N. <i>kilinɔl</i>        | breast              | <i>cag kilinɔl</i> ‘white breast’                 | These constructions are used to attribute the colour of the white hair of the animal parts of body. |
| N. <i>tal’dz’</i>        | tail                | <i>cag tal’dz’</i> ‘white tail’                   |   |
| N. <i>tal’dz’ət teib</i> | the end of the tail | <i>cag tal’dz’ət teib</i> ‘white end of the tail’ |   |
| N. <i>p’arg</i>          | stomach             | <i>cag p’arg</i> ‘white stomach’                  |   |

The construction T. *səry loqa* ‘artic fox’ can be referred to the neologisms, until recently, the Northern Selkups called the artic fox by the term *nūlloqa* ‘God fox’. In the Narym dialect nowadays the informants add a colour term *cag* to the noun *nūllɔga*. Often the white colour of the animal suit in the Selkup folklore embodies the idea of uniqueness and sanctity of the animal. The term of white is also involved in generalizing the category of species of fish with pale flesh colour (in contrast to the fish with the red colour of the flesh).

Table 3. Objects denoting the plants.

| Object          | Translation   | Construction, its translation            | Comments  |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| T. <i>qyt</i>   | moss, lichen  | <i>səry qyt</i> ‘swamp moss’             | The literal translation of the contractions is the ‘white moss’.  |
| N. <i>cumb</i>  | moss, lichen  | <i>cag cumb</i> ‘white moss’             |   |
| T. <i>n’ūqy</i> | the surface, cover; paint; leather; nuki (covering of the tent) | <i>səry n’ūqyl’ qyt</i> ‘swamp moss’     | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white surface moss’.   |
| N. <i>kv’ε</i>  | birch   | <i>cag kv’ε</i> ‘white birch’            | Probably the colour term in these constructions is a result of the calque from the Russia <i>белая береза, белая черемуха</i> , which are distinguished as a certain poetic images. |
| N. <i>te’εv</i> | bird cherry   | <i>cag te’εvlika</i> ‘white bird cherry’ |   |

In the Taz dialect, thus, we find examples of the set expressions denoting the swamp moss. In the Narym dialect there are examples of the attributive constructions of colour with the names of the trees, which may be regarded as certain poetic images taken from the Russian culture and language.

Table 4. Objects denoting metals.

| Object         | Translation | Construction, its translation | Comments   |
|----------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--|
| T. <i>kāsy</i> | metal       | <i>səry kāsy</i> ‘tin’        | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white metal’. |

In the Taz dialect there are another names of the metals which are formed by the means of the colour terms: *sāqy kāsy* ~ *sākāsy* ‘iron, ferrum’ (black metal); *n’ārkāsy* ‘copper’ (red metal).

Table 5. Objects denoting toponyms.

| Object         | Translation                  | Construction, its translation                           | Comments  |
|----------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| T. <i>macy</i> | <i>forest, wooded ravine</i> | <i>Səry macy</i> (the name of the tract)                | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white wood’.                   |
| T. <i>kykä</i> | <i>stream</i>                | <i>Kypa səry wəntyl’ kykä</i> (the name of the stream)  | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘the small white-faced stream’. |
| T. <i>kykä</i> | <i>stream</i>                | <i>Syry wəntyl’ kykä</i> (the name of the stream)       | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘white-faced stream’.           |
| T. <i>kykä</i> | <i>stream</i>                | <i>Wərqy syry wəntyl’ kykä</i> (the name of the stream) | The literal translation of the contraction is the ‘big white-faced stream’.       |

As it can be seen from the table, the colour term T. *səry* is used in the names of geographical objects. Thus, in the creation of a geographical reference the colour perception plays a role. Most likely, the clarity of water and not bushy, deciduous forest as the characteristic features of the objects are transferred to the white colour. In the Taz dialect in the description of the colour of the water construction *səry üt* (the literal translation is ‘white water’) has the meaning of ‘vodka’ (see below).

Table 6. Objects denoting food and drinks.

| Object          | Translation      | Construction, its translation             | Comments   |
|-----------------|------------------|---|--|
| T. <i>üt</i>    | water            | <i>səry üt</i> ‘vodka’                    | The literal translation of the contraction is ‘white water’.   |
| N. <i>üsse</i>  | water            | <i>cag üsse</i> ‘white wine’              | The literal translation of the contraction is ‘white water’.   |
| T. <i>n’än’</i> | bread, cake      | <i>səry n’än’</i> ‘white bread’           | Bread is not a traditional food for Selkup people. In Taz dialect <i>qāpyk n’än’</i> (a little bit bread) means ‘brown bread’ and in Narym dialect brown bread is <i>χag n’aj</i> (black bread). |
| N. <i>n’aj</i>  | bread            | <i>cag n’aj</i> ‘white bread’             |  |
| T. <i>keňy</i>  | soup             | <i>səry qālyl’ keňy</i> ‘white fish soup’ | It is a set expression for a name of a traditional soup.   |
| T. <i>my</i>    | something, thing | <i>səry my</i> ‘white of the egg’         | The literal translation of the contraction is ‘a white thing, something that is white’.  |

In the constructions *səry n’än’* ‘white bread’ the lexeme *səry* does not transmit the colour of the object itself, but denotes the colour saturation in comparison with other similar object (brown bread). In the constructions *səry my* ‘white of the egg’ colour term portrays different state of the object when certain parameters are changed (white of the egg is a transparent viscous liquid of the egg, which after heat treatment becomes white). It is interesting that in the Taz dialect there is a lexeme *qāpyk* (*qāpyl’*) with the meaning ‘a little bit’. This lexeme names brown bread. And the construction *qāpyk səry* is translated by the informants as ‘not white, not black’ and means brown and yellow.

Table 7. Objects denoting inanimate nature.

| Object       | Translation | Construction, its translation | Comments  |
|--------------|-------------|-------------------------------|---|
| T. <i>pü</i> | stone       | <i>səry pü</i> ‘white stone’  | In the Taz texts the object <i>pü</i> ‘stone’ is used |

|                 |       |                              |   |
|-----------------|-------|------------------------------|---|
|                 |       |                              | with the only colour of <i>səry</i> 'white'.  |
| N. <i>χer</i>   | snow  | <i>cag χer</i> 'white snow'  | There are no examples of the usage of the construction with colour terms attributing the objects of inanimate nature in the old folklore texts and archive materials in the Narym dialect, but contemporary informants use this construction very frequently. |
| N. <i>tit</i>   | cloud | <i>cag tit</i> 'white cloud' |   |
| N. <i>qad</i>   | frost | <i>cag qad</i> 'white frost' |   |
| N. <i>c'eld</i> | sun   | <i>cag c'eld</i> 'white sun' |   |
| N. <i>qung</i>  | fog   | <i>cag qung</i> 'white fog'  |   |

Table 7. Objects denoting household items.

| Object                  | Translation              | Construction, its translation                   | Comments  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| T. <i>səqyty</i>        | sokuy (kind of clothing) | <i>səry səqyty</i> 'white sokuy'                | This is a symbolic clothing, which is described in the Selkup folklore.   |
| T. <i>qaqlyn taqqaš</i> | sledge litter            | <i>səry qaqlyn taqqaš</i> 'white sledge litter' | This is a symbolic item, which is described in the Selkup tale.   |
| N. <i>kala</i>          | cup                      | <i>cag kala</i> 'white cup'                     | Contemporary informants do not name these white objects as sacrificed. But they associate white colour of the household items with feasts and celebrations. |
| N. <i>kajpi</i>         | headscarf                | <i>cag kajpi</i> 'white headscarf'              |   |

The white colour in the sokuy and sledge litter in the folklore has symbolic meaning. It should be noted that colour is one of the most symbolic phenomenon. Selkup people associated white colour is with the sky, as well as with the Upper world. The General meaning of white is defined as positive, pleasing for a Selkup God, whose name is Nom, therefore, turning to God and the sky, people sacrificed white ribbons, patches, shawls or skins and pelts of white animals. For the God of the Upper people sacrificed a white deer.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis it can be concluded that:

- 1) there are three terms for white in the Taz dialect (*səry*, *cāqy*, *štāl'*) and one term (*cag*) in the Narym dialect;
- 2) there are some difficulties with the denoting the etymology of these terms. Probably Taz term *səry* is connected with *sər* 'white', *sər* 'ice' and *syrá* 'snow'.
- 3) colour terms T. *səry* and N. *cag* should be determined as basic ones;
- 4) T. *səry* and N. *cag* attributing such objects as T. *qum* 'man' and N. *ütædz'ε* 'young man' obtain the meaning of blond, but in the Taz and Narym dialects there is difference between colour of such objects as T. *oly* 'head' and N. *ol* 'head'. In the Taz dialect the attributive construction *səry õptyl'* means 'gray-haired' and in the Narym dialect *cagoləl* means 'blond';
- 5) in the Taz and Narym dialects there are the names of animals, birds and fish attributed by the colour terms of white; some should be regarded as neologisms (T. *səry loqa* 'artic fox'; N. *cag nüllöga* 'artic fox'; N. *cag n'eva* 'white hare'), and the probable reason of their appearance is the assimilation by the Russian language. The attributive constructions with the colour terms of white and object denoting the domestic birds such as duck and goose have the meaning "domestic".

6) objects denoting plants attributed by the colour term of white in the Taz and Narym dialects of Selkup are mosses and lichens first of all. Birch and bird cherry probably present the loan poetic images from Russian;

7) in the Taz dialect there are metals and toponyms attributed by the colour terms of white;

8) there is difference in meaning of the same object such as water attributed by the colour terms of white: they name different alcohol drinks (wine in Narym dialect and vodka in Taz dialect);

9) in the earlier texts in Selkup there are no examples of the inanimate objects of nature such as snow, cloud, frost, sun and fog attributed by colour terms. From the one hand, they could appear under the influence of the Russian language. From the other hand we have the example of *cag c'eld* 'white sun', which is not universal for the Russian language;

10) household items of white colour are traditionally symbolical for Selkup people.

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**

N. – Narym dialect of the Selkup; T. – Taz dialect of the Selkup.

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