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THE SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLOR TERM KÖK IN THE TURKIC LANGUAGES

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Abstract. The article traces the semantic development of the Common Turkic color term kök from Old Turkic to the modern Turkic languages, with special attention to Uzbek ko‘k. The material was drawn from Old Turkic written monuments, “Devonu lug‘otit turk”, etymological dictionaries and explanatory dictionaries of Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Azerbaijani, Turkish and Turkmen. Historical-comparative, etymological, componential and areal-typological methods were used. The study shows that Old Turkic kök combined the meanings ‘blue’, ‘green’ and ‘sky’. From this syncretic core five lines of development are traced: the cosmological line (sky → heaven → deity), the vegetative line (green → vegetation → spring), the physiological line (bruise), the zoological line (grey-blue coat of animals) and the ethnocultural line (mourning). The modern languages show different outcomes of the split of the blue-green category: narrowing to ‘blue’ (Uzbek, Tatar), specialization as ‘sky’ with a borrowed term for ‘blue’ (Turkish), a shift towards ‘green’ (Turkmen) and preservation of a wide range (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijani). In all languages the older meanings survive in derivatives and set expressions.

Keywords: kök, color terms, Turkic languages, blue-green category, semantic change, narrowing, Old Turkic, Uzbek language.

INTRODUCTION

The history of a single color term can reveal how a whole color system changes. According to the theory of B. Berlin and P. Kay, many languages at an early stage have one term for both blue and green, which later splits into two separate terms [1]. Later research described this “blue-green” category in detail and showed that its split is a common and regular process in the languages of the world [2; 3].

The Common Turkic term kök is a clear example of such a category. In Old Turkic it denoted both blue and green and was also the name of the sky [4; 5]. In the modern Turkic languages its meaning has developed in different directions. In Uzbek, for example, ko‘k now means mainly ‘blue’, but its older meaning ‘green’ survives in ko‘kat ‘greens’, ko‘klam ‘spring’ and ko‘k choy ‘green tea’. In our earlier studies the semantic evolution of Uzbek color vocabulary was traced on the material of written monuments [12], but the development of kök across the Turkic languages has not been examined as a separate problem.

The aim of this article is to trace the semantic development of kök from Old Turkic to the modern Turkic languages and to classify its outcomes. The tasks of the study are: 1) to reconstruct the semantic structure of Old Turkic kök; 2) to identify the main lines of its semantic development; 3) to compare the

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meanings of its reflexes in modern Turkic languages; 4) to define the types of outcome of the split of the blue-green category.

The working hypothesis is that all modern meanings of kök go back to one syncretic core, 'the color of the sky and of fresh vegetation', and that the differences between the modern languages are the result of different ways of splitting this core.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Old Turkic material was taken from the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions and Mahmud Kashgari's "Devonu lug'otit turk" [7], with reference to the Old Turkic dictionary [5] and to the etymological dictionaries of G. Clauson and E. V. Sevortyan [4; 6]. Modern data were taken from explanatory dictionaries of Uzbek [8], Kazakh [9], Azerbaijani [10] and Turkish [11], as well as from general reference data on Kyrgyz, Tatar and Turkmen.

The following methods were used: the historical-comparative method, to compare the reflexes of kök in related languages; etymological analysis, to establish the original meaning of the term and of its derivatives; componential analysis, to describe the semantic structure of the term at each stage; and the areal-typological method, to classify the outcomes of the split of the blue-green category and to compare them with data from other languages [2; 3].

RESULTS

The Old Turkic core. In the Old Turkic sources kök has three closely related meanings: 'blue', 'green, the color of fresh vegetation' and 'sky' [4; 5]. The most famous example is the opening of the Orkhon inscriptions, where üzä kök täŋri 'the blue sky above' is contrasted with asra yaγïz yer 'the dark earth below'. The same term is part of the name Kök Türk. The semantic core of kök can therefore be defined as 'the color of the sky and of fresh vegetation', which corresponds to the blue-green category described in typological research [2].

Lines of semantic development. From this core, five main lines of development were identified.

1) The cosmological line: color → sky → heaven → deity. Through metonymy, kök came to name the sky itself, and through further metaphor the sky became the abode of the supreme deity Täŋri [13]. In Uzbek this line survives in ko'k 'sky' in poetic usage and in the set expression ko'kka ko'tarmoq 'to praise to the skies'.

2) The vegetative line: green → vegetation → spring. The meaning 'green' gave rise to names of plants and of the season of new growth: Uzbek ko'kat 'greens', ko'karmoq 'to sprout', ko'k somsa 'pastry with greens', ko'klam 'spring'; Kazakh көктем and Kyrgyz көктөм 'spring'; Kazakh көкөніс 'vegetables'.

3) The physiological line: color → bruise. The bluish color of injured skin is named by verbs derived from kök, such as Uzbek ko'karmoq 'to become bruised' and Turkish göğermek 'to turn blue or green'.

4) The zoological line: color → grey-blue coat of an animal. In Turkic folklore and mythology kök describes the color of animals, as in the image of the kök böri 'grey-blue wolf'.

5) The ethnocultural line: color → mourning. In traditional Uzbek culture dark blue clothes were associated with mourning, which is reflected in the expression ko'k kiymoq 'to wear mourning'.

Outcomes in the modern languages. The modern Turkic languages show four different types of outcome of the split of the blue-green category. They are summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1. Types of outcome of the blue-green category of kök in modern Turkic languages

Type of outcome	**Languages and form**	**Main meaning today**	**Other meanings and relics**
1. Narrowing to ‘blue’	Uzbek ko‘k; Tatar kük	‘blue’; ‘sky’	‘green’ passed to yashil / yäşel; relics: Uzbek ko‘kat, ko‘klam, ko‘k choy
2. Specialization as ‘sky’	Turkish gök	‘sky’	‘blue’ mainly expressed by the borrowing mavi; relics: gökkuşağı ‘rainbow’, göğermek
3. Shift towards ‘green’	Turkmen gök	‘green’	‘blue’ expressed by mawy
4. Preservation of a wide range	Kazakh, Kyrgyz kök; Azerbaijani göy	‘blue’; ‘sky’	‘green’ preserved for vegetation: Kazakh көкөніс, көктем; Azerbaijani göyərti ‘greens’

In the first type, a new term for ‘green’, yašïl (from yaš ‘fresh, young’ [4]), took over the green part of the category, and kök narrowed to ‘blue’. In the second type, the color meaning of gök weakened, and the term specialized as the name of the sky, while ‘blue’ came to be expressed by the borrowing mavi. In the third type, the green part of the category became the main meaning. In the fourth type, kök keeps both its blue and its vegetative meanings, although a separate term for ‘green’ also exists.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm the hypothesis that all modern meanings of kök go back to one syncretic core. The five lines of development show that the meaning of kök grew in two main directions: through the sky (cosmological line) and through vegetation (vegetative line). These two directions correspond exactly to the two prototypes of the original category, the sky and fresh grass. This agrees with A. Wierzbicka’s view that color meanings are anchored in prototypes of human experience such as the sky and vegetation [3].

The four types of outcome show that the split of a blue-green category does not follow a single path. In most languages studied, the term kept the ‘blue’ part, as predicted by the general typology [1; 2]. Turkish and Turkmen, however, show that other outcomes are also possible: specialization in the non-color meaning ‘sky’ or a shift towards ‘green’. Such differences may be explained by language contact and by the appearance of competing terms, such as the borrowing mavi in Turkish.

An important result is that the older meanings of kök survive in all the languages studied, even where the main meaning has changed. They are preserved in derivatives (ko‘kat, көкөніс, göyərti), in names of seasons (ko‘klam, көктем), in verbs (ko‘karmoq, göğermek) and in set expressions (ko‘kka ko‘tarmoq). This confirms the general principle of historical semantics that old meanings remain in the periphery of a lexical system after it has been restructured [14]. For Uzbek, this explains why ko‘k choy means ‘green tea’ and ko‘k somsa refers to pastry with greens, although ko‘k today means ‘blue’.

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The cultural significance of kök also deserves attention. The association of the sky with the supreme deity, which has close parallels in Mongolian culture, made kök one of the most sacred color terms of the Turkic peoples [13]. This sacred status may explain why the term remained stable as a name of the sky in all the languages studied. The limitation of the study is that the data for several languages are based on dictionaries; a corpus-based comparison of the frequency of the meanings is a task for further research.

CONCLUSION

The study leads to the following conclusions. First, Old Turkic kök was a syncretic term with the core meaning ‘the color of the sky and of fresh vegetation’. Second, five lines of semantic development are traced from this core: cosmological, vegetative, physiological, zoological and ethnocultural. Third, the modern Turkic languages show four types of outcome of the split of the blue-green category: narrowing to ‘blue’, specialization as ‘sky’, a shift towards ‘green’ and preservation of a wide range. Fourth, in all the languages studied the older meanings survive in derivatives, names of seasons, verbs and set expressions. Fifth, Uzbek ko‘k belongs to the type of narrowing to ‘blue’, while its relic units preserve the original green meaning.

The results can be used in the comparative historical study of the Turkic languages, in etymological and explanatory lexicography, and in teaching the history of the Uzbek language.

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