SEMANTIC PROCESSES IN DERIVATIVES
OF THE ETYMOLOGICAL ROOT *ĞHEL- (*GHEL-) / *GLEND(H)- ‘TO SHINE, TO SPARKLE’

O.V. Tsaregorodtseva

Tomsk State University (Tomsk, Russian Federation)
E-mail: caregrad@yandex.ru

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Abstract. The study is devoted to the history of derivatives of Indo-European root *ğhel-: zeleniy, zheltiy, goluboy ‘green’, ‘yellow’, ‘blue’. In the article material of the classical languages, Slavic languages, Russian dialect material was used. A hypothesis of the semantic reconstruction of the color terms was proposed. In the article was written about connections of the semantics of the light and color – this semantic is the semantic of the root *ğhel-. In the article also the assumption was propounded about the semantics of the Indo-European root, parallels was held with other “light” roots: *mer- ‘sparkle’, *skāj/*skāj/*ski- ‘dim lights’, ‘shadow’, ‘reflection’.

Keywords: etymology; the history of the Russian language; comparative philology.

Researchers paid attention to derivatives of Indo-European root *ğhel-not only one time. The reason of attention is that derivatives of this root have often color semantic, and color categorization is one of the ways of world categorizing. The problem of “color words” was interested by ancient philosophers (Empedocles, Theophrastus, Democritus, Plato); light and color as phenomena in their teachings are closely related. Aristotle wrote, that color concluded two plans: light and dark, closely related, without the existence of light color is inconceivable [1: 690-701]. In this regard, the study of the origin of color terms, their semantic reconstruction becomes the object of study of etymology, semasiology, the history of language. This paper discusses the semantic, connection between semantics of color (green, yellow, blue) and light semantics of derivatives of Indo-European root *ğhel-.

Indo-European root *ğhel-(*ghel-) has the meaning 1) to shine, to sparkle, 2) name of color: yellow, green, blue. This Indo-European root is difficult to determine because it has uncertainty or instability the initial sound [2: 429-433]. Pokorny suggests such words as zeleniy ‘green’, zheltiy ‘yellow’, zelje ‘potion’, zhelch ‘bile’, zola ‘ash’, zhelna ‘black woodpecker’, zlak ‘cereal’, glyadet’ ‘to look’, gladkiy ‘smooth’ to be derivatives of the root *ğhel-. Chernyh adds the word goluboy ‘light blue’ to this list [3].

First of all, color words zeleniy, zheltiy, goluboy have been considered. In the color spectrum these colors are associated with each other: when cyan
and yellow are mixed, green color is formed. In the dictionary of modern Russian language, this fact is reflected: in the DRL zeleniy is ‘having a color of one of the primary colors of the spectrum – the middle between yellow and blue, the colors of grass’, besides, the adjective can have the meaning ‘pale, greenish tint’ (in the conversational speech) and figuratively ‘immature, inexperienced’ [4].

Trace the history of this “color word”. The adjective was recorded in the Russian language in the XI century. Zelenь, zeleniy [5: 969] in Old Russian language is ‘green, dull green, muddy’, the adjective could occur in combination of words zelenaya boleznь ‘jaundice, icterus’, it is also called zheltaya boleznь’ [6. V. 5]. Thus, in the ancient texts zeleniy is not just the color of grass, green, but yellow, muddy color, e. g. in the contexts of the XVII century: kasha zelenaya s masломь (green cereal with butter), vino zeleno (green vine), urina zelenostna est’ (green urine), also zeleniy in Old Russian means ‘pale’, denoting a sick person, e.g. in the context zelenь narechemь litsa ego radi bleda (he is called green because of his pale face) [7].

Traces of semantics ‘dark’ are traced in the dialects, e.g. zelenaya vorona ‘green crow’, zeleniy ‘Devil for some superstitious notions’ [8. V. 11: 250], there is sinets with the same meaning, also zelenь ‘fumes, smoke, stench’ [Ibid: 251], v glazah zeleno ‘green is in the eyes’, ‘dark is in the eyes’ [Ibid: 249], in these contexts, obviously, zeleniy is color of dark marking. In the context, where the adjective has meaning ‘about lean, sickly child’ [Ibid: 251], is illustrated the connection with the old meaning, expressed in the context zelenь narechemь litsa ego radi bleda, where zeleniy is very pale man, with a yellowish tinge of the skin disease.

In the dialects of the Russian language zelenь ‘squirrel, which has not lost red color’ is met, where connection with the meaning ‘bright red’ is seen.

In other Slavic languages, the adjective means green color, the color of grass, greenery, e.g., Ukrainian zeleniy, Belorussian zyal’ony, Bulgarian zelën, Serbian, Croatian želénı, Slovenian zelen, Czech zeleny, Slovak zeleny, Polish zielony, Upper Sorbian zeleny, Lower Sorbian zeleny [3, 9]. In Old Slavonic zelenь, zeleniy [10] were associated primarily with the color of grass, compare the context: na trave zelene (on the green grass) [10]. Proto-Slavic form *zelenь, *zelenьyь is rebounded [3, 9] with the suffix -en-, as in *čьrvenь, palatal variant Indo-European root ġhel- is realized in the word.


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Obviously, there is spectrum of spread color values in the Baltic languages from green to yellow, blue and gray, which is similar to the history of semantics and Russian зелений. In the Russian adjective зелений such meanings as ‘green’, ‘yellow’, ‘pale’, ‘muddy, dark’ are observed.

Etymologically adjective жёлтый is close to the зелений, which in the modern Russian language has meaning ‘having the color of one of the colors of the spectrum – the average between orange and green, the color of egg yolk, gold’ [4]. In this definition is also present connection with the green. This adjective as a nickname is known since the beginning of the XIII century: Дмитрий Желтое, s псковитин, 1216 г. (Dmitry Yellow from Pskov region) [5: 887]. Here, obviously, жёлтый refers to the color of a person’s hair, as in the XI-XII centuries the adjective with this root was infrequent and was served here for hair color: Елена бе тело ть предобра ... добралика, русовласа, назелтв (Elena had a good body, good face, blonde yellow hair) [Ibid]. In the dialects this semantics is survived, where yellow ‘blonde (about hair color)’ [8. V. 9: 116]. In folklore this adjective often occurs in the word combination желтве кудри ‘yellow curls’. Thus, in the time of the first fixation of the adjective, it was the symbol of light color hair [7]. In the XVII century using of this adjective becomes wider, it occurs with words, meaning tissue, clothing, rocks, vegetation. Adjective жёлтый, like зеленый, could mean a yellowish skin tones of sick person, in this case жёлтый means ‘is not rosy, not white, pale’ [Ibid].

Proto-Slavic form *žьlтъ, *žьlтьjъ is rebounded with velar version of Indo-European root, with ż-of g-, cf. Lithuanian geltas ‘daffodil’. In Slavic languages the form želtý correspond to forms: Ukrainian zhovtiy, Belarusian zhouty, Bulgarian zhъlt, Serbian, Croatian zhütt, Slovenian old žolt, Czech žluty, Slovak žlty, Polish żółty, Upper Sorbian, Lower Sorbian żółty, in Old Slavonic zhlъtъ, zhlъtyi are recorded [3. V. 1; 9].

In the dialects of the Russian language besides the meaning associated with hair color, жёлтый means ‘a product of the yellow metal’, ‘often in the names of plants: herbs, mushrooms’ [8. V. 9: 116], also it is found in the combination жёлтая пшеница (yellow wheat) ‘mottled brown, with a larger grain and thicker rind than white wheat’ [11]. Thus, in the old time adjectives зеленый and жёлтый could interfere with color naming in disease passing meaning of very pale skin with a yellowish-green tint, that’s why there are two names of jaundice, icterus – зеленая болезнь и жёлтая болезнь’. In ancient Russian texts зеленый was closer to the designation of dark colors; жёлтый was closer to the designation of light tone, but not white. In the semantic structure of the adjective жёлтый may be present meanings ‘yellow’, ‘green’, ‘light’, ‘mottled’.

'brown', continuing to consider vocabulary of Indo-European languages, which is a continuation of Indo-European root *ghel-.

In this list color words are found with meanings ‘brown’, ‘green-yellow’, ‘bright, white’. From the same root in the ancient Indian language there are hári ‘light (about hair)’, ‘yellow’, ‘green-yellow’, ‘pale’, harit-‘pale, whitish’, hiranya- ‘gold money’ in Avestan z̄ari- ‘yellow, yellow’, gold color’, zāra ‘bile’. Sunlight could be associated with the color of gold, yellow, so the root of the primary meaning of ‘light’ could appear color word zheltiy and word meaning ‘gold’, which, as you know, has a yellow color, it can be compared zheltiyye kudri ‘yellow curls’, zolotye kudri ‘golden curls’.

In connection with the Russian adjectives it’s interesting to pay attention to semantic of Greek χλωρός, which also dates back to the Indo-European root *ghel-. The dictionary gives such spectrum of meanings: ‘green’, ‘yellow-green’, ‘yellow’, ‘pale greenish or yellowish-pale’, ‘suggestive pallor’, ‘bright, shining’, ‘fresh’.

This spectrum contains meanings close to the Russian zheltiy, zeleniy, while in the semantic structure of the adjective χλωρός the meaning ‘light’ is found, which is explained by the actualization of the ancient Indo-European root meaning *ghel-, the meaning ‘light’ occurred in such contexts: ἀχλύς (Hesiod) ‘darkness’, ἀδάμας (Hesiod) ‘steel diamond’, δάκρυ (Euripides) ‘tear’, ὧδωρ (Palatine Anthology) ‘water’ [12]. The bright darkness may be not strong dark. In other meanings – ‘green’, ‘yellow-green’ – lexeme was combined with the lexemes that refer to different phenomena and objects of reality: ‘branch’, ‘forest’, ‘grass’, ‘bread’ etc. In the ancient Greek word, as in the Russian zheltiy, goluboy, is observed in the presence of chromatic color words achromatic color meaning.

Another color word in this world series is adjective goluboy ‘light blue, clear color of the daytime sky, azure’ [4]. The adjective goluboy is unknown for all Slavic languages, in the most Slavic languages to express the concept of ‘light blue’ there are other lexemes: Bulgarian svietlosin, Serbian, Croatian plav, Czech lazurový, Polish blékity, modry [3]. In old Russian adjective golubyi is recorded [5: 546].

Goluboy in the dictionary of XI-XVII centuries means ‘light blue’, ‘ash, light gray (about animal suit)’: kobylka goluba ‘blue mare’ [6. V. 4], zemlya aki goluba ‘land like blue’ [5: 546]. This adjective occurs as a symbol of color in relation to the suit of animals, e.g. in the context of zemlya aki goluba, where it can mean ‘gray’, as part of the phrase-toponym goluboy les ‘light blue forest’ [7].

In Slavic languages, this root is documented in the following languages: Serbian, Croatian golubijy ‘pigeon, light bluish-gray, dove color’; Old Polish golęby ‘on horse color’; ‘grayish, ashen, blue-gray or dove-colored’; Ukrainian golubiy ‘light-blue / goluboy, ox color (dark gray)’ [13:
Taking into these constructions, it can be concluded that the original words with this root designated gray with a light bluish hue animal color. Comparing contexts in Russian dialects, it is found that goluboy sometimes is equal to gray, for example, horse color (raven-black); goluboy kon’ ‘ashen horse color’; goluboy lis ‘black-silver fox’; golubaya kurica ‘gray smoky whitish’ [8. V. 6: 340]. In addition, in some dialects goluboy means ‘yellow’ (zhelty) when talking on bird color, e.g., “In Nizhny Novgorod and other (provinces) goluboy sometimes people name yellow color; it is remarkable that these colors are opposite to each other” [Ibid]. This observation strengthens relationship between goluboy and zhelty. Crossing the semantics of goluboy and zhelty can be traced also in the Serbo-Croatian word plav (that can designate both goluboy and zhelty).

Nechipurenko notes that peculiarity of color naming / labeling that is a derivative from Indo-European *ĝhel is a syncretic concept of green and yellow in one color term [14]. This can be seen on meaning of adjectives zhelty / yellow and zeleny / green. As it was shown, meaning of zhelty / yellow coincide with meaning of goluboy combining these color terms.

In semantic structure of color naming / labeling zheltiy, zeleniy, goluboy that in modern Russian refer to chromatic colors a presence of achromatic color semantics: dark, light, gray is noticed. Presence of these meanings strengthens meaning of light / svetlyy, which has an Indo-European root *ĝhel-. As for the meaning dark/temnyy, in etymological nests of other «light» roots are found meanings of darkness, dark. For example, for derivatives of *mer-(sparkle) we have twinkle, fade; for derivatives of *sk,aį / *sk,øj / *sk,i- (dim light, shadow, reflection) we have shine, blue. Semantic shift from shine to dark is implemented within Indo-European root meanings of irregular, intermittent light. It seems that we are dealing with the development of semantics of irregular lighting and shining → blink → dark. In this semantic scale is reflected gradual decay of light (more on this in [15]). In Indo-European roots derivatives with meaning of irregular lighting and shining can also be transferred into bright shining as in the case of the verb to shine [Ibid].

Etymological nest *ĝhel- also has meanings that are associated with semantics of dark, for example, Lithuanian žlėja ‘twilight’, from the other stages of the root *ghel- is in Old English glōm ‘twilight’, in the words zeleniy, goluboy there are semantics of dark too.

Thus, we can assume that the light expressed derived from *ghel-in Indo-European languages was increasing or decreasing as in derivatives of the root *sk,aį / *sk,øj / *sk,i-. For derivatives of the root *ghel- such models are the usual: ‘to shine with uneven light’ → ‘to lose light’ → ‘to go dark’ (e.g. zeleniy, źlėja ‘Twilight’, glōm ‘Twilight’), ‘to shine with uneven light’ → ‘shine brightly’ (e.g. Icelandic glan ‘gloss’, ‘shine’, Norwegian dialectal glana ‘bright, shining’, German glühen ‘brilliant’, gluot ‘heat’, Old Norse glōra ‘sparkle’, also German Glanz ‘shine’).
Light passed by derivatives *ḡel-, probably also was uneven, faltering, so such meanings as ‘Twilight’, ‘dark’ are possible. It is difficult to define the mechanisms of connection of meanings ‘dark’, ‘light’ and ‘yellow’, ‘blue’, ‘green’, but it may be the perspective of this study.

**Literature**