

New Directions in Colour Studies edited by Carole Biggam et al.

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Colour draws on many disciplines, as reflected by this book. The volume is a collection of articles based on papers and posters presented at the *Progress in Colour Studies* conference held at the University of Glasgow in 2008. The overall aim of the conference and this resulting volume is ‘to provide a multidisciplinary forum for discussion of recent and ongoing research, presented so as to be accessible to scholars in other disciplines’ (p.ix); an ambitious goal as contributions are given from areas as diverse as Architecture, History of Art, Linguistics, Onomastics, Philosophy, and Psychology.

This challenge has been addressed by dividing the collection into seven themed sections (‘Theoretical issues’, ‘Languages of the world’, ‘Colour in society’, ‘Categorical perception of colour’, ‘Individual differences in colour vision’, ‘Colour preference and colour meaning’ and ‘Colour vision science’) which have been carefully arranged to provide a sense of cohesion and development. This development is usefully assisted by editorial prefaces to each section; an invaluable tool for a multidisciplinary readership, as they summarise the key findings from each article and draw out themes shared between them.

Some chapters have a particularly cohesive theme, such as ‘Languages of the world’, centred on the colour naming systems of a number of languages. Many of these articles revise and update the classic text by Berlin & Kay (1969), which suggested that the colour space is broken down into just eleven regions of the colour space which correspond to the English speakers’ foci of black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, grey, pink, purple and orange, to show how these languages have competing terms belonging to the same colour category. For example, Al-Rasheed *et al.* examine three salient terms for *blue* in Arabic, while Frenzel-Biamonte discusses how the German word

rosa has changed in usage since the adoption of the English word *pink*. Two papers successfully demonstrate the advantages of using electronic corpora in linguistic research. First, Rakhilina & Paramei use corpora to document the processes involved in the development of a colour term by analysing its use between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. They convincingly suggest that an older colour term will be used to refer to natural objects whereas an emerging colour term will initially expand over descriptions of artefacts. Second, Anderson shows how potential correlations between language use, sociolinguistic and textual factors can be investigated using corpora which encode metadata. The Scottish Corpus of Texts & Speech (SCOTS), for example, provides evidence for only younger speakers using *red neck* in the sense of embarrassment and of *red face* being more common in writing than in speech.

Several articles examine colour from a psychological perspective. One particularly interesting chapter examines which colours people prefer and why. Pitchford *et al.* suggest that colour preference is directly linked to how children learn to name colours. This theme is continued by Ling & Hurlbert who propose that hue preference is affected by age and sex; a correlation most prominent in 11-12 year olds which, they suggest, may be accounted for by the onset of adolescence and the importance of gender roles. Simmons analyses the colours associated with particular emotions, and found for example, the most pleasant colours were purple and blue-purple and the most unpleasant green-brown. All of these articles reveal a strikingly high level of agreement in our reactions to colour; yet creating an account of why people prefer certain colours is complex as these articles show that a number of influencing factors are shown to be important. A theory which examines a number of these connected factors together, rather than one in isolation, is presented by Palmer & Schloss in what they call an 'Ecological Valence Theory' of colour preference. Their account offers the most comprehensive and ambitious explanation of colour preference and may help to account for the results found by the others. Palmer & Schloss argue that people like colours associated with objects they like, for example, blue with clear skies. They take into consideration not only universal trends, but also cultural differences, individuals' affinities to groups with strong colour associations, such as

university or sports colours, and idiosyncratic influences experienced during development to form a convincing argument, which is backed up by their results.

The chapter ‘Colour in the community’ draws on a number of disciplines. For example, Bramwell discusses Onomastics, the study of names, and explores how present-day bynaming practices can help to explain the evolution of surnames, many of which contain colour terms. She demonstrates that partnering historical evidence with living accounts can help clarify the motivations for giving such names. Bramwell’s article can serve as a fascinating introduction to Onomastics for beginners, but also presents a thorough analysis of a specific type of name (i.e. surnames containing colour terms) for scholars of Onomastics. Steinvall analyses the use of specific colour vocabulary in literary texts, using nineteenth century travelogues. He concludes that ‘elaborate colour terms’ (ECT), such as saffron, rose, pearly, golden and azure, are used to evoke positive connotations of the objects from which they were derived. Furthermore, Steinvall finds a strong relationship between the use of ECTs and travelogue writers’ styles, with a higher proportion of ECTs reflecting a greater engagement of the author. A different restricted use of colour forms the focus of Huxtable’s article on the heraldry. Drawing on a wide range of texts, he discusses how the perception of armorial colours developed between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries.

There are seventeen colour illustrations in the book, five of which appear in the article ‘Illusions of colour and shadow’ from the keynote, Frederick Kingdom. Colour images are vital to demonstrate Kingdom’s theory, as images are manipulated to show how the interaction between not only colour but also luminance can affect the appearance of colour surfaces. Other colour images give the reader examples of the subject being discussed, such as Chare’s article on Francis Bacon’s paintings, and methodology used, including stimuli from various experiments. Given the subject matter of the volume, more articles would have benefited from the inclusion of colour images, particularly graphs which can be difficult to interpret in grey scale.

The book aims to be widely accessible. This is successfully achieved as the writers provide a general context for their work and explain associated terminology, and the

editors have equipped the reader with the tools to get the most out of the book. An excellent balance has been struck between high quality scholarship and accessibility, and as a result the book would be of use to beginners and experts from across a whole range of disciplines. Though the reader may approach this book with only a handful of articles in mind, which relate directly to area of research, if they delve a little deeper, they will find topics which can illuminate new approaches and methodologies which they may not have previously considered. And therein lies the success of *New Directions in Colour Studies*: though spanning an exceptionally wide range of topics, it does so in true interdisciplinary spirit.

Bibliography

Berlin, Brent & Kay, Paul. 1969. *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Stanford, California: Center for the study of Language and Information.

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