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Background

The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

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FOCAL COLOURS

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Project	Categories and concepts across language and cognition
Task	Experiment where participants pick out the best exemplar for the basic colour terms in their language
Goal of task	To establish language specific focal colours
Prerequisites	(i) Colour stimuli with focal colours; (ii) List of basic colour terms; (iii) establish the most frequent colour terms from the Colour naming task 2007

Background

In this task we aim to find what the best exemplars or “focal colours” of each basic colour term is in each of our field languages. This is an important part of the evidence we need in order to understand the colour data we collected last year.

Our focus is on the comparative codability of different sensory experiences. However, we know from previous research that even within a sensory modality there are differences in the how codable specific colours are, with focal colours being more codable than non-focal colours (Brown & Lenneberg 1954). So we need to know for our stimuli which colours are focal and which non-focal in order to better understand any differences in codability across senses (for example, is smell as codable as non-focal colours, or worse still?).

Focal colours have been an important construct in thinking about colour categories. Berlin and Kay (1969; Regier, Kay & Cook, 2005) show that focal colours across languages are not distributed randomly in colour space but rather cluster together. From this they suggest that these foci in colour space constitute the universal basis for colour naming.

In contrast, Debi Roberson and colleagues (Davidoff, Davies & Roberson, 1999; Roberson, Davies & Davidoff, 2000) have argued that focal colours are epiphenomenal. They suggest that colour categories are language-specific and that the boundaries of colours have to be learnt. Once the boundaries have been established, then focal colours are just the centers of these language specific categories. Part of the evidence for this claim comes from Berinmo speakers, who show do not show a tight clustering of focal colours, but a diffuse one instead.

Data from our field languages can contribute to this debate. **Note** – our colour stimuli are sampled in a different way to the World Colour Survey (WCS). We have only 80 colours (not 330) and we manipulate saturation too (unlike the WCS).

Task

Consultants

The ideal case scenario is that you elicit focal colours from the **same participants** that you collected the colour naming data with.

If for some reason this should prove to be impossible, collect data from other speakers that are as closely matched as possible for language background, gender, age, etc.

Aim to test at least 12 people.

Stimulus material

One card with 80 circular colour patches plus 4 achromatic colours (that were not included in the naming task). These are the same colour patches that were used for the naming task in the 2007 field manual.

Basic colour terms

You need to establish the basic colour terms for your language first to do this task. In addition you should elicit focal colour terms for every term that is used for more than 5 chips in the naming task (Berlin, Kay, & Merrifield, WCS Instructions).

In the World Colour Survey, focal colours have been elicited for “basic colour terms”. A complete set of basic colour terms should be able to exhaustively name every possible colour. Berlin and Kay state that all languages they have studied have between 2 and 11 basic colour terms. In order to establish the basic terms of your language, Berlin and Kay (1969) suggest the following criteria:¹

1. The term is **monolexic** (i.e., its meaning is not predictable from the parts).
2. It is **general** so that:
 - (a) its signification is not included in that of any other term (e.g., *red* vs. *crimson*, *scarlet*)
 - (b) it is used for a broad class of objects (not just hair, complexion, furniture, etc.).
3. It is **psychologically salient** so that:
 - (a) it occurs at the beginning of elicited lists of colour terms
 - (b) it has a stable reference across participants and across situations
 - (c) it occurs in the idiolect of all informants.

Additional criteria to invoke include:

- having the same distributional potential as other basic words (e.g. combining with the suffix *-ish* in English)
- it is questionable as a basic colour term if it is a source name (e.g., *gold*, *silver*)

¹ There's in fact a sizeable literature on these criteria and their appropriateness – see Levinson (2000) for some leads.

- it is questionable as a basic colour term if it is a recent foreign loan word

In addition, you may have elicited colour terms in the naming task from 2007 that occurred frequently (more than 5 times per consultant per booklet). It would be extremely useful to elicit focal colours for these terms too.

Instructions

Conduct the experiment on a sunny day in the shade, if at all possible.

Ask the participant to *Please point to the best example of COLOUR TERM?* and substitute each of the colour terms. You can present the colour terms in a fixed order. Try to get the participant to choose one best example, if at all possible. Don't force them to select only one if they seem to be uncertain and torn between more than one.

Record the letter and number of the colour circle that they have pointed to.

Outcome

Data will contribute to a description of "Language and the senses" in the field language, intended for a collected volume. The pooled cross-linguistic data will also contribute to an overview publication on the encoding of the senses across languages.

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