

## *Красный* versus *Rosso*: Colour Terms Denoting Red in Russian and Italian\*

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### **Abstract:**

The present article is centred around the comparative analysis of colour terms denoting red in two languages – Italian and Russian. It is widely assumed that the field of colour lexicon is one of the most interesting and fruitful ones, whereas the comparative lexicological analysis can reveal multiple discrepancies conditioned not only by different structures of the languages under analysis, but also by different ways in which their native speakers perceive a colour term. The decisive role in this respect is attributed to the connotations and associations that colour words acquired in course of their functioning in a language. As far as colour terms denoting red are concerned, they describe an important notion in all European cultures – the fact that justifies the choice of this colour field for our study. The analysis presented in this article is a lexicographic one. Our conclusions will be based on six dictionaries: three explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language (*Словарь русского языка* (“The Dictionary of the Russian Language”) by S.I. Ozhegov, *Малый словарь русского языка* (“Small Dictionary of the Russian Language”) of the USSR Science Academy, the Institute of the Russian Language, and *Большой толковый словарь современного русского языка* (“The Big Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Russian Language”) by D.N. Uşakov, as well as three explanatory dictionaries of the Italian language, and namely *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana* by Nicola Zingarelli, *Il Grande Dizionario Garzanti Della Lingua Italiana* and *Grande Dizionario Italiano* by Gabrielli Aldo.

**Keywords:** the red colour, rosso, красный, comparative analysis, lexicographic analysis

### **Introduction**

Colour is a highly important and significant part of people’s life. The attention to this subject was drawn by a large number of studies in different fields such as physics, chemistry, psychology, physiology,

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culturology, the history of art and, last but by no means least, philology that developed manifold theories in relation to colour naming. It is widely assumed that the field of colour lexicon is one of the most interesting and fruitful ones for philological research. It offers extensive data for the analysis: colour terms frequently appear not only in everyday conversations, but also in specialized studies and on pages of works of verbal art. Thus, colour terms have proved to be a substantial element of literary pieces, performing the role of rendering the author's intention and contributing to the creation of an effect meant to get the readers into a certain state. However, the subject of this article does not consist in the role of colour words in a work of verbal art. Our attention is centred around the terms of one certain colour and the way they appear in the explicative monolingual dictionaries. Moreover, the present study includes the comparative analysis of the analogous terms in two languages – Italian and Russian. Such an approach would allow us to reveal multiple discrepancies conditioned not only by different structures of the languages under analysis, but also by different ways in which their speakers perceive a certain colour term. The decisive role in this respect is given to the connotations and associations that colour words acquired in course of their functioning in a language. Thus, such an analysis would allow us to contrast the perception of the respective term not only in different languages, but also in different cultures and mentalities.

As far as the choice of the red colour as the subject of this article is concerned, it is perfectly justified. According to previous studies, it is extremely significant for all European cultures, whereas in the Russian language it is an ethno-relevant colour (Светличная, 2003: 139). It should be mentioned in this connection that the colour terms denoting red were demonstrated to be predominant in the lexico-semantic group of Russian colour terms in all historical periods of the development of the language (Бахилина, 1975: 31).

The present analysis is based on six explanatory dictionaries. On the one hand, we have chosen three Russian explanatory dictionaries: *Словарь русского языка* (“The Dictionary of the Russian Language”) by S.I. Ozhegov, *Малый словарь русского языка* (“Small Dictionary of the Russian Language”) of the USSR Science Academy, the Institute of the Russian Language, and *Большой толковый словарь современного русского языка* (“The Big Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Russian Language”) by D.N. Uşakov. On the other hand, Italian colour terms will be examined in the following Italian explanatory dictionaries: *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana* by Nicola Zingarelli, *Il Grande Dizionario Garzanti Della Lingua Italiana* and *Grande Dizionario Italiano* by Gabrielli Aldo.

### **Red Colour and Its Shades in Russian Explanatory Dictionaries**

According to the structuralist approach to the study of colour lexicon, the latter can be regarded as a lexical field. One of the central terms of the Russian system of colour lexicon is *красный* (Макеенко, 1999: 31) – the word that denotes a highly important notion for Russian culture and, from the universalists' point of view, constitutes a basic colour term in the Russian language (Berlin, 1999: 99). This aspect is clearly reflected by the numerous meanings and expressions contained in the explanatory dictionaries. Despite the pejorative connotations that are bound to appear since the red colour is the colour of blood and fire (*красный петух, красное пламя*), also describing the red colour of a body caused by the excessive consume of alcohol (especially in reference to the colour of the face), the term *красный* is perceived positively by the native speakers of the Russian language. First and foremost, this adjective renders a beautiful and bright colour of natural objects and parts of human body (especially that of women's lips – *красные губы*). Second, this term is highly poetical when it realizes the semes "good, bright, clear" (*красный денёк, красный угол, лето красное*), as well as "beautiful, wonderful" (for example, *красная невеста, красная даль, красная девица*). Yet another meaning of the word in which it gains meliorative connotations is that of a precious and rare object (*красная рыба, красный зверь, красный лес, Красная книга*). In Russian folk culture red marks the most important and expressive elements (*красная строка, красной нитью, красное словцо*), as well as things that deal with celebrations (*красное крыльцо, красная горка*). As for the political associations inevitable in this case, they come to the fore in the Russian language, clearly marking the history of Russia. The Russian perception of the phenomenon can hardly seem to be critical, since the word combinations *красная армия, красные войска, красный галстук* render the Soviet period realia and do not provoke strongly negative associations.

We shall proceed with the analysis of the colour terms that denote the shades of red chosen for the present study, and namely *розовый, гранатовый, карминовый* (*карминный, кармин*), *малиновый, багряный, багровый, рубиновый* (*рубин*), *пунцовый, червонный, червлёный, коралловый* and *румянец*.

As far as *розовый* is concerned, it renders a light shade between red and white. The Russian native speakers' perception of this term is mainly meliorative, describing the rosy colour of a girl's cheeks or lips or that of children's healthy faces. Another typical usage of this adjective is the description of the colour of natural phenomena (for

example, *розовая заря, розовые лучи*) and clothing (*розовая ленточка, розовое платье*). A highly significant meaning is that of an optimistic attitude (sometimes even an excessively optimistic one) and a naive outlook on life (for example, *розовая любовь, розовые надежды, розовые мечты, смотреть сквозь розовые очки, видеть в розовом свете* etc.).

The term *гранатовый* stems from the name of a precious stone and, at the same time, of a fruit – *гранат* – and describes a deep and dark red colour. The examples adduced by the explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language demonstrate that this lexeme is mainly used in its literal meaning, whereas the chromatic seme is present implicitly.

The colour adjective *карминный*, as well as its less usual version *карминовый* stem from the name of the respective paint – *кармин* – of a bright red colour. The phrases exemplifying the use of these words in a sentence demonstrate that they appear in the description of the colour of fruits (*карминная хурма*) and lipstick (*карминная губная помада*).

Another colour term that is to be discussed in the present analysis is *малиновый*. It describes a dark colour between red and violet akin to that of raspberry, whose name in the Russian language – *малина* – is the origin of the word under discussion. As far as the connotations of the term are concerned, it can be affirmed that Russian native speakers tend to perceive it in a positive way: apart from its use in the descriptions of the colour of fabric, clothes and rosy cheeks, *малиновый* also acquires other meanings, becoming the synonym of the words “good” or “pleasant” (like, for example, in *малиновая жизнь*), whereas the Russian expression *малиновый звон* presupposes a very pleasant and soft sound that resembles the timbre produced by the bells.

The following pair of terms – *багровый* and *багряный* – presents a special interest for our research. At first sight, these words that render a shade between red and deep blue or violet are perfect synonyms; the first one even describes the second one in all the three explanatory dictionaries used for our comparative analysis. At the same time, the study of the sentences offered by these dictionaries reveals major discrepancies in the perception of the two terms: the adjective *багровый* has proved to be perceived negatively, describing the colour of fire, smoke and scars, whereas the colour word *багряный* is a poetic term that is used in the combinations like *багряный убор (леса), багряная заря*, rendering the colour of beautiful natural phenomena. Another term that refers to the same tinge of red is *пунцовый*. Like *багряный*, this term, as opposed to *багровый*, acquires meliorative connotations, describing the beautiful colour of a girl’s cheeks and lips, sunset, fabric and clothing.

The chromatic adjective *рубиновый* is an indirect colour term that stems from the name of a precious stone – *рубин*. The examples in which this lexeme renders the colour of berries and wine gain special level of expressivity and metaphorization, clearly standing out in the sentence.

The colour term *червонный* – the following element under analysis in the present research – is stylistically marked due to its obsolete character. According the explanatory dictionaries, this adjective stems from the name of pure gold – *червонное золото* – that has a shade of red; the examples from the dictionaries demonstrate its use in the chromatic meaning in reference to the colour of jewellery; however, this word evokes two associations in the minds of Russian speakers that can be also found in the dictionaries under analysis – money (*червонец*) and the game of cards (*черви*). As far as another obsolete word – *червлёный* – is concerned, it describes a dark shade of red; it is used as a colour of military objects such as flags or shields.

Yet another term that will be subjected to the analysis in this section of the paper is *коралловый*. Derived form the Russian noun *коралл*, it denotes a bright red colour of corals, used in the description of the colour of lips and clothing.

The last chromatic word under the analysis in this paper is *румянец*. This noun is an indirect colour term which is mainly used with a view to describe the rosy colour of a girl's face or that of the cheeks of a healthy and beautiful person; thus, it is positively perceived by the native speakers of the Russian language. Another possible use of this word is when it denotes the colour of the reflected light of the sunrise or the sunset; in these cases the respective colour term endows the sentence with a high level of poetization and expressivity.

To sum up, the material offered by the Russian explanatory dictionaries allows us to arrive at the following conclusions. First, the Russian colour terms denoting red acquired both pejorative and meliorative connotations; the latter, however, tend to predominate. As far as the central colour term – *красный* – is concerned, it is extremely rich from the associative and emotional points of view, developing a large number of associations. The majority of these associations are positive, since the respective adjective describes beautiful, precious and important objects for the Russian people, whereas the political associations are not perceived negatively. As for the tints of red, they tend to acquire meliorative connotations (with the exception of the word *багровый*), used in the descriptions of nice complexion, clothing and natural phenomena.

### Red and Its Shades in Italian Explanatory Dictionaries

In what follows we shall discuss the way explanatory dictionaries present chromatic lexemes denoting red in the Italian language. From the structuralist perspective, one of the centres of this lexical field is the colour term *rosso* (Grossman, 1988: 63), the word that, like its Russian counterpart *красный*, constitutes a basic colour terms of the Italian language. According to the lexicographical material offered by the dictionaries under analysis, the lexeme *rosso*, like *красный*, developed a large variety of associations and connotations in the course of history, being perceived both positively and negatively by the native speakers of the Italian language. As for the prototypical objects of the respective colour term that describe it in the explanatory dictionaries, these include blood, purpura, ruby, fire and poppy flower. The usage of the word *rosso* has proved to be quite large: it can perform the role of attribute of the words that denote clothing (*abito rosso*), skin (*pelle rossa*, *labbra rosse*), flowers (*rosa rossa*), wine (*vino rosso*), hair (*capelli rossi* – in this case, the colour of the real object is not red, but orange), eyes (*occhi rossi*) and ink (*inchiostro rosso*). The pejorative connotations of the term are linked with its associations with tears and illness (*occhi rossi*), as well as unpleasant emotions, especially fury and shame – the fact that is reflected in fixed expression (for example, *vedere rosso*). Another aspect of its meaning, which is also typical of the Russian language, is signalling danger, the obligation to stop (*passare col rosso*) or an urgent situation (*linea rossa*, *telefonino rosso*). At the same time, the word has acquired some specific associations that are not present in the case of its Russian counterpart: *rosso* can indicate the lack of money or debt, especially as referred to the banking system (for example, *andare in rosso*, *essere in rosso*); it can emphasize the pornographic character of some phenomena (*cinema a luci rosse*, *film a luci rosse*, *locale a luci rosse*), being also associated with gambling (*giocare sul rosso*). The politically-oriented semes of the colour term, too, come to the fore, like in the case of the Russian language: the dictionaries offer a vast number of contexts in which *rosso* refers either to the socialist ideology, or to the Soviet Union (*camicie rosse*, *comune rosso*, *bandiera rossa*, *armata rossa*). As can be seen from the lexicographical material, meliorative connotations are inferior to the pejorative ones; *rosso* is positively perceived in the descriptions of a nice and healthy colour of the body (*labbra rosse*, *bianco e rosso*), as well as in the Italian proverb *rosso di sera, buon tempo si spera*.

The following part of the paper will be concentrated around the Italian colour terms that denote tints of red, and namely *rosa*, *roseo*, *rosato*, *rossastro*, *rossiccio*, *granata*, *vermiglio*, *scarlatta*, *ciliegia*,

*rubino, rossore, cremisi* and *corallo*. The adjective *rosa* stems from the noun with the same form that stands for the name of a flower and renders its most common colour – the one between white and red. It should be mentioned in this connection that the Italian language has a special colour term for naming a highly intense and bright shade – the fixed phrase *rosa shocking* borrowed from the English language. The connotations of this colour term are mainly meliorative: *rosa* is used in order to describe a woman's appearance, for example, face, skin, cheeks or lips, as well as clothing (*vestito rosa, gonna rosa*) or natural phenomena (*nuvole rosa*); generally speaking, it may be referred to anything relating to women (*campionato rosa, fiocco rosa*). Moreover, the respective word acquires figurative meanings in such expressions as, for example, *letteratura rosa* or *romanzo rosa*, rendering the idea of a sentimental story, or *vedere tutto rosa*, referring to an optimistic outlook on life. The explanatory dictionaries also indicate the associations of these terms with sport, and namely with cycling (*maglia rosa*). The pejorative connotations of the word *rosa* stand out in two cases: first and foremost, as a noun it can denote the reddening of skin caused by the bite of an insect; second, negative associations appear in the expression *balletti rosa* whose meaning is “erotic meetings of adult men with young girls”.

Another lexeme that denotes the same colour is *roseo*; the contexts present in the Italian explanatory dictionaries indicate the fact that this word is positively perceived by the native speakers of the Italian language and can be used for the description of a girl's complexion (*viso roseo*), flowers (*petali rosei*) and natural phenomena (*alba rosea*). In its figurative meaning, the respective word refers to optimist, happy and peaceful ideas and attitudes (*speranze rosee, vedere tutto roseo*).

As far as the word *rosato* is concerned, it constitutes a synonym of the words mentioned above. It is used, first and foremost, in the descriptions of a woman's appearance (for example, *labbra rosate, guance rosate*), whereas as a noun this word can denote the material of the respective colour. Other possible uses of this term include a type of wine (*vino rosato*), as well as the colour of natural phenomena (*il rosa del cielo*). The lexeme under discussion is, in the majority of cases, a perfect synonym of the term *roseo*; however, it should be mentioned in this connection that *rosato*, according to the explanatory dictionaries, maintains its close connection to the noun from which it was formed, whereas *roseo* approaches the word *rosa* in its meliorative connotations (the associations with optimism).

The next term subject to our analysis in this chapter is *rossastro*; being a derivative from the word *rosso*, it denotes a darker and more

faded shade of red and mainly appears in the description of the colour of light or fire (for example, in *un bagliore rossastro, la luce rossastra, le fiamme rossastre*). A synonym of this chromatic word is the adjective *rossiccio*; however, the explanatory dictionaries lack the contexts in which it can be used.

Yet another colour term that denotes a shade of red is *granato/granata*. Its chromatic senses developed from the non-chromatic ones – *granato/granata* can stand for a precious stone or dark red fruit. The usages of this word in the chromatic meaning include the contexts in which it describes clothing (for example, *abito granata*), fabric (*seta di colore granato*) or other objects (*un tappeto granata*). Among the associations of the term there is also sport: *granata* can be used with reference to the Torino team (for example, *calciatore granata, il tifo granata*).

*Vermiglio* is another colour word that denotes the red colour, and namely its bright and vivid shade. It is used as an attribute to the nouns that denote fabric (*tessuto vermiglio*), stones (*rubino vermiglio*) or surrounding environment (*vespero vermiglio*).

As far as the colour term *scarlatto* is concerned, it describes a bright red colour that defines a nice tinge of flowers (*rose scarlatte, fiori scarlatti*), face (*guance scarlatte*), fabric (*una stoffa di un bellissimo scarlatto*) or other objects (*tappeto scarlato*). At the same time, we should also mention its pejorative connotations: in some contexts it describes the change of the colour of a person's face caused by unpleasant emotions, especially shame (for example, in *farsi scarlatto in viso, diventare scarlatto per la vergogna*).

In what follows, we shall analyse two indirect colour terms – *ciliegia* and *rubino*. The primary meaning of the former is that of a berry of a bright and intense red colour; however, it can also be used in the respective chromatic meaning. The explanatory dictionaries of the Italian language provide the examples in which it tends to describe the colour of clothing (*un abito rosso ciliegia, una cappa color ciliegia, un vestito ciliegia*). As for *rubino*, it should be mentioned that its main meaning is a precious stone of an intense red colour; the explanatory dictionaries also underline its use as a colour term – *rubino* is figuratively used in fiction in order to describe the red of the lips (*della tenera bocca i bei rubini*), as well as that of other objects (for example, *uno smalto rosso rubino*).

The next word subject to our analysis is another indirect colour term – *rossore*. This noun is negatively perceived by the native speakers of the Italian language, since it denotes the red colour of a face that is provoked by unpleasant emotions such as anger or shame. This meaning

is reflected in a number of expressions, for example, *sentirsi salire il rossore alle guance, uomo senza rossore, non sentire rossore sau il rossore è sparito dalla sua faccia*. A neutral meaning of the term that is present in the explanatory dictionaries – as a noun that denotes the red colour; however, it is marked as literary and obsolete.

Another Italian adjective that denotes a bright red colour is *cremisi*; as for its use, the only example provided by the explanatory dictionaries presents it as an attribute to a noun that denotes fabric (*dammasco cremisi*).

The last word under analysis in this article is *corallo*; its main meaning is, again, a non-chromatic one; however, its use as a colour term is demonstrated in the contexts adduced by the explanatory dictionaries. Thus, in its figurative meaning, the word *corallo* appears in literary texts with a view to describing a bright red colour characteristic of the homonymous substance, also denoting the colour of lips (*labbra di corallo*), fabric (*seta corallo*) or clothing (*un vestito rosso corallo*).

The analysis presented above has pointed to the following conclusions. First and foremost, the study of the way in which the colour terms denoting red are presented in the Italian explanatory dictionaries has demonstrated that their associations and connotations are quite varied. As far as *rosso* is concerned, it does acquire some meliorative connotations; however, in the majority of cases it is perceived negatively by the native speakers of the Italian language, indicating an unpleasant, dangerous or urgent situation and being associated with illness and negative emotions. As for the lexemes denoting the shades of red, it should be highlighted that the majority have acquired meliorative connotations, describing a nice colour of a person's face (especially, that of cheeks and lips), fabric, clothing and natural phenomena. At the same time, some colour words, such as *scarlatta, rosa* sau *rossore*, have acquired pejorative connotations because of their connection with anger, shame and vulgar behaviour.

### Conclusions

As a result of the lexicographical analysis, the present study has arrived at the following conclusions. First and foremost, the colour terms denoting red in both Russian and Italian have acquired meliorative and pejorative connotations; they are perceived both positively and negatively by the native speakers of the two languages under discussion. We have also tried to demonstrate the exceptional richness of the associations and the vast usage of the words rendering the red colour, as well as its shades in both languages – the fact that points to their special importance for the Italian and Russian cultures. Thus, the associations common for both analysed languages are realized when the terms

describe a nice and healthy complexion, beautiful natural phenomena and material objects, whereas its pejorative connotations come to the fore when it is referred to blood, illness, negative emotions or danger.

At the same time, our study has revealed some substantial discrepancies concerning the perception of the colour terms under analysis. First, the Russian lexeme *красный* has developed a great number of positive associations in course of time – the fact that is reflected in its semes such as “good”, “beautiful”, and “precious”; in the case of its Italian counterpart, meliorative connotations are inferior to the pejorative ones, and the respective lexeme develops the associations with the notions of debt, pornography and gambling that are absent from the Russian language. Another discrepancy consists in the associations of the Italian terms *rosa* and *granata* with sport, as well as erotic associations of the adjectives *rosso* and *rosa* that have not been revealed in the case of the Russian lexemes. More discrepancies can be observed at the connotative level concerning the terms that are usually considered to be counterparts, suggested as a direct correspondence by bilingual dictionaries. The chromatic nouns *румянец* and *rossore* constitute such a case: the Russian word acquires meliorative connotations, whereas its Italian counterpart is negatively perceived by the native speakers of the respective language.

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