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IS THE YAKUT FOX GREEN?,
OR REMARKS ON SOME
COLOUR NAMES IN TURKIC,
URALIC, AND YENISEIC

The Yakut word for ‘fox’ is *sahyl*. It comes as something of a surprise, however, to see that its exact Turkish match is *yeşil* ‘green’. Even if the colour of fox fur varies considerably between individuals representing one and the same species, whether or not they belong to the same subspecies, nobody will probably associate a fox with green.

However, colour names generally display a relatively large range of senses, rather than one precise meaning. The rule is not Yakut-specific. Quite the contrary, it holds true for virtually every language. A number of Indo-European examples of this kind can be found in Maciuszak 1996, such as for instance Pers. *sabz* ‘green, verdant, fresh; also: black, dark, blue (eyes)’ (ibidem: 35). A Turkologically important consideration is the association of the meanings ‘green’ and ‘yellow’ in one word since the fur of some foxes is particularly light in colour, almost golden:

The most conspicuous interchange is to be found in Iranian (also in other IE) words for ‘yellow’ and ‘green’, perhaps because they were applied to vegetation like grass, leaves etc. which changed from green to red, golden and finally yellow. NP [= New Pers.] *zard* ‘yellow’ is a cognate with *zaryun* ‘green, golden, fresh’ [...] (Maciuszak 1996: 34).

Thus, if we accept Maciuszak’s idea of ‘green’ being our semantic point of departure we receive by the same token a suggestion of a semantic model:

[A] (1) ‘green’ → (2) ‘red’ → (3) ‘golden’ → (4) ‘yellow’.

Can this model be of use for the explanation of the Turkic proportions, too? What we need in order to answer this question is the original meaning of Tksh. *yeşil* ‘green’. At any rate, the presented tentative model suggests that the Yakut meaning ‘fox’ evolved from stage (2) ‘red’ because it is the first link in chain [A] that can be used as a starting point for ‘fox’. Thus: ‘green’ → ‘red’ → ‘fox’. On the other hand, the Yakut substantive *sahyl* ‘fox’ has also an adjectival meaning ‘yellow’¹ that suggests stage (3) or (4) rather than stage (2) as the direct pre-

¹ Cf. also Yak. *sahyl ölü* ‘icterus, jaundice’, lit. ‘yellow death’ (Pek. 2119sq.). – The meaning of this expression is uncertain because jaundice only very sporadically causes death. Since the modern designation of the disease is *saharar yary* (lit. ‘disease of turning

decessor of ‘fox’, i.e. ‘green’ → ‘red’ → ‘golden’ (? → ‘fox’) → ‘yellow’ (? → ‘fox’).

Tksh. *yeşil* ‘green’ has some correspondences with front vowels (e.g. Kar.H. *jesil*, Uyg.dial. *ješil* id.) and some with back ones (e.g. Trkm. *jāşyl*, Khal. *jāşyl* id.).² Since the consonants *j* and *ş* sometimes cause fronting of vowels in their vicinity it is obvious that the original vowels were velar, i.e. **jāşyl*. W. Bang (1930: 20) was probably the first to etymologize the word: *< *jāşyl < *jāş³* (like Tkc. *kyzyl* ‘red’ *< *kyzşyl < *k^hkyz*). This etymology was rivalled by Laude-Cirtautas (1961: 61) who suggested another solution: *jaşyl < *jaş+y-l* ‘green’ *< *jaş+y-* ‘to turn green’ *< *jaş*. Admittedly she does not explain the meaning of the reconstructed form **jaş*, but neither does Bang. More important is the fact that the verb **jaş+y-* is a teleological construct, unattested in any Turkic language. Laude-Cirtautas’ objection against Bang’s etymology is based on the fact that the suffix *+şyl* generally has a diminutive meaning whereas reflexes of the form **jāş+şyl* never mean anything like ‘greenish’. The objection can be easily contested since diminutive formations sometimes also express ‘quasi-, resembling’,⁴ and this circumstance is of paramount importance to us because it enables us to tentatively interpret the word **jāşyl* as one originally meaning ‘quasi-green’, i.e. ‘not really green, slightly green’ or the like.

T. Tekin (1994: 249, 262sq.) is quite right when he doubts the correctness of the morphological structure suggested by Bang because the cluster **-şs-* would have probably been retained unchanged and, on the other hand, no trace of this etymon evidencing such a cluster has been found in any Turkic language. Thus, the

yellow’), and *sahyl ölü* seems to have gone out of use one cannot easily decide whether it is a correct translation. ‘Yellow fever’ appears to be at least equally imaginable.

² For other attestations see ÈSTJa 4: 164.

³ He did not, however, take into account the vowel length.

⁴ A special case of a diminutive derivative without a clear diminutive meaning is Tksh. *akça ~ akçe* ‘money; coin’. Even if it looks like a simple diminutive (*+ča*) of Tksh. *ak* ‘white’ it must have another etymology, given the fact that this word was written *agča* in some older Ottoman documents. Thus, the etymology proposed by G. J. Ramstedt (*akça < agča < *agy+ča < Old Tkc. agy* ‘treasure’ *< ‘silk, brocade’*) proves true (Şirin User 2004: 132–135). Which means that the word etymologically meant not ‘whitish’ (that is sometimes, even today, interpreted as a colour of silver) but rather something like ‘a part of treasure’, and the meaning stands between the classical diminutive sense (**‘little treasure’*, cf. Engl. *a (nice) little sum*) and a figurative one (**‘quasi-treasure, a thing that resembles treasure’*). Beside this derivative, another one with *+ča* was also coined: Tksh. *akça* ‘whitish’. The latter one certainly influenced the etymological perception and interpretation of *akça* ‘money’ which eventually led to a secondary identification of both words with each other. Afterwards, *akça* ‘money’ had (because of both its allegedly etymological connection with ‘white’ and the real modern meaning ‘money, coin’) been associated with Gr. *ásprē* (femin.) ‘white’ which caused the change of Tksh. *-a > -e*, and thus, the variant *akçe* ‘money’ ensued – one that is of course never used for *akça* ‘whitish’. Another difference between the two *akça* words is that only *akça* ‘money’ was, in the Ottoman times, also written *agča*. – Incidentally, Şirin User (2004: 132) rightly ascribes this etymology to G.J. Ramstedt but she can only refer to Räsänen (1920: 160), who says “Nach Ramstedt *< ak+ča* (deminutivsuffix) zu atü. *ayl* schatz”, without mentioning any specific work by Ramstedt, and nobody seems to know where Ramstedt proposed this etymology.

reconstruction should be better modified into **jāš+yl* (op. cit. 263) but not **jāš+y-l*. This fact does not influence our semantic considerations because both **jāš* and **jāšyl* had an adjectival meaning so it is highly possible that **jāšyl* was a “softened” version of **jāš*.

It is psychologically only too natural that Laude-Cirtautas, who rejects Bang’s etymology, should argue against the originally bright hue of **jāšyl*.

Gerade die Ableitung des Wortes von dem Pflanzengrün [...] macht es wahrscheinlich, daß *yašil* anfänglich eine bestimmte Nuance der grünen Farbe wiederzugeben hatte, die wir etwa als ein saftiges, dunkles Grün zu umschreiben haben. (Laude-Cirtautas 1961: 62).

I fail, however, to see why an etymological connection between ‘green’ and ‘plant’ should inevitably point to an originally dark hue of green.

As for PTKc. **jāš*, it is generally considered a reconstructed protoform of modern Tksh. *yaš* ‘tear’ = Trkm. *jāš* ‘1. tear; 2. fresh, young’ (ĖSTJa 4: 161), the original meaning of **jāš* being approximately ‘1. moist, humid, wet; 2. fresh’⁵ (> Tksh. Trkm. ‘tear’; Trkm. ‘fresh, young’).⁶

If we now connect our semantic insights with what has been said above of the functions of diminutive suffixes we can try to explain **jāš+yl* as a word etymologically meaning approximately ‘resembling a fresh plant’, i.e. more or less ‘slightly green’ or ‘verging on green’.

Thus, a preferable evolutionary model for Turkic would be:

[B] (*‘humid; fresh’ → *‘resembling a fresh plant’ → ‘verging on green, light green’ → ‘yellow green’ → ‘yellow’ (= Yak. ‘yellow’) → ‘reddish, rust red’ (→ Yak. ‘fox’)).⁷

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Let us examine some non-Turkic languages now, primarily (albeit not exclusively) in Siberia. In Komi, spoken in the easternmost European part of Russia, at the western border of Siberia, both ‘yellow’ and ‘green’ are expressed by *viž* (or its phonetic variant *vež*). If a more precise determination of the colour is inevitably needed one can say *turun viž* (with *turun* ‘grass’, i.e. lit. ‘grass-*viž*’) for ‘green’ and *kol’k viž* (with *kol’k* ‘egg’, i.e. lit. ‘egg-*viž*’) for ‘yellow’ (KĖSK 49 s.v. *vež* I).

The phonetic reconstruction of the proto-form of *viž* is settled: < Fenno-Perm. **wišV* (KĖSK 1.c.) ~ **wiša* (UEW 7: 823). Establishing its original meaning,

⁵ Cf. the antonymous Engl. word *stale* ‘dry because not fresh’.

⁶ Whether **jāš* really is or is not a derivative of a Proto-Turkic root **√jā-* ‘?’ whose later traces were and partially still are to be seen in words like *ja-z* ~ *ja-j* ‘spring, summer’ (Bang/Gabain 1930: 19, fn. 1), i.e. ‘a season in which vegetation is fresh’, is a disputable question that need not concern us here any longer.

⁷ The change of ‘yellow’ > ‘reddish, rust red’ was in this case relatively simple because another word for ‘yellow’, i.e. **saryg* has also the meaning ‘rust red’ (Kononov 1975: 174), so that the influence of its semantic range is quite possible.

however, is much more difficult because of the great semantic diversity attested in its modern reflexes: Fi. *viha* ‘hate, anger, fury’; Veps. *vihä* ‘1. hate, fury; 2. snake poison, venom’; Est. *viha* ‘hate, fury; 2. hostility; 3. poison; 4. bitter; 5. embittered, fierce, angry’; Vot. *vož* ‘green’; Mordv. *ožo* ‘yellow’ (UEW l.c.). This prompts the authors of UEW to consider the meaning ‘poison’ original.

Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung war möglicherweise ‘Gift’ und daraus entwickelte sich wohl über ‘giftfarbig’ die Bedeutung ‘grün, gelb’ (UEW 7: 823).⁸

Parallels like Hung. *mérög* ‘1. poison; 2. anger’ and Ital. *veleno* ‘1. poison; 2. hate, anger’ can also be found (UEW 7: 824) to buttress this semantic evolution. Nevertheless, one modern meaning cannot be fitted into this explanation. The Votyak word *vož* mentioned above with the sense ‘green’ can also mean ‘little, small, undeveloped’, and it would be a challenging task to derive this meaning from ‘poison’. However, by reference to the Turkic model suggested above, the Uralic data, too, can be explained, although in a modified way. First, we have to posit the original meaning *‘light green, fresh (of plants)’. Then we may assume the following evolution:

[C] ‘light green, fresh (of plants)’ → [1] ‘green’; [2] ‘young, undeveloped’; [3] ‘yellow’ → *‘bile, gall’ → [3a] ‘bitter’⁹ → ‘angry’; [3b] ‘bitterness’ ~ ‘acrimony’ ~ ‘anger; hate’.¹⁰

⁸ Thus, a connection of this Uralic word with Iranian data (e.g. Avest. *viša-* ~ *vīša-* ‘poison’, Pehl. *viš* id.; UEW l.c.) seems possible. It is hard to decide what was first: the decision to accept ‘poison’ as the starting point for Uralic or the observation of the resemblance with Iranian.

⁹ It is not quite clear whether this semantic derivation matches the general observation in Katz (1970: 147): “[...] in den ostseefi. Sprachen [ist] ja offensichtlich die Bedeutung ‘Gift’ nicht von ‘bitter’ abgeleitet [...], sondern umgekehrt ‘bitter’ von ‘Gift’”. This statement compels us to place ‘poison’ before ‘bitter’, i. e. directly after *‘bile, gall’. The problem is, however, that the bitter taste of bile alone should keep it off the list of poisons (nobody could be poisoned without noticing it). Moreover, bile is produced by the liver which breaks down toxic substances, and the liver may usually be eaten as food without resulting in food poisoning. The place of the meaning ‘poison, venom’ in this semantic scheme still remains to be settled.

¹⁰ The further evolution of this word family is admittedly of no importance to our study. Nevertheless, it is astonishing enough to be mentioned here: ‘angry’ → *‘damaging, hurtful’ → *‘sinful’ → *‘taboo’ → Komi *veža* ‘holy, saint’ → Komi *veža aj* ‘godfather’, *veža ań* ‘godmother’ (UEW 7: 824). For the change of ‘sinful’ into ‘holy’ Fuchs (1958: 167, 170) refers to the following shift attested in Ostyak and Nenets: ‘ist sündhaft’ → ‘ist tabu’ → ‘ist heilig’. – Another astonishing semantic shift connected with colour names can be observed in Tk. *kara su*, being one of old names for kumis. Its literal meaning is ‘black water’, although traditional kumis actually is milky white. P. Aalto’s (1966: 4) explanation that we have to do with a peculiar semantic change here, namely: ‘noir’ > ‘sans couleur’ > ‘limpide’ is not really convincing because milky white is not limpid at all. But there is also another link connecting this expression with our subject: it is possible that *kara su* reached Pliny the Elder via an Iranian translation in which Old Pers. *axšaēna* (see below) was used to render ‘black’ (Aalto 1966: 1). But even then the question of the original Turkic meaning of this expression remains open. Tk. *kara* ‘black’ can also mean ‘negative, bad, dangerous, threatening’ as in Tat., Bashk., Uyg. *kara kurt* ‘a species of poisonous spider’, lit.

Let us have a look at Yeniseic data now. In Ket we find *qÁl'ajs'* 'yellow'¹¹ (< ³*qAl* 'bile, gall') = Imbatian [= 18th century Ket] *kyalmas* 'green' = Pump. *kómulsi* 'green' (Werner 2002: 2: 143). S.A. Starostin suggested 'green' as the original meaning of this word, but H. Werner (l. c.) who does not specify the work by Starostin, undoubtedly rightly prefers to interpret 'green' as a secondary meaning that evolved from 'yellow' which, in its own turn, ultimately goes back to 'bile, gall', that is:

[D] 'bile' → 'yellow' → 'green'.

This model is opposite to what we have established for Yakut. However, since the colour of bile actually is 'light green' or 'greenish yellow', rather than just 'yellow' the scheme should be altered to:

[E] 'bile' → 'light green, greenish yellow' → [1] 'yellow' ~ [2] 'green'.

Another Yeniseic word belonging to this group is Ket *śań(+ś)* 'blue, green, brown' (Werner 2002: 2: 221; cf. Northern Ket *śań'ñ* (~ *śáyeń*) ⁴*qǝjǝ* 'Brown Bear'). As can be inferred from the examples in H. Werner's dictionary, the meaning 'brown' appears exclusively in the designation of bear. Which means that *śańś* does *not* mean 'brown'; it means 'blue' and 'green', and is used to characterize a bear that is called 'brown' in Europe.¹²

'bad/threatening worm' (not 'big worm' as translated in Kononov 1975: 162). Thus, the original meaning of *kara su* was figurative: 'bad/dangerous water'. Consequently, the borrowing channel seems to have been as follows: Turkic > Iranian > Latin. On the other hand, it would be most interesting to show that the Turkic expression *kara su* rather goes back to an Iranian prototype because some other Turkic words in this semantic field seem to have been of Iranian origin, too: (a) Tkc. *kymyz* 'kumis' < Pers. *qamīz* id. < ? Arab. *ḥāmiḍ* 'sour' (Erdal 2009: 296); (b) Trkm. *ğor* 'residue of sour camels' milk used to make yoghurt' < Sogd. **xwr* = Pehl. *hur* 'horse milk' (Erdal 2009: 295); (c) Old Tkc. *bor* 'wine' and possibly also *begni* 'beer' are generally considered to be Iranian loan words into Old Turkic (TMEN Nr. 759; Zieme 1997: 436, 439). By the way, a striking parallel for the above mentioned Arabic word *ḥāmiḍ* 'sour' and its Modern Hebrew reflex *xamiza* 'a soup called *borsh(t) ~ boršč*' (Erdal 2009: 296, fn. 2) can be found in Old Germ. *sūr* (= Modern Germ. *sauer*) 'sour' and its Polish reflex *zur* 'white *boršč*'. – Yet another example of an European-Asiatic semantic interweavement is an old Greek name of the Black Sea: *Póntos Áxeinos*, lit. 'Inhospitable Sea' (secondarily changed into somewhat more optimistic *Póntos Eúxeinos* 'Hospitable Sea') whose second element reflects Old Pers. *axšaēna* 'dark, dark blue' (Kononov 1975: 163sq.; Dan 2007: 2). And this Persian name was translated into Turkish as *Kara Deniz* that could have been understood as 'Black Sea' or 'Dangerous Sea'. The Europeans must have taken over the literal meaning of the Turkish name and thus, the semantic variant 'Black Sea' became usual in Europe. (For another, geographical interpretation of the name 'Black Sea' cf. Schmitt 1996).

¹¹ As for the usage of word-final *-ś* (~ *-s*) as a so called "Nominalizer" see Georg 2006: § 4.1.2.1.

¹² Also the Tibetan Bear, being a subspecies of the Brown Bear, is sometimes called the (*Tibetan*) *Blue Bear*.

The combination of both ‘blue’ and ‘green’ within one word strongly resembles the Proto-Turkic word **kōk* ‘1. sky, heaven; 2. blue; 3. green’, or as Şirin User (2009: 183) aptly puts it: ‘blue, green, grey = any colour of the sky’.¹³

One might say that Tkc. **jāšyl* was a relatively bright colour, and **kōk* was relatively dark.¹⁴ The latter fact proves also true when confronted with a peculiar name *Ašina* which was given to the *Kök Türk* dynasty in Chinese annals. For a long time the origins and the etymological meaning of this name – which never occurred in *Kök Türk* gravestone inscriptions of the 8th century – were much discussed without being resolved. It was only fifteen years ago that a convincing etymology was proposed (Kljaštornyj/Savinov 1994: 13sq.): the Chinese took over the name *Ašina* from Iranians in whose languages we find an adjective like Khotan. *aššena* ‘blue’ = Sogd. *exšene* ‘blue, dark’ = Old Pers. *axšaēna* id.¹⁵, i.e. the Turkic word **kōk* was first translated into an Iranian language by a word meaning approximately ‘(dark) blue’, and it was this word that the Chinese afterwards used as a designation of the *Kök Türk* dynasty. For us, it is a good hint regarding interpretation of **kōk* as a name for ‘dark blue’ (or, maybe even somewhat more generally, ‘any dark colour of the sky’; for the possibility of rendering Tkc. *kara* ‘black’ by this Iranian word see above).

Revenons à nos moutons (ieniseiens)! I am not quite sure that the Russian word *zelënyj* ‘green’ is the correct etymon of Ket *śán*, as suggested in Werner (2002: 2: 221), even if the Yeniseic word is nowadays attested exclusively in Ket. It is the Northern Ket phonetic variant *śáyeñ* that argues against *zelënyj* because it is hardly possible to accept Ket *-γ-* as an inevitable adaptation reflex of Russian *-l-*.

¹³ It would probably be more appropriate to translate this word as ‘grey-blue-green’, that is to say that Indo-European languages just do not have a simple word for this colour and they can at the most render this sense by using a compound word or a description like ‘colour of the (dark) sky’. The same hue is also characteristic of the sea. However, since one of the meanings of PTkc. **kōk* was ‘sky, heaven’ it seems quite reasonable to accept it as the primary sense and to interpret the adjectival meaning as originally referring to ‘sky’, not ‘water’. An interesting parallel can be drawn between this Turkic word and Latin adjectives *caerulus* and *caeruleus* that are derived < *caelum* ‘sky’ but their meaning changed in a similar way as PTkc. **kōk*, i.e. they were attested with the meaning ‘light blue’ (water), ‘grey blue’ ~ ‘dark blue’ (clouds), ‘green’ (plants) or ‘black’ (underworld) (Euler 2004: 84sq. and fn. 22). – Nowadays the green hue is permanently present in Tksh. *gök* (< Ptkc. **kōk*), so that derivatives can generally be divided into two semantic groups: [a] ‘blue + green’, e.g. Anatolian Tksh.dial. *güvem* ‘a species of large fly’, *gövenek* ‘a species of horse fly’, *göğem* ‘violet verging on green’ (Eren 1958: 86, 88); [b] ‘(pure) green’, e.g. Anatolian Tksh. dial. *güvek* ‘green nutshell’, *göylek* ‘new, fresh leaves that appear in the autumn’ (ibidem: 86). The original combination of senses (‘grey-blue-green’) made it possible to call a ‘pigeon’ *güvercin*, that is, another Turkish word deriving from **kōk*; in this context cf. Osset. *æxsīnaeg* ‘pigeon’ below.

¹⁴ Even if modern reflexes of **kōk* sometimes have the meaning of ‘light green; the colour of young verdure’ (Kononov 1975: 172) we may assume that **jāšyl* was generally lighter than **kōk*.

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, the Ossetian word for ‘pigeon’ namely *æxsīnaeg* comes from *æxsin*, being the Ossetian correspondence of Khotan. *aššena*, etc., just like Tkc. *güvercin* ‘pigeon’ comes from **kōk* (Tryjarski 1991: 367).

Moreover, the Ket words *śań* ~ *śańeń* ‘blue, dark green’ on the one hand and *qal’ajs* ‘yellow, light green’ on the other exhibit more or less the same semantic proportion as PTkc. **kōk* and **jāšyl* do. Even the sporadic use of Ket *śań* to describe the colour of bear fur has its parallel in Turkic: Anatolian Tksh. dial. *jašyl* ‘dark red horse’.

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Some interesting questions may be posed here:

Are all these data convincing enough to suggest a new areal feature in Siberia? To what extent do Yeniseic and Uralic data agree with the Turkic system? Is there any system in Turkic at all? Can the opposition of a lighter **jāšyl* and a darker **kōk* be placed among other antonymous word pairs in Turkic?

Let us say some words about the last question. In Turkic, there are five basic colour names¹⁶: *kara* ‘black’, *ak* ‘white’, *kyzyl* ‘red’, *jašyl* ‘green’ and *saryg* ‘yellow’. It seems quite reasonable to include also *kōk* ‘blue’ into this group. Although it seems hardly possible to base the whole system on pairs of semantically opposed words the following series is imaginable:

‘yellow, light coloured’ – ‘light green’ – ‘green, blue, dark’
**saryg* **jāšyl* **kōk*

The meanings given here are purely symbolic. But they fit the sequence of hues on colour circles quite well:

Yellow – Yellow green – Green – Bluish green – Greenish blue – Blue
 ← **saryg* → | ← **jāšyl* → | ← **kōk* →

This (purely semantic, not evolutionary) scheme¹⁷ makes it possible to suggest that the Middle Turkic syntagm *jašyl kōk* ‘blue sky’ (Laude-Cirtautas 1961: 62) probably referred to bright, clear sky. One may wonder whether a syntagm **kōk kōk* ‘dark sky’ was also possible. It would probably have been hardly intelligible. Rather a composition with *boz* ‘grey’¹⁸ should be assumed because *boz* can also be

¹⁶ “Basic colour names” is my equivalent for what Laude-Cirtautas (1961) calls “zusammenfassende Farbbezeichnungen”. The other group is that of “gegenständliche Farbbezeichnungen” which approximately corresponds with Engl. “specific colour names”. If Laude-Cirtautas (ibidem: 15) defines basic colour names the following way: “sie fassen eine einzige, genau bestimmte Farbe zu einem Farbbegriff zusammen, der auf jeden beliebigen Gegenstand angewandt werden kann” one can accept this definition for black, red or white, and even this to some limited extent only. It is not my task here to discuss definitions. Nevertheless, it is amazing to see that **jāšyl* is, in her book, a basic colour name, and **kōk* a specific one.

¹⁷ Numerous (Indo-)European examples that display similarly extensive changes and “rickety” semantics (vacillating between ‘yellow/blond’ and ‘blue’) can be found in Woll (1975) and Euler (2004).

¹⁸ The Indo-European notion ‘grey’ is rendered by two lexemes in Turkic: *boz* and *kyr*. According to Kaymaz (1997: 257, 263) *boz* has a dash of brown ~ roan, *kyr* that of blue ~

used as a designation of ‘dark weather’, cf. the Anatolian Tksh.dial. derivative *boz+amık* ‘cloudy, murky weather’ and the Azerb. verb *boz+ar-* ‘to turn rainy/foggy/cold’ (op. cit. 89).¹⁹

Finally, one can observe that the Yeniseic evolution of ‘yellow’ → ‘green’ is the least certain scheme here. The development can equally well have proceeded in the reverse direction as was the case with Turkic and Uralic (and Indo-European which is, however, less important for Siberian studies). This fact rather weighs against any claim of close areal connections between Yeniseic and, say, Turkic.²⁰

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We have started our considerations with a tacit assumption that the change of Tkc. *yeşil* ~ **jāšyl* ‘green’ into Yak. *sahyl* ‘fox’ resulted from a semantic evolution of the Turkic adjective. H. Şirin User (Izmir; personal communication), however, calls my attention to the fact that an ellipsis is also possible, i.e. a syntagm like “**jāšyl/sahyl* fox” (= ‘light-coloured fox’; cf. Middle Tkc. *jašyl kōk* above) might have been shortened to “**jāšyl/sahyl*” = ‘light-coloured fox’, and then generalized into ‘fox’. Among Şirin User’s examples (email message of 7.07.2009) we find e.g. the Old Turkic usage of *kara* ‘black’ with the meaning ‘people’ (< *kara bodun* ‘common folk/people, plebs’, lit. ‘black folk’) or the modern usage of Tksh. *beyaz*, lit. ‘white’ for diverse narcotics, surely an ellipsis of **beyaz madde* ‘white stuff/article’ or the like. Even if I am at present not in a position to say what the other Yakut word for ‘fox’ was (without which we cannot construct a phrase like “*sahyl* fox”) nor to prove the correctness of Şirin User’s conjecture, it nevertheless deserves closer attention. Be that as it may, the reason for the semantic change or the ellipsis was probably the same: taboo in the Yakut hunting jargon.

LANGUAGES

Arab. = Arabic; **Avest.** = Avestan; **Azerb.** = Azerbaijani; **Bashk.** = Bashkir; **Bur.** = Buryat; **Engl.** = English; **Est.** = Estonian; **Fi.** = Finnish; **Germ.** = German; **Gr.** = Greek; **Hung.** = Hungarian; **IE** = Indo-European; **Ital.** = Italian; **Kar.H.** = Karaim of Halicz; **Khal.** = Khalaj; **Khotan.** = Khotanese; **Mordv.** = Mordvinian; **Osset.** = Ossetian; **Pehl.** = Pehlevi; **Perm.** =

dark/black. The newest study on semantics and the modern usage of Tksh. *boz* and *kır* is Bayraktar 2009.

¹⁹ It is still uncertain whether Tkc. *mor* is a phonetic variant of *boz* or a loan word from Gr. *μόρον* ‘mulberry’. Nevertheless, this word, too, shows a range of colour hues that are all rather dark: ‘grey’ – ‘brown’ – ‘reddish (brown)’ – ‘violet’ (Račeva 1998: 209).

²⁰ As for close contacts of Yakut, the situation with Buryat is extraordinarily curious. Mongolic loan words in Yakut usually exhibit no Buryat phonetic features; nevertheless, there exist some loan words in Yakut that are unknown to any other Mongolic language but Buryat (Kałużyński 1961: 124). The latter applies also to the Yakut fox – it is only in Yakut and Buryat that ‘rainbow’ is literally called ‘the fox pissed’, i.e. Yak. *sahyl iktēbit* ~ Bur. *ünegen šektete*, and such a “common conceptualization of an atmospheric phenomenon” (Clark 1979: 18) surely implies “a connection that is deeper than ordinary borrowing” (l.c.).

Permian; **Pers.** = Persian; **PTKc.** = Proto-Turkic; **Pump.** = Pumpokolian; **Sogd.** = Sogdian; **Tat.** = Tatar; **Tkc.** = Turkic; **Tksh.** = Turkish; **Trkm.** = Turkmen; **Uyg.** = Uygur; **Veps.** = Vepsian; **Vot.** = Votyak; **Yak.** = Yakut.

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Abstract

*Is the Yakut fox green?,
or remarks on some colour names in Turkic, Uralic, and Yeniseic*

The present article discusses some problems connected with semantic understanding and etymological interpretation of Turkic colour names. Its starting point is the observation that the Yakut word for fox should – because of its etymology – be translated as 'green' which is rather astonishing for the colour of fox fur. Also some other words are discussed here, e.g. Turkic *kōk* 'blue', *jāšyl* 'green', *saryg* 'yellow'. An areal comparison with some Uralic and Yeniseic data is offered as well.

Streszczenie

*Czy jakucki lis jest zielony?,
czyli uwagi o nazwach kolorów w językach turkijskich, uralskich i jenijskich*

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje kilka problemów związanych z semantycznym rozumieniem i etymologiczną interpretacją turkijskich nazw kolorów. Punktem wyjścia jest tu spostrzeżenie, że jakucką nazwę lisa powinno by się – biorąc pod uwagę jej etymologię – tłumaczyć jako 'zielony', co jest dość zaskakujące jako kolor lisiego futra. W artykule jest też mowa o kilku innych wyrazach, jak np. *kōk* 'niebieski', *jāšyl* 'zielony' czy *saryg* 'żółty'. Uwzględniono także pewne dane uralskie i jenijskie.