

BASIC COLOUR TERMS IN LITERATURE*

I.C. MCMANUS

Bedford College, University of London

and

St. Mary's Hospital Medical School

It is shown that the use of colour words in poetry and literature correlates closely with the order of evolution of colour words, as described by Berlin and Kay. This relationship

suggests that a number of the psychological aspects of colour *naming* correlate closely with the Berlin and Kay ordering.

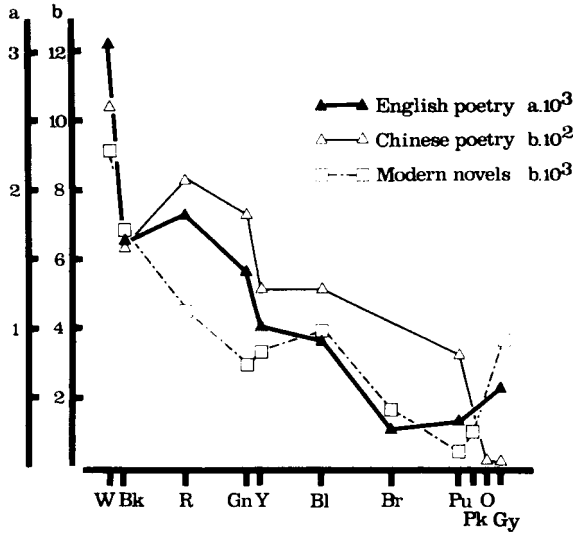
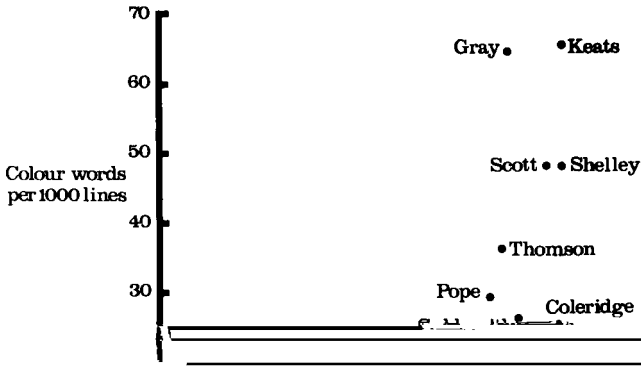


Fig. 1. The frequency of occurrence (ordinate) of colour words in three separate



3 shows that the relative usage of colour words is much the same in the different poets (a small number of poets have been omitted due to inadequate sample size).

A similar trend may be found in word-counts of ordinary writing. Table 1 shows the frequency of colour words in the analysis of Thorndike and Lorge (1944) of almost a million words from magazines ($r = -0.69$ with the Berlin and Kay order) and the analysis of Kučera and Francis (1967) of 1,014,232 words from popular literature ($r = -0.77$ with the Berlin and Kay order).

The general relationship of an increased frequency or salience of words occurring earlier in the Berlin and Kay evolutionary scheme can be found in a heterogenous

Berlin and Kay order with the length of the entry for each word in the Oxford English

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between the Berlin and Kay order of
number of other measures

Correlation with Berlin and Kay o

	All colours	Ex black	White
	-0.858 (-0.835)	-0.870	-0.818
5)	-0.895 (-0.892)	-0.924	-0.943
	-0.770 (-0.778)	-0.483	-0.564
(1944)	-0.692 (-0.766)	-0.577	-0.665
1967)	-0.772 (-0.841)	-0.610	-0.708
	-0.585 (-0.514)	-0.643	-0.341
	-0.664 (-0.542)	-0.839	-0.778
	-0.461 (-0.393)	-0.744	-0.708
	-0.357 (-0.352)	-0.861	-0.769) Ω
	-0.680 (-0.653)	-0.872	-0.954)
	-0.334 (-0.289)	-0.839	-0.848)
5)	-0.705 (-0.837)	-0.706	-0.711)
1973)	-0.763 (-0.522)	-0.789	-0.666)
1973)	-0.225 (-0.232)	-0.652	-0.667)
1973)	-0.783 (-0.522)	-0.902	-0.666)

Boyle and Kerr conclude that water was particularly scarce because of their

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