

BARBARA TARASZKA-DROŹDŹ
GRZEGORZ DROŹDŹ

THE WORLD SEEN THROUGH VEGETABLE COLOURS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH, POLISH, AND FRENCH

Abstract. This study constitutes a comparative investigation of figurative senses of vegetable names in three languages: English, French, and Polish. Drawing on lexicographic data, the goal of the analysis is to investigate those vegetable names whose figurative senses are motivated by these vegetables' colour. Our analysis shows that, on the one hand, all three languages make use of this type of phytonyms as colour terms. At the same time, in all the languages the vegetable colour served as a basis for menonymic and metaphorical extension of vegetable names to different elements of the world that surrounds us—people, animals, and things. In both of these research areas, the languages reveal certain similarities as well as culture-specific elements that are unique for each of them.

Keywords: colour terms; comparative analysis; English; French; metaphor; metonymy; semantic extension; Polish; vegetable names

ŚWIAT WIDZIANY W KOŁORACH WARZYW: STUDIUM PORÓWNAWCZE JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO, POLSKIEGO I FRANCUSKIEGO

Abstrakt. Artykuł przedstawia analizę porównawczą przenośnych znaczeń nazw warzyw w trzech językach: angielskim, francuskim i polskim. Opierając się na danych leksykograficznych, jej celem

BARBARA TARASZKA-DROŹDŹ, PhD, University of Silesia in Katowice, Institute of Linguistics; correspondence address: Instytut Językoznawstwa US, ul. Grota-Roweckiego 5, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland; e-mail: barbara.taraszka-drozd@us.edu.pl; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4944-9813>.

GRZEGORZ DROŹDŹ, PhD, Dr. Litt, Associate Professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Institute of Linguistics; correspondence address: Instytut Językoznawstwa US, ul. Grota-Roweckiego 5, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland; e-mail: grzegorz.drozd@us.edu.pl; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7327-5329>.

jest przebadanie tych figuratywnych znaczeń, które motywowane są kolorem tych warzyw. Jak wskazuje analiza, z jednej strony wszystkie trzy języki wykorzystują ten rodzaj fitonimów do nazywania kolorów. Jednocześnie we wszystkich analizowanych językach kolor warzyw dał podstawę metonimicznym i metaforycznym rozszerzeniom nazw tych warzyw do różnych elementów otaczającego nas świata – ludzi, zwierząt i rzeczy. W obu tych zakresach badawczych języki wykazują pewne podobieństwa, jak też wydobywają pewne elementy specyficzne kulturowo, charakterystyczne dla każdego z nich.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza porównawcza; język angielski; język francuski; język polski; metafora; metonimia; nazwy kolorów; nazwy warzyw; rozszerzenie semantyczne

INTRODUCTION

From the linguistic perspective, the concept of colour constitutes a multifaceted subject of investigation. On the one hand, the perception of colour is fundamentally a neurological process, regarded by scholars as a universal aspect of human cognition (Roberson et al., 2005, p. 279). On the other hand, the process of naming wavelengths in a specific language inherently intersects with the domain of cultural variability and diversity (Philip, 2006, p. 60). Actually, this view can be taken even further to say that “the meanings of color terms ... are cultural artefacts” (Wierzbicka, 1990, p. 142).

Colour terminology often draws on various elements of the surrounding world, many of which are specific to a particular culture. One of these elements are vegetables, which form the subject of our considerations. Vegetable colours can motivate the use of vegetable names to designate specific hues. At the same time, vegetables’ colour, as one of their salient perceptual dimensions, may serve as a foundation for further, figurative senses. This study aims to examine this type of phytonyms—vegetable names, across three languages, each from a different language group: English (Germanic), French (Romance), and Polish (Slavic).

Following a concise overview of the topic of colour research, the article outlines the methodological framework adopted in the present study. Further, it presents an in-depth analysis of conventionalized vegetable names in the three languages. First, of their metonymic extensions to colour names, and second, of their other extensions motivated by the vegetable colours. The article is concluded with a synthesis of the findings.

1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Till the present day, research on colour terms has gone a long way. One of the important points in it was indicating a small set of colour words that exhaustively partition the colour space, found in all languages – basic colour terms (BCTs) (Berlin & Kay, 1969; Kay et al., 1991; Levinson, 2000, p. 6, etc.). However, as Wierzbicka (1990, p. 103) put it, “whatever happens in the retina, and in the brain, it is not reflected directly in language. Language reflects what happens in the mind, not what happens in the brain” (see Wierzbicka, 2006). In other words, the semantics of colours requires colour concepts, and not just colour space. What is more, languages have evolved hue-denoting expressions not in order to refer to a universal, “natural semantic field systematically covered by a lexical set” (Levinson, 2000, p. 45), but have developed colour vocabulary from all kinds of specific elements of nature, e.g., fruits, animals, minerals, or vegetables (see McNeill, 1972, p. 23; Turton, 1980; Lucy, 1997, pp. 340–341; Wierzbicka, 1990, pp. 138–139; MacDonald et al., 2018).

In the present study, we choose to follow this last path of investigation. Among the possible sources of colour names, we focus on vegetables, defined as “any plant whose fruit, seeds, roots, tubers, bulbs, stems, leaves, or flower parts are used as food” (*DIC*). Their names, as names of objects, are not BCTs but, rather, as Casson (1994) suggests, secondary colour terms, which can be divided into simple (e.g., *lettuce*) and complex (e.g., *carroty*, *watercress green*). As such, they can be called phytonyms or, to the extent that those names refer to colours—chromophytonyms (Baillaud, 2016, p. 80).

Anchored within cognitive linguistics, this investigation draws on Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, e.g. 2008, 2017). Within this framework, the analysed extended senses are approached as semantic extensions of vegetable names, representing a categorizing relationship based on a mental process that involves a comparison of two incongruent entities: one serving as the standard (the basic sense of the vegetable name) and the other being the target of extension (each of the analysed figurative senses).

The nature of this incongruity determines whether the extension is metaphorical or metonymic. Metaphorical extensions occur when the incongruity concerns distinct conceptual domains evoked by the two structures (e.g. Langacker, 2008, p. 36; 2017, pp. 117–118; Taraszka-Drożdż, 2016). Metonymic extensions, by contrast, involve discrepancies between two entities from a single conceptual domain.

Vegetable names, like any lexical item, provide an access point to “an open-ended body of knowledge pertaining to a certain type of entity” (Langacker, 2008, p. 39; see Dąbrowska & Divjak, 2015, p. 1). This encompasses the fact that colours, including vegetable colours, “are imbued with a bewildering range of connotative and associative meanings”, including emotions (Philip, 2011, p. 26; Philip, 2006).

In the realm of linguistic studies, a distinction needs to be made between conventional(ised) colour terms and novel, creative ones. The latter category, as Casson (1994, p. 19) notes, is potentially infinite, as evidenced by the proliferation of colour names in advertising and retail contexts (see Baillaud, 2016). Our study focuses on the former group: those colour terms that are conventionalised. For this reason, we turned to dictionaries as the source of data.

Our analysis addresses the following questions:

- Which vegetable names are used by the linguistic communities to designate colour in the three languages?
- What other, colour-based, figurative senses do vegetable names have?
- What similarities and differences in these areas can be found across the analysed languages?

In order to answer them, a set of 54 English vegetable names was compiled,¹ together with their equivalents in French and Polish. Consequently, they were scrutinised from the perspective of their semantic extensions. This analysis was based on different types of lexicographic sources: 48 general and slang dictionaries, as well as lexicons.²

The results of this analysis are presented in two parts. First, we compare vegetable names that in all the languages refer to colour names. Then, we examine other figurative senses of vegetable names that are motivated by the vegetables’ colour.

¹ To compile such a list, first we referred to the *MVD*, and then to other multilingual visual dictionaries.

² Because of such a large number, in the Sources section only some exemplary ones are enumerated.

2. FIGURATIVE EXTENSIONS OF VEGETABLE NAMES

2.1 EXTENSIONS TO THE DOMAIN OF COLOUR

Before a detailed discussion, three preliminary observations are due. First, in their basic senses the analysed vegetable names function as nouns, and it is these forms that have undergone metonymic extension to the domain of colours. This extension can generally be formulated as “entity for entity’s colour” (Casson, 1994) or, more specifically, “vegetable for vegetable’s colour”. However, as the consulted dictionaries show, depending on the language in question this type of semantic extension has brought about different morpho-syntactic modifications.

In Polish, by analogy to typical colour names (adjectives, e.g. *czerwony* ‘red’), these nouns served as the root for the formation of denominal adjectives by means of the suffix *-owy*, as in e.g., *pomidorowy* ‘tomato.ADJ’. In our analysis, the only exception to this is *szczypiorek* ‘chives’ because, being a part of the whole expression *jajecznica ze szczypiorkiem* ‘scrambled eggs with chives’, it does not change its grammatical category.

In French, vegetable names, like other common nouns (e.g. *marron* ‘chestnut’) can be used as colour adjectives. However, unlike simple adjectives of colour, which agree in gender and number with the modified noun, vegetable names are invariable (e.g. *des manteaux* ‘aubergine’, lit. ‘coats eggplant.SG’). The reason is they can be considered as resulting from ellipsis: *des manteaux (de la couleur de l’) aubergine* ‘coats [of the colour of] eggplant’ (e.g. DAF). In this type of construction, the vegetable name is placed directly after the noun. Besides, dictionaries also record two constructions in which the vegetable name occurs after the colour name, modifying it: either directly, e.g., *rouge tomate* ‘tomato red’ (lit. ‘red tomato’), or by means of the preposition *de*, e.g., *jaune de maïs* ‘corn yellow’, (lit. ‘yellow of corn’).

In English, colour names are also typically adjectives. If not, denominal adjectives can be formed by means of the *-y* suffix, e.g. *carrot-y*. At the same time, in the analysed definitions a more common, syntactic solution can be observed: the vegetable name is used as a modifier specifying either the shade of a colour, as in *beetroot purple*, or describing the colour of an object, e.g. *an aubergine cup*.

Secondly, dictionaries adopt different strategies while characterising the colours associated with specific vegetable names. At times, the definition only provides information that the given word functions as a colour name, without

characterising this colour, as in the case of, e.g., *gingembre* ‘ginger’ (*TLFI*). The definition can also be very general, providing information such as: having the colour of the tomato (*SWJP*). Additionally, dictionaries may occasionally specify which part of the vegetable the colour pertains to, e.g. corn kernels (*TLFI*), its stage of ripeness, e.g. a ripe tomato (*OED*), or the form in which it is used, e.g. dried and powdered ginger (*OED*). In other cases, albeit rarely, dictionaries describe the given colour by referring to single basic colour terms, e.g. orange (*SJP*). Finally, dictionaries provide more complex descriptions that incorporate several colours or their shades, e.g. “deep purple” (*CH*), “yellowish-brown”, or “a bright, nearly pure, but not deep green” (*OED*).

Third, there are considerable divergencies in colour descriptions. The hue of the same vegetable can be defined by reference to different colours, both across the three languages (e.g. carrot), as well as within one language (e.g. ginger). As a result, this precludes the organization of the names into a spectrum of single-color categories. A thorough analysis of dictionary definitions of vegetable names revealed that the designated colours fall into two categories: a spectrum of shades of green and an extensive continuum of hues ranging from yellow through orange, red, pink, purple, violet, to brown. Despite such a broad range, it is impossible to distinguish some subgroups because the colors associated with individual vegetables often overlap, as demonstrated in the analysis.

2.1.1 Colour range: yellow–orange–red–pink–purple–violet–brown

Within this colour range, the majority of the analysed vegetable names can be found—as many as 11. Notably, four of these names appear in all three languages. The first of them is “carrot”, whose colour sense originates from the tuber’s hue. Interestingly, the colour associated with this vegetable varies across the languages, evoking such colours as red, orange, and yellow.

In French, *carotte*, as a colour term, is defined as red (*L*) or orangish red (*DAF*). This noun also appears in the construction *rouge carotte* ‘carroty red’ (*R*), indicating a specific shade of red. In Polish, the colour termed *marchewkowy* [carrot.ADJ] is characterised as orange (*SJP*, *ISJP*). In English, *carroty*, also a denominal adjective, reveals several divergent characterisations regarding the hue: orange colour of carrots (*CAM*), reddish or yellowish-orange (*DIC*), or red (*OED*).

Additionally, it is worth noting that both in English and French dictionary definitions evoke one of the real-world entities that are characterised by this

vegetable-derived colour term—human hair. Actually, they classify its colour in a slightly different manner than that of the carrot. In French, the colour of *carotte* hair is roux (*R*, *TLFI*), a more or less dark orange colour, ranging from fawn to auburn (*DAF*). In English, such hair is described as strong reddish (*CH*) or orange (*LD*).

Another vegetable name found in all the languages is *ginger*. Also in this case there is no consensus regarding this colour. While French dictionaries merely indicate that the word *gingembre* ‘ginger’ can designate a colour (*TLFI*, *GR*), in Polish, the term *imbirowy* ‘ginger.ADJ’ is described as light brown with an orange tint, resembling the colour of spice ginger (*WSJP*). In English, this colour can be named by means of two terms: *ginger* and its derivative, the adjective *gingery*. The former is defined either as a shade of brown, i.e. reddish-brown (*CH*), bright orange-brown (*LD*), orange-brown (*OED*), or as a shade of yellow, i.e. reddish-yellow (*OED*), with *OED* specifying that this is the colour of dried and powdered ginger. Furthermore, *OED* notes that the term *ginger* is used especially with reference to the colour of hair, fur, or plumage. The adjective *gingery* is characterised in a very similar manner; the only difference being the novel trait that it refers to complexion.

The tomato colour, termed in French *couleur tomate*, *rouge tomate*, or simply *tomate*, is characterised as bright red, crimson (*R*) or bright red, similar to the colour of a ripe tomato (*TLFI*). So is it in English—the *OED* specifies that the colour designated by *tomato*, a bright shade of red, is the colour of a ripe vegetable. In Polish, the adjective *pomidorowy* ‘tomato.ADJ’ is described as red with an orange tint (*SJP*, *WSJP*) or, alternatively, as orange-red (*SWJP*).

The last vegetable associated with a specific colour across three languages is the aubergine. In Polish, the colour called *bakłażanowy* ‘aubergine.ADJ’ is not explicitly characterised; the only clue concerning its hue comes from the definition of the vegetable, which describes its skin as violet (*SJP*). In French, dictionaries are far more specific. The colour designated by *aubergine* can be characterised as violet, dark violet, or darkened violet (*L*, *TLFI*, *R*). In English, depending on the language variety, two names are used to refer both to the vegetable and the colour associated with it: *aubergine* in British English, and *eggplant* in American English. A certain discrepancy between them can be observed: *aubergine* is described as deep purple (*CH*), dark purple (*CLD*), or dark purplish (*DIC*), while *eggplant* is characterised as dark greyish or blackish purple (*WEB*).

Extended senses of two other vegetable names can be found in two of the languages. The squash provided colour terms in French and English. However,

both the type and the colour of the squash are different in each language. In French, the term *potiron* ‘butternut squash’ denotes a hue described as yellowish, yellow-orange (*TLFI*). In American English, in turn, the corresponding term is *pumpkin*, which refers to moderate to strong orange (*AH*) or a strong orange colour (*WEB*).

The beetroot, in turn, served as the foundation of a colour name in Polish and English. In Polish, *buraczkowy* [beetroot.ADJ], is defined as red-violet (*WSJP*, *SWJP*, *ISJP*). In English, its equivalent would be *beetroot purple*, described as deep to very deep purplish red (*AH*).

Finally, five vegetable-based colour names are characteristic for one language only—either English or French. In English, three terms can be found. *Dandelion* is described as a brilliant to vivid yellow (*AH*). *Rhubarb* is defined with reference to two types of rhubarb: medicinal rhubarb root, whose colour is specified as yellowish-brown or garden rhubarb, characterised as pale red (*OED*). The melon, in turn, serves as the basis for such colour expressions as *melon pink* or *melon yellow* (*OED*). In both cases, the colour is characterised as yellowish-pink.

In French, the colour name is *maïs* ‘corn’, which is described as orange-yellow, the colour of corn kernels (*TLFI*) or pale yellow (*DAF*). This colour can also appear in the construction *jaune de maïs* ‘corn yellow’ (*TLFI*). The last vegetable is the onion or, more specifically, onion skin—*pelure d’oignon* ‘onion skin’, which is used to refer to violet-pink (*TLFI*) or orange-pink (*TLFI*).

2.1.2 Shades of green

The second continuum encompasses eight vegetable names whose extended senses form a continuum of different shades of green. None of these names is shared by all three languages, two names appear in two languages, and six are exclusive to individual languages.

In Polish and English, it is the pea whose name is used to refer to colours. However, the shade that it designates is characterised in each of them in a slightly different manner. In Polish, the *WSJP* defines *grozdkowy* ‘pea.ADJ’, as whitened green. In English, depending on the dialect, *pea-green* receives divergent characterisations. In British, it is defined as a bright, nearly pure, but not deep green (*OED*), a light green colour (*LG*), or a bright, yellowish-green colour (*CAM*), while in American English it means a moderate yellow green (*WEB*).

The other vegetable noted in two languages is spinach. In both French and English, we find such expressions as *vert épinard* ‘spinach green’ and *spinach green*, which are used to describe a dark shade of green (*OED*, *R*, *DAF*).

As for vegetable names that are language specific, in English we can observe the term *lettuce* or, more specifically, *lettuce green*, defined as a medium shade of green resembling that of lettuce (*OED*). Another English-specific vegetable is *watercress*, whose colour, *watercress green*, is described less precisely as “a particular shade of green” (*OED*).

The vegetable names that only appear in French include *asperge* ‘asparagus’, *artichaut* ‘artichoke’, and *oseille* ‘sorrel’. The first of them, used in the expression *vert asperge* ‘asparagus green’ (*TLFI*), designates pale green colour, while the other two, in expressions such as *vert artichaut* ‘artichoke green’ (*GR*) or *vert oseille* ‘sorrel green’ (*TLFI*), are used to describe dark green.

In Polish, a still different vegetable is found, i.e. *szczypiorek* ‘chives.SG’. However, its name appears in a conventionalised expression *jajecznica ze szczypiorkiem* ‘scrambled eggs with chives’, which is used humorously to describe the combination of vivid yellow shades (the colour of scrambled eggs) and the green hue (the colour of chives) (*WSFP*). A comprehensive overview of the discussed vegetable names is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Vegetable names used as colour names in English, French, and Polish

Colour ranges	English	French	Polish
Continuum: yellow–orange–red–pink–purple–violet–brown	<i>carrot</i>	<i>carotte</i>	<i>marchewkowy</i>
	<i>ginger</i>	<i>gingembre</i>	<i>imbirowy</i>
	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomate</i>	<i>pomidorowy</i>
	<i>aubergine</i> <i>/eggplant</i>	<i>aubergine</i>	<i>bakłażanowy</i>
	<i>pumpkin</i>	<i>potiron</i>	
	<i>beetroot</i>		<i>buraczkowy</i>
	<i>dandelion</i>		
	<i>rhubarb</i>		
	<i>melon</i>		
		<i>maïs</i>	
		<i>pelure d'oignon</i>	

Shades of green	<i>pea</i>		<i>groszkowy</i>
	<i>spinach</i>	<i>épinard</i>	
	<i>lettuce</i>		
	<i>watercress</i>		
		<i>asperge</i>	
		<i>artichaut</i>	
		<i>oseille</i>	
			<i>szczypiorek</i>

2.2 COLOUR-BASED EXTENSIONS TO OTHER DOMAINS

Passing on to the second part of the analysis, it must be noted that only some of the vegetable names discussed above have extended senses in other domains than colour. At the same time, there are also those that are not recognised by dictionaries as colour names, though the vegetables' colour played a major role in the formation of the figurative senses discussed below.

Moreover, vegetable names can appear in all kinds of constructions. First, as a single word, which is a construction of its own (e.g., *lettuce* means dollar banknotes). Second, it can constitute a part of a figurative construction, where it modifies a noun (e.g. *radish communist*), or be a part of different types of simile (e.g. *go as red as a beet* or *cabbage looking*).

2.2.1 Colour range: yellow–orange–red–pink–purple–violet–brown

As for the vegetable names examined in subsection 2.1.1, the colour of six of these vegetables became one of the important elements motivating their further figurative senses: carrot (English and French), tomato (Polish and French), beetroot (Polish and English), ginger (English), aubergine, and onion (French).

As previously mentioned, *carrot* is associated with hair colour. Based on this, both in English and French one more figurative sense of *carrot* developed, metonymically related to hair, namely, people with such hair. In French, such a person can also be referred to as *poil de carotte* 'hair of carrot' (TLFI), whereas in English, the plural form of the noun, *carrots*, is used to refer both to someone's red hair as well as to a person with such hair (OED).

Regarding tomato, in Polish slang *pomidor* signifies blush (*SPP*) and, through metonymy, a person who blushes (*SSM*, *SPP*). This reddening in the face is also associated with specific emotions manifested through reddening. Consequently, another metaphorical sense of *pomidor* relates to the blushing brought on by emotions such as shyness or embarrassment (*SSM*).

Much like Polish, the French language associates the colour of the tomato with the complexion of a person experiencing certain emotions. For instance, the expression *être rouge comme une tomate* ‘to be as red as a tomato’, is defined as having red cheeks and a face flushed with shame, shyness, confusion, or anger (*TLFI*). Besides this one, in French this colour has triggered more metaphorical senses, such as: an aperitif whose colour resembles that of a tomato—specifically, an aperitif prepared with pastis and grenadine (*TLFI*, *GR*); the rosette of the Legion of Honour, one of the distinguishing features of which is the discussed colour (*TLFI*, *DLA*); and a particular physical characteristic of the nose, which is described as big and red (*DLA*).

The colour of the next vegetable, beetroot, is evoked in Polish in expressions such as *być czerwonym jak burak* ‘to be as red as a beetroot’ (*WSFP*, *SFJP*), *zaczzerwienić się jak burak* ‘blush like a beetroot’ (*ISJP*), *poczerwienić jak burak* ‘to turn as red as a beetroot’ (*SF*), or, more colloquially, *puścić buraka* ‘to display a beetroot’ (*SPP*). All these expressions describe the state or process of facial reddening, together with the emotions that cause such a reaction: shame (*ISJP*, *NSF*), anger (*ISJP*), or emotional agitation (*NSF*). Additionally, much like *tomato*, in colloquial usage *beetroot* can also designate the facial blush and a person who has blushed (*SPP*, *SSM*).

In English, we observe very similar expressions (though, again, with the American–British distinction): *go beet red* (UK: *go beetroot*), and *go as red as a beet* (UK: *go as red as a beetroot*), which associate the flush with a specific emotion that motivated its appearance, i.e. embarrassment (*CAD*, *LD*). At the same time, CH observes a slightly broader sense of *beetroot*, which refers to deep or rosy red complexion, but the reason motivating it is not only emotional—embarrassment, but also physical—exertion.

The figurative senses of *ginger* in English to some extent resemble those of *carrot*—*ginger* can designate the colour of hair, fur, and plumage. These senses are in a metonymic relationship with further senses of *ginger*—beings possessing such attributes: a person with reddish-yellow or (light) orange-brown hair, a cat with predominantly orange-coloured fur, or a cock with reddish-brown plumage (which was formerly a type of cock for cockfighting)

(*OED*). Moreover, *OED* identifies an additional, now obsolete, meaning of *ginger*: gold dust.

Colour has also played a significant role in forming several figurative extensions of *aubergine* in French: a bottle of red wine (*TLFI*, *GR*, *DLA*), a very red, elongated nose (*TLFI*, *GR*) and, as indicated by *DLA*, a nose reddened by alcohol abuse. Additionally, the term appears in the name for an academic ribbon, referred to as *raclure d'aubergine* 'aubergine scrapings' (*TLFI*). What is more, *aubergine* is used to refer to certain people: bishops (*TLFI*, *GR*, *DLA*) and Parisian traffic wardens (*GR*, *DLA*). The motivation behind these extensions lies in the colour of their clothing—vestments in the case of the bishop and the uniform in the case of the traffic warden, both of which resemble the hue of the aubergine.

A different set of associations is evoked by the colour of the onion or, more specifically, its skin, referred to in French as *pelure d'oignon* 'onion skin'. With its orangish to tawny tint characteristic of certain red or pink wines, particularly aged varieties (*L*), it has given rise to names such as *vin pelure d'oignon* 'onion skin wine' and, through ellipsis, *pelure d'oignon* (*TLFI*).

2.2.2 Shades of green

Regarding the vegetables discussed in subsection 2.1.2, the colour of three of them has become the basis for further figurative extensions: spinach (French), chives (Polish), and lettuce (English).

The French term *épinard* has acquired a pejorative sense in the field of painting: the expression *paysage épinard* 'spinach scenery', *paysage aux épinards* 'scenery with spinach' or, through ellipsis, simply *épinard(s)* is used to describe a mediocre painting depicting a landscape dominated by green (*TLFI*). In Polish, the name *szczypior* 'chives' is colloquially used to characterise a person lacking appropriate knowledge or skills within a particular field (*WSJP*). One of the elements motivating this extension is the green colour of the vegetable, which symbolises immaturity and youth. Youth, in turn, is often associated with the lack of experience or knowledge (Bartmiński & Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, 2018, p. 313). In English, particularly in American slang, *lettuce* refers to dollar banknotes (*AH*, *DIC*), probably due to its association with the colour of American currency (*OED*) or, through broadening of the sense, to money in general (*OED*).

Interestingly, there are also several vegetable names that are not conventional colour names, but still colour has served as the basis for their figurative

extensions. What is more, they carry two out of three associations encoded in the analysed green vegetable names: money and youth.

In English, two vegetable names, *cabbage* and *kale*, are used in American slang to refer to money (*OED*, *WEB*, *AH*). In Polish, the same metaphorical sense—money (*SA*, *SPP*, *SSM*)—is carried by *salata* ‘lettuce’ and *kapusta* ‘cabbage’.

As for youth, in Polish the name *szczaw* ‘sorrel’ and its diminutive form, *szczawik*, are used in a dismissive manner to characterise a young, inexperienced boy (*WSJP*). As with the earlier term *szczypior*, the green colour assumes here a symbolic interpretation. We also need to mention a figurative extension of the English word *cabbage*, as in the expression *cabbage-looking*. It is defined as stupid or ‘green’ (*OED*), which constitutes yet another metaphorical extension of a vegetable name rooted in the discussed symbolism of the green colour.

2.2.3 Black

Moreover, among the analysed vegetable names, a few stand out, as they do not fit into the previously described categories of figurative extensions. One of these names evokes a colour not yet observed in the analysis, which is black. It only appears in the French language, where this colour served as the foundation for two extensions of *radis noir* ‘black radish’. In colloquial usage, this name is used to refer to people with the distinctive black colour of their clothing—priests and policemen (*DLA*).

2.2.4 Two contrasting colours

Additionally, the analysis shows that certain figurative senses or expressions derive not from a single, salient colour of a vegetable, but rather contrasting colours of different parts of the given vegetable.

One of such examples is the leek, whose green leaves contrast with its white lower section. In French, this combination of colours was one of the motivating factors for the figurative meaning of *poireau* ‘leek’—the Order of Agricultural Merit (*L*, *TLFI*), which features a white enamelled star attached to a predominantly green ribbon. This colour combination underpins the metaphorical expression *être comme le poireau: la tête blanche et la queue verte* ‘to be like the leek: the white head and the green tail’, describing a middle-aged man who remains vigorous and daring with women. The same colour

contrast may also have influenced the use of *poireau* to designate the general commanding the military school of Saint-Cyr. One of the possible motivations of this latter sense draws on an association between the green uniform worn by generals and their grey hair (*BOB*).

In the English language, the metaphorical meaning of two contrasting colours was derived from the colours of the radish—its red skin and white flesh. This contrast became the basis for associations with the red colour, emblematic of the Bolshevik Revolution and the communist system that followed it, and the white colour, a symbol of the White, anti-Bolshevik movement. Consequently, the term *radish* or *radish communist* referred to people who publicly claimed to be communist (red on the outside) but were, in reality, opposed to it (white on the inside) (*OED*).

2.2.5 Low saturation of colour

In French, and exclusively in this language, we can also observe figurative meanings of vegetable names that are based not so much on hue but on colour saturation—specifically, low saturation, which is associated with paleness. For instance, the pale colour of cucumber flesh has led to its figurative extension to describe a person with a pale complexion (*TLFI*). Similarly, the pale colour of the endive, resulting from the blanching process (deprivation of light during cultivation), forms the basis for the expression *pâle comme une endive* ‘as pale as an endive’, used to describe someone with a sickly complexion (*GR, L, TLFI*). A more complex process underpins the figurative associations of the pale colour of turnip flesh and juice. This paleness was metaphorically transferred to the colour of blood and, as *DEL* notes, the image of whitened blood suggests anaemia and, metaphorically, connotes cowardice (Amerlynck, 2006). Hence the expression *avoir du sang de navet* ‘to have the blood of turnip’, which means to be anaemic and also refers to someone who lacks courage or fighting spirit (*TLFI, L, DEL*). The figurative senses of the vegetable names discussed in this part of analysis are collected in the following table.

Table 2. Vegetable names with figurative senses motivated by colour in English, French, and Polish

Colour ranges	English	French	Polish
Continuum: yellow–orange–red–pink–purple–violet–brown	<i>carrot</i>	<i>carotte</i>	
		<i>tomate</i>	<i>pomidor</i>
	<i>beetroot</i>		<i>burak</i>
	<i>ginger</i>		
		<i>aubergine</i>	
		<i>pelure d'oignon</i>	
Shades of green		<i>épinard</i>	
			<i>szczypior</i>
	<i>lettuce</i>		<i>sałata</i>
	<i>cabbage</i>		<i>kapusta</i>
	<i>kale</i>		
			<i>szczaw</i>
Black		<i>radis noir</i>	
Two contrasting colours		<i>poireau</i>	
	<i>radish</i>		
Saturation of colour		<i>concombre</i>	
		<i>endive</i>	
		<i>navet</i>	

3. CONCLUSIONS

As the analysis shows, the attention drawn to the vegetables' colour unquestionably plays a role across the three languages. This is demonstrated by the presence of vegetable names used as colour names in all the languages, and the fact that in each of them the vegetable colour has provided a foundation for further figurative extensions.

3.1 VEGETABLE NAMES USED AS COLOUR NAMES

In each of the analysed languages, a different number of vegetable names functioning as colour names was identified. In English, there are 13 of them, 11 in French, and 7 in Polish. Notably, only 4 vegetable names appear across all three languages: carrot, ginger, tomato, and aubergine. At the same time, certain names are unique to individual languages: English has 5 unique names (*dandelion*, *rhubarb*, *melon*, *lettuce*, and *watercress*), just like French (*maïs*, *pelure d'oignon*, *asperge*, *oseille*, and *artichaut*), while Polish has just 1 (*szcypior*). Importantly, identical vegetable names in diverse languages may correspond to distinct hues due to experience with different vegetable varieties, as these can differ in colour. Thus, even when languages use the same vegetable for a colour name, the hues may differ (e.g. squash and carrot-derived colours).

3.2 OTHER FIGURATIVE EXTENSIONS

From a statistical perspective, these senses can be summed up as follows: French is the most abundant language, with 10 vegetable names contributing to 21 senses. English follows with 7 vegetable names linked to 11 senses, and Polish features 6 vegetable names that only generate 9 senses. Also in this category of extended senses, similarities and differences across the languages can be observed.

3.2.1 Extensions referring to people

When it comes to the similarities, the vital one is that a significant portion of the analysed expressions somehow pertains to people, one of the parts of their body, or certain emotions, states, and qualities (see Sommer, 1988, p. 672). All the languages refer to flushed cheeks—by means of the tomato in Polish and French, and of the beetroot in Polish and English. What is also common for these languages is that the red colour is a manifestation of certain emotional or physical states. While the evoked emotions are largely similar: shame, embarrassment, shyness, and confusion, Polish and French also enumerate anger, and English mentions physical exertion. The next element designated by vegetable names is human hair, though this only occurs in French and English, where carrot is used to evoke its red colour.

In all three languages, people are referred to by means of the green colour and its symbolic connection to immaturity and youthfulness, though each language profiles a different dimension of it: in Polish, this colour evokes being young and inexperienced or lacking proper knowledge (chives), vigour in French (the green part of a leek), and immaturity associated with stupidity (cabbage) in English.

As for language-specific, human-centred references, two languages must be listed. The one that clearly dominates in this area is French which, for instance, by means of red vegetables—aubergine and tomato, refers to a red nose. This, among other things, suggests excessive alcohol consumption. French also evokes a specific colour of the face—a pale complexion (endive) or a person with such pallor (cucumber). This paleness is either associated with being frail (endive) or anaemic (turnip). A distinctive feature of French is also the use of the white base of the leek to symbolise grey hair and, by metonymy, to designate two kinds of people with such hair: a general and a middle-aged man. Finally, only in French vegetable colours are applied to refer to people with a characteristic colour of their attire: the colour of the black radish—to the priest and policeman, the colour of the aubergine—to the bishop and traffic warden, and the green top of the leek—to the general. The other language, English, is exceptional in its reference to complexion by means of the adjective *gingery* and *beetroot*, and drawing upon the symbolism of the red colour, derived from the red skin of the radish, to refer to specific people, i.e. communists.

3.2.2 Extensions referring to things and animals

The thing shared by two of the languages, English and Polish, is dollars (or, by extension, money), which are referred to through the green colour of the following vegetables: lettuce, cabbage, and kale (English), and cabbage and lettuce (Polish).

Among thing designations unique to individual languages, French stands out because as many as three French terms refer to wine (*pelure d'oignon*, *tomate*, and *aubergine*) and another three to orders and decorations (*poireau*, *tomate*, and *aubergine*). French is also the only language to use the name of a green vegetable (*épinard*) to describe a specific type of landscape in painting. By contrast, a distinctive feature of English is the use of the term *ginger* to refer to gold dust.

This brief overview of vegetable names ends with one associated with animals. It turns out English is the sole language that uses a vegetable name, *ginger*, to refer to the colour of fur or plumage and, through metonymy, also to animals with such characteristics—cats and roosters.

Concluding, even an analysis of such a small segment of language as extended senses of vegetable names that are based on vegetable colours allows us to observe both conceptualisations of the world common for the three languages, and cultural elements that are unique for each of them.

REFERENCES

LITERATURE

- Amerlynnck, J. (2006). *Phraséologie potagère: les noms de légumes dans les expressions françaises contemporaines*. Peeters.
- Baillaud, L. (2016). Images, métaphores, métonymies, autour du vocabulaire botanique. *Revue des sciences naturelles d'Auvergne*, 80, 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.3406/rsna.2016.1151>
- Bartmiński, J., & Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych. Rośliny*. Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Berlin, B., & Kay, P. (1969). *Basic color terms: Their universality and evolution*. University of California Press.
- Casson, R. W. (1994). Russett, rose, and raspberry: The development of English secondary color terms. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 4(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1994.4.1.5>
- Dąbrowska, E., & Divjak, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of cognitive linguistics*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Kay, P., Berlin, B., & Merrifield, W. (1991). Biocultural implications of systems of color naming. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 1(1), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1991.1.1.12>
- Langacker, R. W. (2008). *Cognitive Grammar: A basic introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Langacker, R. W. (2017). *Ten lectures on the basics of Cognitive Grammar*. Brill.
- Levinson, S. C. (2000). Yéli Dnye and the Theory of Basic Color Terms. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 10(1), 3–55.
- Lucy, J. A. (1997). The linguistics of “color”. In C. L. Hardin & L. Maffi (Eds.), *Color categories in thought and language* (pp. 320–346). Cambridge University Press.
- MacDonald, L.W., Biggam, C. P., & Paramei, G. V. (Eds.). (2018). *Progress in colour studies: Cognition, language, and beyond*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- McNeill, N. B. (1972). Colour and colour terminology. *Journal of Linguistics*, 8(1), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002222670000311X>
- Philip, G. (2006). Connotative meaning in English and Italian colour-word metaphors. *Metaphorik*, 10, 59–93.
- Philip, G. (2011). *Colouring meaning*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Roberson, D., Davidoff, J., Davies, I. R. L., & Shapiro, L. R. (2005). Color categories: Confirmation of the relativity hypothesis. *Cognitive Psychology*, 50(4), 378–411.
- Sommer, R. (1988). The personality of vegetables: Botanical metaphors for human characteristics. *Journal of Personality*, 56(4), 665–683. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1988.tb00471.x>
- Taraszk-Drożdż, B. (2016). Lexical and grammatical dimensions of metaphor – a Cognitive Grammar perspective. In G. Drożdż (Ed.), *Studies in lexicogrammar: Theory and applications* (pp. 175–192). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Turton, D. (1980). There's no such beast: Cattle and colour naming among the Mursi. *Man*, 15(2), 320–338. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2801674>
- Wierzbicka, A. (1990). The meaning of colour terms: semantics, culture, and cognition. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 1(1), 99–150. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cogl.1990.1.1.99>
- Wierzbicka, A. (2006). The semantics of colour: A new paradigm. In C. Biggam & C. Kay (Eds.), *Progress in colour studies* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–24). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

SOURCES

- AH = *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. <https://ahdictionary.com>
- BOB = *Bob, dictionnaire de français argotique, populaire et familier*. <https://www.languefrancaise.net/Bob/59775>
- CAD = *The Cambridge Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>
- CH = *The Chambers dictionary*. <https://chambers.co.uk>
- CLD = *Collins English dictionary*. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>
- DAF = *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*. <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr>
- DEL = Rey, A., & Chantreau, S. (Eds.). (1989). *Dictionnaire des expressions et locutions*. Le Robert.
- DIC = *Dictionary.com*. <https://www.dictionary.com>
- DLA = Colin, J-P., & Mével, J-P. (1994). *Dictionnaire de l'argot*. Larousse.
- GR = Rey, A. (Ed.). (2001). *Le Grand Robert de la langue française: dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française de Paul Robert*. Dictionnaires Le Robert.
- ISJP = Bańko, M. (Ed.). (2000). *Inny słownik języka polskiego*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- L = *Dictionnaire de français Larousse*. <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais>
- LD = *Longman dictionary of contemporary English online*. <https://www.ldoceonline.com>
- MVD = Corbeil, J-C., & Archambault, A. (Eds.). (1995). *The Macmillan Visual Dictionary. Unabridged Compact Edition*. Macmillan.
- NSF = Lebeda, R. (2005). *Nowy słownik frazeologiczny*. Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa.
- OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*. (2024). Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com>
- R = *Dico en ligne le Robert*. <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/fr>
- SA = Kania, S. (1995). *Słownik argotyzmów*. Wiedza Powszechna.
- SFJP = Skorupko, S. (Ed.). (1999). *Słownik frazeologiczny języka polskiego*. Wiedza Powszechna.
- SJP = *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. <https://sjp.pwn.pl>

- SPP* = Czeszewski, M. (Ed.). (2006). *Słownik polszczyzny potocznej*. PWN.
- SWJP* = Dunaj, B. (Ed.). (2000). *Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego*. Wydawnictwo SMS.
- TLFI* = *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*. <http://atilf.atilf.fr>
- WEB* = *Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
- WSFP* = Kłosińska, A., Sobol, E., & Stankiewicz, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Wielki słownik frazeologiczny PWN z przysłowiami*. PWN.
- WSJP* = *Wielki słownik języka polskiego*. Instytut Języka Polskiego PAN. <https://wsjp.pl>