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## **A cognitive and corpus-based study of the connotative potential of the adjectives *czzerwony* ‘red’ and *czarny* ‘black’ in modern Polish political discourse**

### **1. Introduction**

Metaphor is traditionally considered to be merely a literary and poetic figure of speech. Nevertheless, the cognitive Conceptual Metaphor Theory assumes that metaphors are pervasive in everyday language (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:80). Lakoff and Johnson, who are cognitive scholars, explain that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism that enables the comprehension of abstract concepts in terms of more concrete ones. It organizes our ways of thinking in various domains, such as politics, war or health, therefore facilitating communication on these intricate issues. Metonymy is a cognitive mechanism which involves only one conceptual domain to evoke another conceptual entity (Kövecses & Radden 1998). Analogously, colour collocations abound with metaphorical and metonymic meanings (Philip 2006). It is evidenced in expressions such as a *red card* or the *black market*.

A great number of researchers have examined colour metaphors from various perspectives. For instance, Philip (2006) provides an account of connotative meanings of colour metaphors in English and Italian. Gieroń-Czeczor (2010) discusses figurative meaning extensions of the colour *red* in Polish and English. Molnar (2013) demonstrates the parallel usage of the connotations of *red* in Croatian and English, showing an array of metaphorical and metonymic meanings. Hamilton (2014) presents an analysis of metaphorical meaning extensions of two colours, *purple* and *lavender*, in electronic corpora. In turn, Kalda and Uusküla (2019) discuss the role of context in the translation of colour metaphors with regard to English and Estonian.

This paper is a corpus-based analysis of the metaphorical and metonymic extensions of the adjectives *czerwony* ‘red’ and *czarny* ‘black’ observed in Polish political discourse. The paper aims to analyze the connotative potential of *red* and *black*. The theoretical framework of the analysis includes the discourse-historical approach as proposed and developed by Wodak (2001) and the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Discourse is understood as all texts, speeches or social comments and opinions of a political nature (Bohman 2004). Due to the limits of space, the article discusses only two colours. *Red* and *black* were chosen for their cultural saliency and prevalence in Polish. Only adjectival forms of *red* and *black* will be discussed in detail. Hopefully, it should not affect the discussion of the qualitative data. In addition to corpus data, dictionaries were consulted to establish symbolic and cultural associations of the colours under scrutiny.

## 2. Research material

*Red* and *black* colour collocations have been retrieved from the online electronic corpora MoncoPL and Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego (NKJP) ‘National Corpus of Polish’. The sample of 3000 citations in each corpus has been searched manually with the aim of finding *red* and *black* colour metaphors. It is impossible to establish the chronology of lexical units excerpted from corpora (Wierzchoń 2010). Nevertheless, it can be stated that MoncoPL is a corpus which contains citations from the following years: 2010-2019. It therefore keeps track of the most current collocations in contrast with the NKJP corpus, which includes older units from 2008-2011 (Pęzik 2019:321).

## 3. The adjectives *czerwony* ‘red’ and *czarny* ‘black’ from a linguistic-cultural perspective

The colours *red* and *black* are deeply rooted in Polish culture and language. Investigations into the symbolism of these colours reveal a host of associations. Wierzbicka (1990) and Tokarski (2004: 90) associate the colour *red* with fire. Komorowska (2010:214) associates *red* with emotional states such as love, enthusiasm and passion. Kopaliński (1990) notices that in the Christian tradition the sacrificial blood of Jesus is attributable to the colour *red*. Correspondingly, this colour evokes associations with bloody crime, battle, war, revolt and anarchy. In ancient times, red was considered to have protective and apotropaic properties.

An array of associations emanate from the colour *black*. Semantic scholars describe *black* in terms of its hue (strength of colour) and relative darkness or lightness. Accordingly, Barcelona (2003) observes that it is the colour which lacks light. *Black* is often described as the darkest colour. Tokarski (2004) associates *black* with darkness and night. Wierzbicka (1996) paints a contrast between *black* and *white*, suggesting that *black* connotes negativity. In European culture, *black* is the colour of death and it is a symbol of mourning. Kopaliński (1990) links *black* with sin and evil. Finally, the clergy and their cassock are the most natural references for the colour *black*.

*Red* is loaded with symbolism. It makes *red* a semantically productive colour which emerges in many linguistic expressions (Philip 2003:25). Polish dictionary entries provide definitions of the colour *red*. “Wielki słownik języka polskiego”, “Inny słownik języka polskiego” and “Słownik języka polskiego PWN” (SJP) define *red* as the colour of blood, ripe tomatoes and wine. The dictionaries associate *red* with emotional states such as shame, resentment or physical tiredness. *Red* also arouses associations with communism and revolutionary transformations (Bańko 2000:222). Accordingly, *lewicowy* ‘the leftist’ is a secondary most natural reference for the colour *red*. *Red* also reflects socialist and communist sympathies. In that sense, *red* evokes pejorative connotations.

*Black* is a highly salient colour evoking a number of associations culled from the aforementioned Polish dictionaries. “Wielki słownik języka polskiego” and “Inny słownik języka polskiego” draw a parallel between *black* and coal & soot. Additionally, Polish dictionaries describe *black* with reference to dark complexions. *Black* colour also evokes Afro-American culture and Afro-American slaves. *Black* is also associated with obscurity and dimmed lights (Bańko 2000:215). As Doroszewski (1958-1969:1098-1102) explains, *black* reflects the darkness of night. “Słownik języka polskiego PWN” associates *black* with dust and dirt.

#### 4. Collocations with the constituent *czerwony* ‘red’ in selected corpora of the Polish language

Extralinguistic factors such as historical or socio-cultural events influence lexical expressions (see: Wodak 2001 or Szerszunowicz 2015). This statement finds validation in the corpus data: communist references are the most frequent figurative extension of the colour *red* (505 occurrences in MoncoPL and 103 in NKJP). It is attested in the following quotations found in the corpus: *czerwona gwiazda* ‘red star’ or *Armia Czerwona*

‘the Red Army’. These lexical expressions are remnants of communist political rule. It has to be mentioned that *red* also occupies an important position in the languages of other East Central European countries. For example, in Hungarian and Czech there are two separate terms for *red*. Hungarian uses *piros* as a basic term for *red*, but *vörös* is used as a *red* colour standing for communist references (e.g. *vöröskatona* ‘the soldier of the Red Army’). In the Czech language *červené* is a basic term for *red*, whereas *rudý* stands for *red* used with reference to communist associations (e.g. *rudá armáda* ‘Red Army’) (Uusküla 2011:152).

A high frequency of the proper name *Armia Czerwona* ‘the Red Army’ occurs in the Polish corpora (594 occurrences in MoncoPL and 421 in NKJP). The colour-based proper name carries both literal and metaphorical senses. Metaphorical uses outnumber non-metaphorical ones (215 metaphorical examples in MoncoPL and 67 in NKJP). Non-ideological uses of the *Red Army* show metaphorical potential. As Stanulewicz and Pawłowski (2018:261) concur, a non-ideological and negative evaluation of the *Red Army* paints a sharp contrast with the ideologised phrases such as *niezwyciężona Armia Czerwona* ‘the invincible Red Army’ or *zwycięska Armia Czerwona* ‘the victorious Red Army’. Non-ideologised *red* is employed in the following corpus citation: *málo ludzi wie o tym, że we wrześniu 1939 roku również Armia Czerwona zaatakowała nasz kraj* ‘few people know that in September 1939 the Red Army also attacked our country’. In this particular example the *Red Army* evokes atrocities perpetrated by Soviet soldiers. As we can see, the non-ideological use of *red* evokes a metaphorical cross-domain mapping between the RED ARMY and EVILNESS. This metaphorical projection indicates that Polish society had a hostile attitude towards communism.

A range of corpus examples confirm the frequent use of *red* with reference to communism and communists. For example, the metaphorical expression *Czerwona Łódź* ‘Red Łódź’ (10 occurrences in MoncoPL and 11 in NKJP) reflects the political prevalence of the communist system in this Polish city. The nominal *czerwoni* ‘the red ones’ (35 occurrences in MoncoPL and 71 in NKJP) is a metonymy for communist sympathisers: RED FOR COMMUNISTS. Here, a negative evaluation of the communists is mapped onto the colour domain. Thus, the nominal *red ones* is an invective or negative collective etiquette. In all these examples the colour *red* is mapped onto the IDEOLOGY domain (RED IS COMMUNISM). Then, the colour *red* signifies communist. An emotional load and an aggressive attitude towards communists are present in the following examples: *Za-*

*toka Czerwonych Świń* ‘the bay of red pigs’ (12 examples in MoncoPL and 7 in NKJP), *czerwone świnie* ‘the red pigs’ (100 occurrences in MoncoPL and 33 in NKJP). The phrase *the bay of red pigs* refers to a housing estate in Warsaw where communist party members, and after 1989 Polish left-wing politicians, used to live. With that in mind, one can deduce that the collocation *the red pigs* evokes metaphorical mapping between communists and the traits of pigs (Zimny & Nowak 2009:301). Therefore, the image of greedy communists is transferred into the domain of *red*.

The corpus data reveals that *red* evokes communist vestiges in democratic Poland, as evidenced in *czerwone pająki* ‘red spiders’ (86 occurrences in MoncoPL and 5 in NKJP), *czerwona holota* ‘red rabble’ (35 examples in MoncoPL and 40 in NKJP) and *czerwona zaraza* ‘the red plague’ (70 MoncoPL and in 6 NKJP). The collocation *red spiders* is a reference to the Polish left-wing after 1989 (Szerszunowicz 2016:480). Negative features of spiders are metaphorically transferred onto left-wing politicians. Therefore, *red spiders* may be seen as a pejorative name for contemporary left-wing politicians who were former communists. The unit *red rabble* is a fragment of a Polish chant that was extremely popular in the communist period: *Raz sierpem, raz młotem czerwoną holotę* ‘Use a sickle, use a hammer, smash the red rabble’. *Red rabble* functions as a pejorative label for the communists and communist activists. Nevertheless, such a meaning of the phrase does not find validation in a Google search. In Internet lore *red rabble* has acquired a new meaning: it signifies sympathisers of the contemporary political grouping *Koalicja Obywatelska* ‘Civic Coalition’ and the civic organization *KOD* (Komitet Obrony Demokracji), ‘the Committee for the Defence of Democracy’. Therefore the collocation is used to indicate contemporary communist successors.

The lexical collocation *czerwona zaraza* ‘the red plague’ is rich in meanings and connotations. First of all, according to “Inny słownik języka polskiego”, the term *zaraza* ‘plague’ stands for an epidemic disease such as cholera, smallpox or typhus. However, the corpus data do not confirm the dictionary meaning. In corpus the noun *plague* refers to the bolshevik soldiers and the ideology of communism. It is manifested in the following citation: *Komuna to czerwona zaraza bolszewicka!* ‘communism is the red bolshevik plague’. Here, we can observe a metonymy-based metaphorical mapping between two domains of DISEASE and COMMUNISM (COMMUNISM IS DISEASE). Communism is presented as a symbol of social disorder or dysfunction. However, the above-mentioned lexical unit *red plague* also occurs in reference to the political party, as is manifested in the following corpus

statement: [...] *SLD to czerwona zaraza* ‘The Democratic Left Alliance is a red plague’. In this example *SLD* is designated as the sole follower of communist practices. It seems that the depreciative expression *red plague* ascribes the leftist political party a negative image: *SLD IS DISEASE*. Therefore, the left-wing political grouping is evoked as an object of disgust.

### 5. Collocations with the constituent *czarny* ‘black’ in selected corpora of the Polish language

Socio-cultural phenomena and events influence language (Szerszunowicz 2018). Polish culture is inextricably linked with the Catholic creed and the Catholic Church (Szocik & Szyja 2015). In fact, the church is entangled with the Polish state. It is worth mentioning that the Catholic church helped resist communist ideology. Since the fall of Communism the Church has played an important religious and political role in Poland. Corpus data reveals that religious connotations are the most frequent metaphorical extensions of the colour black (43 occurrences in MoncoPL and 15 in NKJP). It can be assumed, to a great extent, that the dominance of the Catholic creed in Poland motivates a number of phrasemes with the constituent *black* in corpus.

The use of *black* with reference to the Catholic church is aptly reflected in the corpus citations. The lexeme *czarni* ‘the black ones’ stands for representatives of the Catholic church (100 occurrences in NKJP). The term *the black ones* is a metonymy – the imagery of the black clothes worn by priests (the cassock) represents the whole group of clergyman in language. As Gieróń-Czepczor (2011) concludes, the salient property (i.e. clothing) has been mapped onto the whole category of the clergy. *Red* and *black* mirror political affiliations: the former lexeme connotes the ideology of communism, communist sympathisers and the Red Army. On the other hand, the *black* lexeme is a twin-form of the former language unit and it is a colour label for the clergy. The lexemes *the red ones* and *the black ones* show that Polish power groups are named after colours. Colour changes reflect the transfer of group categories. The unit *the black ones* is a pejorative verbal etiquette replacing the communist *red ones*: *Byli czerwoni, zastąpili ich czarni* ‘They were red, they were replaced by black ones’ (Zimny & Nowak 2009:61). This particular example shows that all negative connotations of the colour *red* have been transferred to a domain of *black*. Consequently, the *black ones* are considered to be bad and dangerous per se.

Another meaning of *black* within the domain of CHURCH refers to a negative perception of the Polish church and clergy. Such a deprecia-

tory view of the church finds validation in recent social research, which shows that the institution of the Catholic Church in Poland is in decline (Bill & Stanley 2020). Linguistic evidence for this may be found in the corpus citation: *Polską rządzi czarna mafia kierowana przez Episkopat* ‘Poland is ruled by a black mafia led by the Episcopate’. The collocation *czarna mafia* ‘black mafia’, is a modified version of the collocation *czzerwona mafia* ‘red mafia’, i.e. highly ranked Polish communist activists that held power in the country and achieved financial success at all cost. In turn, the collocation *black mafia* is a metonymy-based metaphor revealing a mental mapping between the domain of the CATHOLIC CHURCH and an ILLEGAL ORGANISATION CLERGY IS MAFIA. Here, the church and priests are metaphorically compared to culprits: priests allegedly steal church money (ranging from church taxes to so-called envelope money).

Another use of black refers to the revelation of evidence on paedophilia in Poland’s Catholic church. The Internet collocation *mapa pedofilii w Kościele* ‘a map of paedophilia in the Church’ has been motivated by priests’ improper conduct. It refers to the National Security Threat Maps where *czarne punkty* ‘black points’ signify the places with a high risk of crime. Analogically, the *black points* on a *map of paedophilia in the Church* denote clerical sexual abuses. The graphical *map* and its *black points* symbolize the sins of the church. Priestly paedophilia evokes the domains of EVIL and DISGRACEFUL BEHAVIOUR. The expression *czarna zaraza* ‘the black plague’ reinforces a negative perception of the Church institution voiced by some Poles. This collocation is a slightly modified version of the *red plague* expression. *Black plague* is a negative label for the Catholic Church (100 occurrences in MoncoPL). The compound *plague* evokes the domain of serious ILLNESS. Therefore, the *black plague* exploits metonymic mapping BLACK FOR CHURCH, which is followed by a cross-domain mapping CHURCH IS ILLNESS. This metaphor evokes the imagery of an ill church and ill clergymen. Here, illness should be associated with unethical and shameful behaviour. Thus, church sins of sexual abuses and money theft may be metaphorically seen as symptoms of illness.

The collocations *black mafia* and *black plague* prompt a negative image of Catholic priests. The collocations seem to imply that the Church does not function properly and is in decline. It is worth adding that the ‘sinful’ priests are enlisted in *czarna księga* ‘black book’. Originally the collocation *black book* referred to the black deeds of communists or censorship. *Black mafia* and *black plague* are twin-forms of *red mafia* and *red plague*, i.e. collocations that share communist references. Nowadays, Poland is

a democratic country, so the former communist related phrases are slightly modified to fit a new reality. Consequently, the collocations under analysis show a transfer of meanings: communism ceases to be perceived as dangerous, whereas the church and priests become a new danger.

The corpus data indicates that the adjective *black* is often used with reference to protests. Expressions such as *czarna procesja* ‘a black procession’ and *czarny marsz* ‘a black march’ refer to social protests against the deaths of innocent people (SJP). The corpus also includes the presence of the unit *czarny protest* ‘a black protest’ (300 examples in MoncoPL and 5 in NKJP), which refers to social demonstrations whose participants wear black clothes and protest against some political decisions. Nevertheless, recent socio-political events leading to a ban on abortion in Poland influence new connotations of the *black protest*. Nowadays, *black protest* has acquired a more specific meaning: it is employed to talk about protests against the government’s restrictive law effectively banning abortion. At the same time *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* ‘All-Poland Women’s Strike’ organises strikes mourning the abortion law. These strikes are known under the following names: *czarny poniedziałek* ‘black Monday’, *czarny czwartek* ‘black Thursday’, *czarny marsz* ‘black march’ or *czarny spacer* ‘black walk’. All these expressions share a similar meaning, referring to social demonstrations for women’s reproductive rights.

The black clothes worn by protesters are the most perceptually salient feature of protests. Black clothing gives rise to metonymy BLACK CLOTHES FOR THE PROTESTERS. This metonymy is followed by the conceptual mapping that takes place between the domain of BLACK CLOTHES and that of PROTESTS. It results in the metaphor BLACK CLOTHES IS PROTEST. Tabakowska (2017:284) remarks that cultural associations of black with mourning and despair probably motivated the choice of clothes. Alternative interpretations of the conceptual mappings involved in the meaning of the phrase *black protest* are involved in metaphorical associations of *black* with night, darkness, menace, negativity and evilness. Logically, the adjective *black* arouses negative feelings and, as a result, the lexical unit *black protest* is considered undesirable and bad or threatening. The opposers of the *black movements* associate *black protests* with evil forces. The protesters are called *black witches*. *Black* offers another metaphorical extension. In colour psychology it is believed that *black* evokes feelings of fear. Tabakowska (2017:287) explains that the lexical expression *black protest* (or *black Monday/black Thursday*) functions as a warning for the government. The corpus examples



demonstrate that contemporary names of protests (women's *black marches* and *black protests*) derive from the old and well-worn collocations of *black march* and *black protest*. It shows that in these collocations *black* serves as a means of identifying a specific event. These collocations do not undergo any semantic changes, they have simply gained new connotations.

## 6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that *red* and *black* have high frequencies in modern Polish political discourse. The colours in question exhibit a significant connotative potential. When used figuratively, *red* connotes both communist and leftist references. The analysis of contemporary discourse shows that nowadays *red* is used with reference to the political parties who are considered to have a communist past. In contrast, metaphorical uses of *black* entail devilishness and a negative representation of the Catholic Church and social dissatisfaction with the current situation.

The results that have been obtained show that *red* and *black* fit into the socio-cultural reality. This reality influences and changes the meanings of the colours under scrutiny. It can be concluded that newly coined lexical expressions using *red* and *black* show the transfer of dangers. In the communist period, Polish people were scared of the colour *red* as it evoked communists and the cruel Red Army. However, in contemporary times the dangers are different. Consequently, the lexeme *black* has developed new evaluative connotations. The dictionaries consulted in this case study do not include new connotations of *red* and *black* colour collocations. For example, only the more recent corpus of the Polish language, MoncoPL, or Google Trends register the new coinages, such as *czzerwone pająki* 'red spiders', *czzerwona holota* 'the red rabble' (used as an insult towards contemporary political groupings), *czarna mafia* 'black mafia', *czarna zaraza* 'black plague', *czarna księga* 'black book' (used as a reference to paedophilia in the Church), *czarny protest* 'black protest', *czarny spacer* 'black walk', or *czarny czwartek* 'black Thursday'.

The diagram (see the attachment) provides an insight into the connotations of *red* and *black* in modern Polish. It is based on the study material retrieved from two corpora. The diagram presents all transfers of meanings and modifications of collocations.

The study shows that extralinguistic factors are of importance for the development of colour lexicon. It proves that the discourse-historical approach should be implemented in corpus and lexical research. Certain

socio-political events influence language and lexical expressions. Analogically, lexical expressions reflect the culture and politics of a given community. For example, the adjectival component *black* is used as a carrier of social attitudes and evaluations. In that sense, *black* reflects a negative perception of the institution of the Church and the Polish abortion law.

To conclude, it could be stated that *red* and *black* are important constituents of lexical expressions of political origin. Due to the constant socio-political changes occurring in a given community, the meaning and connotative potential of the Polish lexical stock should be constantly monitored. It is worth studying because such research provides an insight into correlations between language, politics and culture.

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## Dictionaries

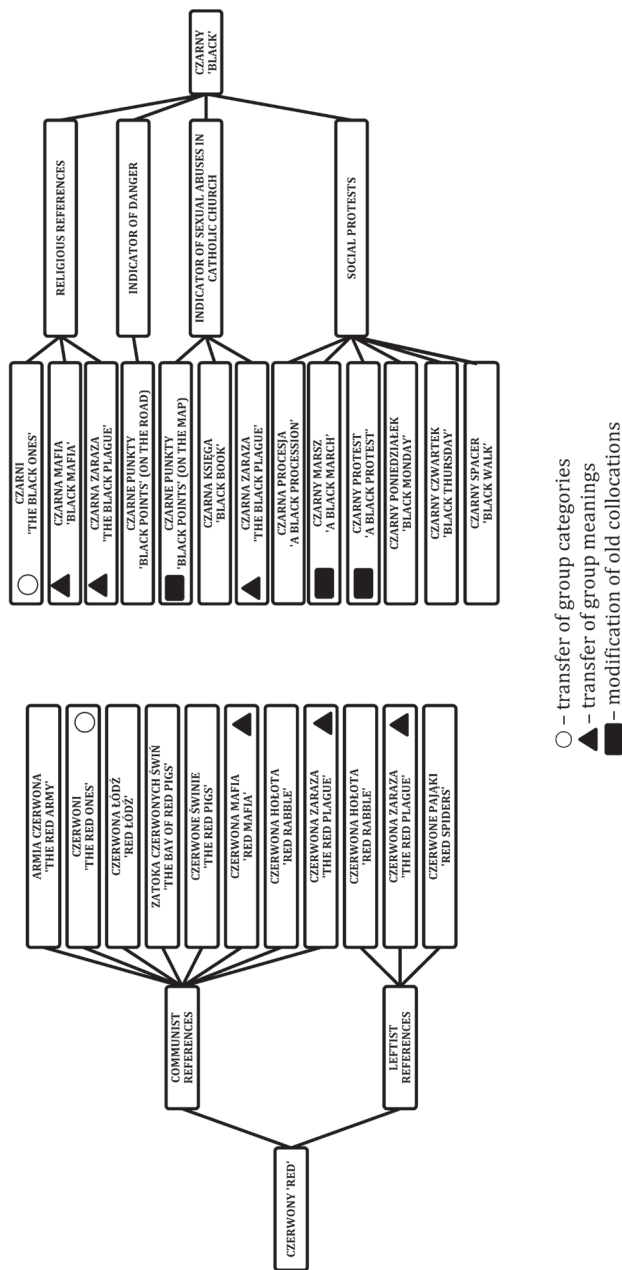
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## Corpora

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- MoncoPL, access: May, June, July, August 2020, source: <http://monco.frazeo.pl/>.

## Attachments

A diagram of the meanings and connotations of *red* and *black* colour collocations.



**A cognitive and corpus-based study of the connotative potential of the adjectives *czzerwony* ‘red’ and *czarny* ‘black’ in modern Polish political discourse**

The paper discusses metaphorical and metonymic extensions of the adjectives *czzerwony* ‘red’ and *czarny* ‘black’. The connotative potential of *red* and *black* colour collocations is analyzed and discussed. *Red* and *black* collocations were excerpted from the two largest corpora, i.e. NKJP and MoncoPL. All colour citations are analysed in the framework of discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor and metonymy. The analysis indicates that extralinguistic factors (i.e. social, political and historical events) motivate the emergence of *red* and *black* colour collocations in modern Polish discourse.

**Keywords:** red, black, metaphor, metonymy, discourse.