Grounded in perception, color categories (CCs) apparently follow universal rules (Berlin & Kay, 1969), yet linguistic diversity reveals language’s deterministic effects on cognition (Roberson et al., 2005). Studies have focused on color terms’ (CTs) etymology and CC extension (Bulakh, 2007; Fischer, 1965; Hess, 1920), symbolism (Al-Jehani, 1990; Roth, 1986), and basic color terms’ typology (BCTs; Borg, 1999; 2007). I compare linguistic and cognitive CCs in ʕAzāzmih Arabic elicited from 8 women/men over age 70, speakers of the traditional language, in central/southern Negev encampments (Shawarbah, 2012). Linguistic data comes from spontaneous speech (on animal coats/embroidery/textures/colors of earth/vegetation/human complexion), direct questions (ayy lawn x?, ‘which color is x?’), and stimuli including: 1. naming tasks on a Munsell chart (MC; Majid, 2008; Majid & Levinson, 2007) (I first submitted color chips randomly, then in MC order), 2. culture-specific stimuli to elicit CCs’ association with objects/materials; 3. conversational tasks (informant A, given a configuration of color chips, had to explain to B, out of sight, how to arrange the same chips to replicate the stimulus configuration). In cognitive tasks, each informant observed a sign’s position on the MC, the stimulus was removed, and two minutes later the informant had to place the sign in the same position on a new MC, draw the boundaries between colors on the MC, and gather stimuli chips, pictures, and objects in as many chromatic groups as s/he wanted. Linguistic results show the coexistence of hue CCs (modern objects/embroidery/textures/distinction of contiguous colors), desaturated CCs for natural elements (earth/wild animals/human physical qualities), and brightness CCs based on contrasts and surface effects (Biggam, 2007), used for domestic animal coats. For example, ahmar (red) as a hue stretches from focal red to saturated pink; as a desaturated CC, ahmar designates natural colors from pale yellow to light brown, meaning ‘dry’ (for plants); as a brightness CC, ahmar means colored/polychrome/dark. In cognitive results, the three systems coexist, strongly connected to stimuli type and quality. This coexistence appears in symbolic uses, producing polysemy. Hue CCs, based on warm/cold opposition, are related to the decoration of women’s dresses, where ahmar, fertility/life, opposes azraq (blue)/əxzar (green), infertility. In desaturated CCs, based on the opposition dry-clear/wet-dark, ahmar means drought/death, and opposes əxzar (‘green’/‘wet’ for laundry/‘hydrated’, for skin); in brightness CCs, based on the opposition colored/uncolored, ahmar is the BCT for ‘black,’ opposing abyaz (white/uncolored/pale). This typologically extraordinary coexistence and interplay of three systems is found in ancient Egyptian (Baines, 1985; Quirke, 2001; Schenkel, 2007; Takács, 1999; Warburton, 2007). Striking Egyptian/ʕAzāzmih parallels, such as the physical/social designations of skin colors and the ‘paradoxical’ use of both ahmar and əxzar for fertility and death, are due to the interplay of BCTs’ evolutionary paths. In hue’s path ahmar is ‘warm’ and əxzar ‘cold,’ in desaturation’s path ahmar is ‘dry/light’ and əxzar ‘wet/dark’, in brightness, ahmar is a dark CC. While Aramaic CCs represent the substratum of Levantine sedentary Arabic BCTs (Borg, 2007), ʕAzāzmih reveals contact with ancient Egyptian CCs.


