

Coping with the blues: corpus-based insights into the semantics of 'blue' and 'niebieski'

Ewa Gieroń-Czepczor

Abstract

This paper arises from a wider research project on the semantics of the primary basic colour terms in English and Polish, conducted within the cognitive framework on a wealth of corpus material provided by the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Polish Publishers' Corpus (PWN). The current analysis, which focuses on blue and niebieski, has been inspired by controversies concerning the basicness of 'blues' in English and Polish, as well as in other languages, either from a synchronic or diachronic perspective. However, the underlying aim of this study is to address a number of other issues, namely: (1) Whether blue and niebieski – as indicated in corpus statistics – conform to the implicational hierarchy posited by Berlin and Kay (1969); (2) To what extent both terms – as cognitive categories – share prototypes and meaning extension patterns; (3) Which conceptual metonymies and metaphors motivating these extensions are shared; and (4) What motivations account for any divergencies in the polysemies of blue and niebieski. The main conclusion is that differences in encoding experiences of colour, paired with diverse conceptualizations and cultural factors, give rise to significant discrepancies between the categories of blue and niebieski, the former exhibiting a rich polysemy, the latter being rather modest, dominated by 'heavenly' and 'astronomical' associations. Additionally, the article demonstrates that niebieski, while sharing a denotational range with błękitny, does not seem to be challenged as the only basic term for blue in Polish.

Keywords: colour terms, cognitive semantics, corpus studies, polysemy, conceptual metonymy and metaphor

1 Introduction

The implicational hierarchy proposed by Berlin and Kay (1969), and remodelled in 1975 by Kay and later by Kay and Maffi (1999), offers a neatly structured sequence of 11 basic colour terms which is supposed to reflect the order in which terms for distinctive hues

have appeared in languages throughout civilisational development, as well as in individual development of colour terminology in children as they acquire their lexicon. This hypothesis – often considered to be “too ideal to be true” – challenges the relativist point of view. Its advocates, mainly anthropologists (Hickerson 1971, Durbin 1972, Lucy 1997, Saunders, van Brakel 1997, Gellatly 2007), have repeatedly raised arguments intended to disprove the idea of universality in colour naming patterns. For the current purpose, studies conducted by Davies and Corbett (1994), Paramei (2005), Biggam (1997) and Stanulewicz (2006, 2007) should be mentioned as relevant in the discussion concerning terms for the focal or standard, otherwise known as basic, ‘blue’.

2 Controversies over basic ‘blues’

One example of non-conformity to the hierarchy was provided by Frumkina (1978), whose analysis of Russian terms for blue concluded that the language has more than one basic ‘blue’; actually, both *sinij* ‘(dark) blue’ and *goluboy* ‘light (cold) blue’ deserve this status. That hypothesis was confirmed in further linguistic studies conducted by Davies and Corbett (1994), Andrews (1994), Corbett and Morgan (1988), and Paramei (2005). A similar distinction was found by Özgen and Davies (1998), who posit that Turkish has a twelfth basic term - *lacivert* ‘dark blue’, which lies between the foci of the universal blue and purple and whose range overlaps with the dark-blue term of Russian, *sinij*.

With reference to English, on the other hand, there seems to have been no single universal term for ‘blue’ in the Anglo-Saxon period, although other basic colour terms like *brūn* (brown) and *græg* (grey), which should not have become part of the lexicon prior to basic ‘blue’, did exist in Old English (Wyler 2006). The conspicuous lack of any popular term for what is now understood as *blue* has been noted in a number of studies since the 19th century (Mead 1899).¹ More recently, Biggam (1997) applied the criteria for basic colour terms in a thorough study which clearly indicated that Old English, rich in terms with a narrow reference to grey-blue, green-blue, blue-green etc., did not include any term which might comply with the requirements for basicness.

As far as Polish is concerned, its basic blue, i.e. *niebieski*, seems to hold a weaker position in the colour lexicon than its English counterpart. First of all, one of the original criteria for basic colour terms (hereafter BCTs) is violated: *niebieski* shares a morphological root with the cognate *niebo* (‘sky’). Secondly, this BCT shares some referential functions with the non-basic term, *blekitny*. Moreover, it can be – and frequently is – replaced by this non-basic term. Compared to English *blue*, *niebieski* appears to have a narrower referential range – both in terms of the width of the colour spectrum it denotes, and with regard to its applications in extended, non-literal meanings. The following sections describe and compare these two, apparently parallel colour terms, in a brief discussion of the quantitative and qualitative data available.

3 The ranks of *blue* and *niebieski* in the hierarchy of BCTs

	Basic colour terms	BYU-BNC 100 million	COCA 360 million	PELCRA 93 million	PWN 40 million
1.	WHITE, BIAŁY	23,427	167,927	16,249	10,518
2.	BLACK, CZARNY	23,864	145,546	14,014	8,934
3.	RED, CZERWONY	14,568	71,675	10,658	6,356
4.	GREEN, ZIELONY	14,199	54,425	6,469	5,700
5.	YELLOW, ŻÓŁTY	4,366	21,971	3,477	1,799
6.	BLUE, NIEBIESKI BŁĘKITNY SINY	10,059	47,904	3,499 1,324 251	1,772 679 321
7.	BROWN, BRĄZOWY	8,383	49,175	1,668	953
8.	GREY GRAY	5,456 1,091 6,547	3,159 22,914 26,073	4,271	1,961
9.	ORANGE, POMARAŃCZOWY	2,600	15,483	730	707
10.	PURPLE, FIOLETOWY	1,262	7,13	327	259
11.	PINK, RÓŻOWY	3,150	13,212	1,313	832

Table 1 Raw frequencies of the 11 BCTs (adjectives) in electronic corpora (extracted in May 2008); grey print marks the statistics for non-basic CTs, relevant for the current analysis.

As the frequencies in the BNC and PWN corpus indicate (Tab 1), the BCTs – as defined by Berlin and Kay – largely conform to the posited sequence (Tab 2). The discrepancies revealed in these statistics can be explained by factors such as *yellow* and *żółty* enjoying less popularity due to their sharing the denotational range with *gold*, *golden*, *złoty*, *złocisty* etc., while the BCT itself remains fraught with negative connotations which originated with the theory of the four humours.² Another observation concerns the ‘blues’ in both languages: English *blue* ranks higher (American statistics present a distorted picture as they include surnames, and Brown is the most frequent ‘colour surname’, constituting 20.96% of the whole concordance for BROWN in the BNC) than Polish *niebieski*. The latter appears twice in each relevant column, the asterisk indicating the subsumption of statistics for three Polish colour terms (*niebieski*, *błękitny*, and *siny*) which – perceptually and semantically – cover the range rendered by blue in English. With these variables and tendencies taken into account, the frequencies compared do reflect the implicational hierarchy proposed by universalists. This might suggest that even vaguely related languages provide evidence for the claim that partitioning of the spectrum, as evident in linguistic material, is – to a large extent – perceptually driven, with certain areas being more salient to the human eye (Hardin, Maffi 1997, Hardin 1988, Webster, Kay 2007).

Berlin and Kay (1969)	The BNC (2008)	The COCA (2008)	The PELCRA corpus (2008)	The PWN corpus (2008)
BLACK/ WHITE WHITE/ BLACK	BLACK	WHITE	BIAŁY	BIAŁY
	WHITE	BLACK	CZARNY	CZARNY
RED	RED	RED	CZERWONY	CZERWONY
GREEN/ YELLOW YELLOW/ GREEN	GREEN	GREEN	ZIELONY	ZIELONY
	BLUE	BROWN	NIEBIESKI*/SZARY	NIEBIESKI*/SZARY
BLUE	BROWN	BLUE	NIEBIESKI	ŻÓŁTY
BROWN	GREY/GRAY	GRAY/GREY	ŻÓŁTY	NIEBIESKI
GREY ORANGE PURPLE PINK (in any order)	YELLOW	YELLOW	BRĄZOWY	BRĄZOWY
	PINK	ORANGE	RÓŻOWY	RÓŻOWY
	ORANGE	PINK	POMARAŃCZOWY	POMARAŃCZOWY
	PURPLE	PURPLE	FIOLETOWY	FIOLETOWY

Tab. 2. The sequence of BCTs according to corpus frequencies (surnames omitted in the BNC column).

4 The denotational ranges of the ‘blues’ in English and Polish

It does not require linguistic education or profound insight into the usage of colour terms to notice that the equation of *blue* with *niebieski* simply does not work. Collocations attested in the corpora applied confirm this intuitive judgement. *Blue eyes*, *blue sky*, and *blue smoke*, normally result in *niebieskie oczy*, *błękitne niebo*, and *siny dym* respectively, and such partial perceptual incompatibility of the two blues in question could be illustrated by a host of other well-entrenched phrases, which suggests that for English speakers their BCT covers the range of the colour spectrum that in Polish requires as many as three different terms including the BCT; or four if *fioletowy* is included in the count. Obviously, only the neutral or informal register is considered; poetic language offers a greater variety and ingenuity in this respect, while this study is intended to discuss general tendencies.

5 The prototypes

The encyclopaedic view of meaning adopted within cognitive semantics assumes that speakers’ knowledge is structured around and motivated by prototypes. Rosch (1978) considers prototypes to be *cognitive reference points* and claims that “colour terms acquire their denotational range, not through the setting of category boundaries, but by generalization from focal (i.e. prototypical) exemplars” (J. Taylor 45). Wierzbicka (1996) posits that colour category construction is determined by prototypical exemplars found in the natural environment, salient enough to become a reference point for further conceptualizations and meaning extensions.

For Wierzbicka both *blue* and *niebieski* are semantically related to the concept of ‘sky’, yet each has a unique range of meanings. “To account for this, I would assign to *blue*, but not to *niebieski*, an additional reference-point: naturally occurring “big water places”, such as the sea or lakes” (309). Her observations are confirmed by the dictionary and the corpus data collected and discussed below. Accordingly, Niemeier (150), in her radial network of

metonymic extensions of *blue*, places the sea and sky in the core area of universal blue. Regarding the prototypical exemplar of *niebieski*, Tokarski (2004) shares Wierzbicka's view of the sky as the primary and only reference point for the Polish BCT. He disregards the colour of the surface of water as unstable in comparison to that of the sky. Waszakowa (24) also indicates *niebo* (sky) as the prototype for *niebieski*, as opposed to the sky and water (as in seas, lakes or rivers) as the prototypes for blue. There would therefore appear to be an agreement in this matter concerning the first area of contrast in this comparative analysis. However, Stanulewicz (2006, 209-210) concludes her research into the regional variation of the colour prototypes in the Polish language with the valuable observation that while people living in central and southern Poland indicate the sky, for those living in the north, close to the Baltic Sea, it is the sky and water which are regarded as the best exemplars of blueness. Stanulewicz also responds to Tokarski's reservations concerning the prototypicality of water due to the high level of colour variation. Stanulewicz (ibid.) notes that the colour of water is no more variable than that of the sky - which is rarely perfectly blue - and additionally, the colour of the surface of water tends to reflect the colour of the sky. Thus, the question of the prototypes of *niebieski* remains open to further analysis.

6 *Blue and niebieski as structured conceptualisations*

Considerable differences in the sphere of denotation carry over into the extent of connotational patterns exhibited by both colour terms. While previous studies (Wierzbicka 1996, Waszakowa 2000, Tokarski 2004, Stanulewicz 2006, Niemeier 2007, as well as etymological (Pokorny 1959) and corpus data obtained throughout my doctoral research (Gieroń-Czepczor 2010), indicate a large degree of overlap within the prototypical core of each category, with conceptual extensions of meaning for *blue* originating from the concepts of sky and water, and the readings for *niebieski* revolving around the notion of sky/heaven and less significantly 'water', the resulting networks of meanings exhibited by each category are substantially different.

As far as meaning extensions of *blue* are concerned, a detailed analysis of a sample of 1,500 citations offered by the BNC, paired with available dictionary entries, reveals the following groups and chains of conceptual extensions resulting in readings such as:

1. OF NATURAL KINDS, ELEMENTS, ENTITIES

- OF WATER (SEA(S), LAKE(S), RAIN etc.)
- OF SMOKE, VAPOUR
- OF WEAK FLAME, PALE LIGHT
- OF BLOOD AND VEINS UNDER THE SKIN
 - BRUISED
 - LIVID, PALLID, ASHEN
 - INTOXICATED, DRUNK
 - BLUE FROM COLD, STRESS etc.
 - FEARFUL, ANXIOUS
 - DEPRESSED, MISERABLE
 - DEPRESSING, DISMAL
 - BLUES

2. OF THE SKY

- DISTANT (on the horizon)
- DISTANT (like heaven)
 - UNTHINKABLE, UNUSUAL (over the limit)
 - UNREALISTIC, IMPRACTICAL (vs. down-to-earth)
 - HEAVENLY (not lexicalised)
 - RELIGIOUS, PURITANICAL
 - OF CENSORSHIP
 - OBSCENE, INDECENT
 - CONSTANT, UNCHANGING > FAITHFUL
 - CONSERVATIVE
 - OF CONSERVATIVE PARTIES
 - EXCELLENT, SUPERIOR
 - MARKING VICTORY
 - MAIN TROPHY
 - ARISTOCRATIC
 - PRIVILEGED, SUPERIOR

3. OF CLOTHES, UNIFORMS

- OF POLICE

The list posits the existence of three main chains of extensions from the prototypical core of the category. The distance from the left margin signals the degree of conceptual proximity between the prototype(s) and the meaning in question, each extended meaning being preceded by >.

The first extension derives from the perception of blue as an attribute of environmental elements – with the exception of the sky – as well as human appearance. The latter results in a series of metonymies to render meanings such as ‘fearful’ or ‘depressed’. The second chain stems from the universal experience of the sky as distant and unattainable. These features could also be ascribed to God, and - although this concept has not been lexicalized as blue in English – the BCT was and still is associated with puritanical strictness and, by

extension, conservative ideology. Loyalty, conservatism, and excellence seem to derive from a complex of concepts: the experience of the sky as overwhelming, the images of God in his heavenly abode, and the supreme quality of blue dye termed 'true blue'.

A striking feature in the polysemy of *blue* is the fact that all extensions result in readings as diverse as 'puritanical' and 'obscene', along with 'excellent' or 'superior' and 'fearful'. This axiological ambivalence of *blue* has been noted in literature³ and holds for *niebieski* as well (Tokarski 2004). Blue can evoke positive associations as in: *true blue* ('someone loyal and faithful', with *blue* as the opposite of "treacherous" yellow), *blue blood* (aristocratic ancestry), and *blue book* (a register of highly respected people). On the other end of the axiological spectrum, there are: blue language, blue laws, and the phrase 'into the blue', which may denote escape to the unknown. An explanation for this ambivalence has been suggested by Niemeier (147), who claims that "[t]he basic meaning of blue refers to natural entities like the sea or sky which are highly variable and therefore the meaning spectrum of blue is not as firmly fixed as that of other colours which do not show such a lot of variation in nature."

Another explanation is offered by Allan and BurrIDGE 1991 (in Allan 2008) that the 'bl'- phonestheme - a cluster of sounds smaller than a syllable, which appear at the beginning of a word - and symbolise a certain meaning - tends to indicate a curse or evil talk. By way of illustration they quote, "*bloody, bleeding, blessed, blamed, blinking, blinding, blasted, blighter, blankety(-blank), Blimey!, Blast!, Blow! What the blazes!?*" and the verb *bleep* (out indelicate utterances). These include blood-linked maledictions and some with profane or blasphemous implications invoking the fires of hell or the wrath of the Old Testament God." (9)

As with the ambivalent polysemy exhibited in the extensions discussed above, the use of this BCT with reference to clothes or badges - as well as the status of the wearers - reveals a remarkable diversity. *Blue* as the colour of factory uniforms indicates the working class (as in *blue-collar workers*), blue uniforms of the police give rise to associations with law enforcement (*boys in blue, keep an eye out for the blue* [BNC]; *Don't trust that snitch, I hear he's workin for the blue* [UD]). The blue riband, or the blue of the Tories, signify superiority in different contexts. The inclusion of blue clothes into the chain of metonymic mappings within the category of blue is justified by the fact that clothes and uniforms worn by certain groups are highly salient, and as such provide motivations for connotations (via metonymic mappings) exemplified in the lexicons of English and Polish alike. Mapping the salient colour of clothes on people and ideologies is a highly productive metonymic pattern⁴. Due to this, clothing (and its colour) provides an important mark of identity in the given societies.

7 Meaning extensions of *blue*

The polysemy is largely an outcome of metonymic - rather than metaphorical - mappings which result in the following readings:

1. OF NATURAL KINDS, ELEMENTS, ENTITIES

The number of citations which incorporate *blue* as an attribute of animal or plant names is modest, and includes *blue sharks, whales, pigeons, sheep* and *bluebottles*. In fact, as is the case with uses of BCTs with a natural object, the colour term, or rather its focal value, is mapped onto ‘neighbouring’ shades for the sake of convenience and linguistic economy. Further, terms attributed to animal or plant species can be used metonymically for people if there is a contiguity which permits this kind of mapping. For instance:

- (1) He became a Canadian or a Blue Noser as they are called. [all corpus citations below come from the BNC unless otherwise specified]

The citation refers to a nickname given to Canadians in Nova Scotia as keen growers and consumers of the local kind of potato known by the same name [DPF]. For *bluenose* see PURITANICAL below.

However, “(i)n nature, blue is quite rare in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, but the unbounded expanses of sea and sky are analogical terms of great evocative power” (Sassoon, 174).

● OF WATER

Water is described as *blue* provided it is clear and sunlit:

- (2) the blue sunlit waters of the open ocean.
(3) the light in sea water is predominantly blue or green.
(4) Sky and water blazed blue ...
(5) he said what’s the blue and I said the sea, ...

In the metonymic use, however, such limitations created by environmental conditions have not been observed. “Way to the big blue”, for example, announces a photo with a path towards the beach, and the big blue has become conventionalised enough to denote the sea.

Vast expanses of sea or ocean water, awesome and unpredictable, have never ceased to evoke terror in human beings. This gave rise to the idiomatic phrase *between the devil and the deep blue sea*, indicating a choice between two evils.

● OF SMOKE, VAPOUR

Blue denotes the bluish-grey colour of smoke, especially cigarette or exhaust smoke. Raindrops or other liquid water *suspended in the air* (*vapour, mist and haze*), actually silvery bluish, are premodified by *blue*, e.g.

- (6) The flow front appears as a mass of rounded pillows, disappearing into the blue haze of the Pacific

(7) ... blue or milky cloudiness ...

Fog and mist (with limited visibility) evoke negative associations, giving rise to the conceptualisation of *blue* as depressing. A person shrouded in fog feels lost, unable to find their way either in a physical or psychological sense. In this respect *blue* (also denoting shades of darkness, as in *midnight blue*) is close to the conceptualizations of *black*:

(8) The riverbanks were wreathed in mist. The banana groves and the guava orchards of the east bank were blue and gloomy.

Smoke (most frequently collocating with the BCTs: *black, blue, white* and *grey*) is in typical contexts pre- and post- modified by adjectives such as *bitter, choking, poisonous, smouldering, pungent, nasty*, sometimes *toxic*, which emphasise its negative impact on humans. Therefore, the simile in citation (9) illustrates the common conceptual link between the colour (of smoke, mist, bruised body) and the emotional state known as depression:

(9) Yesterday was blue, like smoke. (> DEPRESSING DISMAL)

• OF A WEAK FLAME, LIGHT or SIGNAL

A pale flame without a red glare, or natural light as seen under the surface of water, is blue. Since the sea is one of the prototypes for *blue*, the fact that most citations involving natural blue light refer to marine topics is not surprising:

(10) Its deep-sea prey have their eyes tuned to the blue ambient light,

(11) the light in sea water is predominantly blue or green.

However, most references from 1,500 BNC citations involve the artificial blue flashing lights used by emergency services, and the sample abounds in blue lights, blue flashes, blue lamps (28 in 37 relevant citations). A *blue glow in the sky* is the only mention of blue light as a celestial phenomenon. Polish citations, on the other hand, tend to present blue light against the background of dark sky, never under water.

English, however, reflects a conceptual link reflected in the ANGER IS FIRE metaphor. Exploited to a large extent in the figurative uses of *red*, the mapping is also obvious in the idiomatic phrase *burn with a low blue flame*. A blue flame, unlike a spectacularly raging red fire, seems to have a less devastating force, and is easier to contain. The meaning of this idiomatic phrase is “to be quietly and intensely angry” [DAI], or “heavily intoxicated with alcohol” (see INTOXICATED, DRUNK).

The intensity of blue flames cannot be underestimated. An old-fashioned American and Australian oath: *Damn it to blue blazes!* maps the power of the (infernal) flames on any action or experience imaginable, as in: “This sweater itches like blue blazes”. Used as a slang expression, it is an euphemistic equivalent of the interjection *Hell*, as in *Where in the blue blazes have you been?* Morris (2000) regards the *blue* in *blue blazes* as “just an alliterative intensifier” with no real meaning. Admittedly, conceptual images of a raging fiery inferno are full of red (red-hot) flames, contrary to the scientific evidence that

the energy released in blue flames is more intensive than that of red flames. Yet, popular knowledge, folk beliefs and culturally shared concepts (like that of hell) are dominant in conceptualisations of human experience.

- OF BLOOD AND VEINS UNDER THE SKIN (> BLUE BLOOD ext.2)

The sight of blood vessels under the thin layer of white skin, commonly referred to as *blue veins*, marks the beginning of a chain of metonymic and metaphorical mappings.

- BRUISED

Although bruises alter in colour and shade throughout the process of healing, it is *blue* or *black and blue* that English speakers use to describe this kind of injury. Thus, a person can be *blue with bruises* or have a *big blue scar*. Metonymically, one is *black and blue* when bruised. Metaphorically the colour alone is mapped onto the domain of *EMOTIONS*, as in:

(12) I'm still black-and-blue from my divorce. [DAI]

The same conceptualization equating *blue* with being 'hurt', either physically or emotionally, is present in a phrase attested in American slang. *Screwed, blued, and tattooed* means "taken advantage of" [DAI]. This idiom, like *burn with a low flame*, has a further interpretation, "intoxicated". It can be deduced, then, that the impact of alcohol abuse is perceived in terms of harm done to the drinker, although, in this case, it is predominantly self-inflicted.

The adjectival pair *black and blue* is part of an American and Australian idiom *swear black and blue* (or *up and down*), known as *swear blind* in British English, which is used "to say that something is completely true, especially when someone does not believe you" [CID]. There seems to be no well-grounded etymological nor conceptual explanation - at least in the reference sources available - to the meaning of the colour terms included in the phrase. Tentatively, they might be hypothesized to metonymically stand for the visual symptoms of effort (as in *till one is blue in the face*) as well as anger (black). Roget's Thesaurus attests both *swear till one is black in the face* and *swear till one is blue in the face* and the idiom in question alludes to both. Thus, in this case *black and blue* can be classified as facial colours resulting from extreme emotions which can lead to physiological changes. (See: BLUE FROM EXTREME EMOTIONAL STATE).

- LIVID , PALLID, ASHEN

The bluish colour of the skin reflects the deoxygenated state of the blood. A baby born cyanotic is called a *blue baby* and the condition itself is known as *blue baby syndrome*. Apart from referring to poor condition of health, pallid skin is a symptom of exertion or strong emotions resulting in the discolouration of the face:

(13) I pedalled myself blue in the face on the Exercise Machine.

(14) this huge screw bears down on me throwing a wobbler, going blue with rage

Pale complexion is seen as indicating sickness;⁵ this quality is somewhat humorously exploited in the idiomatic phrase: *blue (or pale) around/about the gills* which means: 'looking sick'.

The expression *blue balls* is "a widely used colloquialism describing scrotal *pain* after high, sustained sexual arousal unrelieved because of lack of orgasm" (Chalett, Lewis 843). The bluish tint caused by the high volume of blood in the genitals contributes to the use of *blue* in the phrase.

● INTOXICATED, DRUNK

The idiomatic phrase *blue devil* is related to the facial skin colour in drunk people (delirium tremens) for the symptoms induced by alcohol abuse. While the devil is metaphorical, *blue* is involved in metonymic mappings: a generalisation (BLUE FOR BLUIISH or PURPLISH), and DEVIANT SENSORY PROPERTY FOR DEVIANT MENTAL PROPERTY metonymy (Barcelona, 71, 353) which implies the abnormal state (both physically and emotionally) of a person who is *down with the blue devils*.

The same metonymic pattern is the basis for the use of *blue* alone to signify intoxication. The Urban Dictionary attests *blue* subsuming all the attendant physical features of drunkenness combined with the mental effects:

(15) I was blue the last night!

Drinking alcohol *till all is blue* alludes to the negative effect of drinking on the eyesight [OEDO] and is one of the more obvious signs of alcohol abuse, semantically close to *seeing pink elephants*. Further consumption can lead to blurred vision and, eventually, blackouts. In fact, blue vision has probably never been attested in medical records as a symptom of alcohol abuse. Unaware of the etymology of the phrase, contemporary users might associate *blue* with depression (i.e. the cause or consequence of getting drunk) or the colour of the drinker's complexion. According to West (n.d.), "this is the British equivalent of *till hell freezes over*, or *to the bitter end*, or many other hyperbolic impossibilities". The origin of the phrase as suggested by Partridge and Simpson (88) is not unlikely: "U.S. (1806); ob. Admiral Smyth refers to a ship reaching deep, i.e. blue water", which acquired the meaning: "to the utmost" or "for indefinite time".

The association of drunkenness and sadness is suggested in the following definition of Blue Monday [DPF]:

The Monday before Lent, spent in dissipation. (...) It is said that dissipation gives everything a blue tinge. Hence "blue" means tipsy.

"Drink till all is blue.
Cracking bottles till all is blue."

As mentioned in WEAK FLAME, LIGHT or FLASH, *burning with a low blue flame* also indicates the state of intoxication, yet the verb *burning* alludes to one further aspect: the irritability of a person under the influence of alcohol, in accordance with ANGER IS FIRE conceptual metaphor.

The idiom *blue ruin* also falls within the realm of alcohol. This time *blue* refers to the tint of gin, while *ruin* (metaphorically) indicates the deplorable consequences of over-consumption of the beverage.

- BLUE FROM COLD, STRESS, EXTREME EMOTIONAL STATES

A range of external and internal factors lead to physiological changes manifested in alterations in skin colour. *Blue* (via generalisation) stands for any tint which results from abnormalities in blood circulation, from sickly paleness to blushing and the purple of rage. The BNC sample includes citations which refer to being *blue with sweat*, *hands blue from the cold icy wind*, *till one is blue in the face*, and *blue with anger*, which indicate the common experience of fingers or toes turning blue through lack of circulation, yet the colour quality (like the facial colour) tends to be applied to the whole body to indicate that one is blue with cold or excess of emotion.

(16) “They’d have a blue fit if they saw such things”

- FEARFUL, ANXIOUS

Blue despair, *blue fear*, *blue murder*, and *blue funk*, all of which have been attested in the BNC sample, illustrate the application of the colour term in an EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy. *Blue* is the colour of a face induced by terror; it is fear or extreme nervousness that makes one appear blue.

(17) Are you in a blue funk about running out of things to say?

Most frequently *blue murder* collocates with the verbs shout or scream, although the nominal phrase can be used independently, as in:

(18) “Here, we’d better get on. There’ll be blue murder if he comes back and we’ve been in here.”

According to *DPF*, the phrase is “indicative more of terror or alarm than of real danger”. The BNC confirms such conceptualization of *blue* in:

(19) “Cambridge University rugby players turned the air blue as they terrorised a packed jetliner during a two-hour rampage.”

- DEPRESSED, MISERABLE

Blue used attributively indicates the state of feeling miserable as in:

(20) I look up and sense Amantani floating in this stillness, in a blue limpidity.

Metaphorically, the state of dejection is known as a *blue devil*, with *the blues* or *blue Johnnies* as synonyms:

(21) this fellow come up fair blue devil go drinking

The *postpartum blues*, *maternity blues*, or *baby blues* is recognised as a transitory state of moodiness frequently suffered by postnatal women. These metaphorical phrases have a metonymic basis: the BCT stands for the facial colour accompanying the emotional state induced by diverse factors.

- DEPRESSING, DISMAL > PESSIMISTIC

The setting may be *blue* (e.g. *blue wet streets*) when rainy and gloomy, as the lack of sunshine, and overcast sky invariably induce a feeling of depression and dejection. This general sense of gloominess may result in sadness which can make one *look blue*. A further extension results from a metonymic mapping (EFFECT FOR CAUSE) and leads to the use of *blue* in the sense 'pessimistic', as in *blue outlook*. *Blue Monday* is based on the same conceptualisation (STATE FOR AGENT) as the first workday of the week is regarded as depressing. This reading reveals the conceptual proximity of *blue* and *black*, although the experiential bases vary: the image of a bruised body or livid face for *blue*, and night for *black*.

- PERTAINING TO 'BLUES' MUSIC

Singing the blues, i.e. bemoaning one's circumstances, is supposedly derived from the *blue devils* as 'depression', 'dejection'. While the details of the origins may be disputed,⁶ the conceptualisation is consistent with related uses of *blue* in which the colour term is mapped onto negative emotional states.

2 OF THE SKY

The sky exhibits a wide palette of shades of blue:

(22) from the silvery grey of the morning to the pale marine-colours
of midday to a deep velvety blue in the early evenings.

(23) Clear blue sunblaze of air surrounding ...

and the salient colour (blue) stands for the sky in well-entrenched phrases: *out of the blue* and *a bolt from the blue*. The whole phrase, however, is interpreted as "coming from an unexpected or unforeseen source", which is the result of a metaphor. A further mapping, TIME IS LOCATION, yields another reading: "at a completely unexpected time". The overall reading is based on the imagery of clear skies indicating good weather and sunshine in contrast to rainy, and therefore unlucky, days (NEGATIVE IS DARK).

- DISTANT (on horizon)

Blue is considered to be a colour of distance. Goethe summarised this impression in the following words: “As the upper sky and distant mountains appear blue, so a blue surface seems to retire from us” (Goethe, 1780). Modern English reflects this perception of distance with *blue horizon* and *blue yonder*. The latter is metonymically represented by the colour alone, as in:

(24) At a far distance; into the unknown: spontaneously take a trip into the blue. The BNC citations include *blue* as a direct attribute of *distance*:

(25) I sat out on the crumbling turf, with the blue distances below, and warm sun lying over this lovely autumn land.

- DISTANT (like heaven)

The distant ‘upper sky’ from Goethe (see the paragraph above) has inspired both poets and general users of English alike. BNC citations confirm the image of the sky, as of something that is ‘out there’, unattainable and overwhelming.

(26) stretching his angular arms into the blue of the sky as if reaching for a star.

(27) he had spent the entire journey staring out of the cabin window into **the infinity of space**. His meeting was not until the next morning, so he could switch off for a few hours. He needed to do just that, for he was tired, morose and bitter and, for the first time in his life, feeling very insecure. Gazing out into the blue, he asked himself if this assignment was his swan song.

- ABUNDANT?

Niemeier (147) suggests that the limitless nature of the sky when equated with an abundance of worthless shares is the conceptualization behind *blue sky laws*.⁷ It clearly contrasts with some other readings of *blue* which denote superiority and highly valued qualities such as loyalty. A more plausible interpretation of the phrase, however, may imply the reading of *blue* as ‘unrealistic or unreal’, as the term ‘blue sky’ is believed to have originated “from the supporters of the laws who claim that some securities were so dishonest they would sell ‘building lots in the sky’”. Regrettably, there are no citations in the BNC which would illustrate the usage of *blue sky laws*.

- UNATTAINABLE, UNUSUAL (over the limit, out of proportions)

A range of phrases are based on the concept of unattainable blue skies. In simple terms, what is *blue* is both awesome and unrealistic or extremely rare. *Blue diamond* or *blue rose* (Niemeier 2007), *blue dahlia*, anything rare or unheard of [OEDO], and *blue wonder*, from French *contes bleus* (‘an improbable tale’), seem to be based on the same imagery.

Similarly, *once in a blue moon* (signifying a rare event) is a description of an uncommon, but real, meteorological phenomenon. It occurs when dust particles high in the atmosphere filter out most of the longer wavelengths of red light. An alternative interpretation is more recent and concerns the appearance of two full moons in the same month. This also occurs infrequently [ETO].

Blue streak, on the other hand, reflects the boundless quality of blue skies, with the meaning “extremely fast or interminable”:

(28) He had a wicked tongue when roused and could talk a blue streak.

Analogically, the informal phrase *to cuss/curse a blue streak* signifies a continual flow of offensive terms.

The ability to exceed the limits is reflected in the name *Blue Streak* applied to British ballistic missiles.

- ABSTRACT, IMPRACTICAL (vs. down-to-earth)

Impossible to reach, blue skies may be thought of as an impractical or unrealistic goal. *Blue skies research* or *approach(es)* are impractical, or *blue-sky nonsense*:

(29) The authority said yesterday that the delays arose because the research amounted to what scientists called a “blue skies” project because it involved going beyond the present capacity of the reactor design.

(30) in a book that superbly demonstrates how yesterday’s blue-sky philosophical idea can become today’s razor-sharp tool of scientific practice

(31) If you fight, you stand a better chance. I have tried to encourage others to do battle.” Roy went to his specialist thinking he’d cracked it. But the doctors cautioned against blue skies forever.

- PERTAINING TO HEAVEN (?)

Although the conceptual proximity of the categories of sky and heaven is obvious, this fact is not reflected in the use of *blue*. However, the colour is present in religious symbolism, thus giving rise to related readings, as in *blue laws* cited below.

- RELIGIOUS, PURITAN

Blue, as in *blue laws*, became associated with religious, or rather Puritan contexts, due to a metonymic mapping with origins in the practice of printing codes which were intended to ensure high moral standards in the newly established North American colonies on blue paper (in Laband, Heinbuch, 16). Another view, however, links the use of *blue* in *blue laws* with the similarity between rigid devotion and the quality of a true blue colour which never fades (Trambull 1867 in Laband, Heinbuch, 17). Regardless of the origins, *blue*, when

associated with strict morality and dour religious followers, gave rise to a semantic and symbolic use of the colour which extends beyond the domain of *RELIGION*.

- PURITANICAL

The cultural models and moral values which underlie Puritanism led to the use of *blue* as a reference to the (frequently negative) attitudes underpinning restrictive religious orders:

- (32) strict paternalism fascinated the New York newsmen who described it as “Tiller’s puritanical blue laws”.

The meaning of *bluenose*, a puritanical person who attempts to impose a strict moral code on others, is based on the metonymic mapping of *blue*, after *blue law*, in reference to the strict tenets of Puritanism. Combined with *nose* standing for the inquisitive nature of an individual, *blue* strengthens the negative associations with a severe moral code.

A quotation from Thackeray (565), “The ladies were very blue and well informed” employs *blue* in the meaning discussed here, which is also evident in *bluestocking*, originally an attribute of an independent educated woman, which in time acquired a derogatory meaning.

- OBSCENE, INDECENT

Decent *blue*, following a “perverse” metonymic mapping which equalled moral with immoral, gained the reading ‘obscene, indecent’. A probable conceptual basis is the mapping of *blue* (standing for strict morality) onto that which violates the codes which protect it. This, ironically, caused the use of *blue* in *blue jokes* and *videos* to refer to sexual overtones or overt pornography. The high entrenchment of the ‘indecent’ blue allows free combinations with other nouns:

- (33) Bill Cosby does not use “blue” material. [UD]
Sexual harassment is defined as:
- (34) anything from unwanted touching and uncalled-for blue jokes to overt demands for sexual favours.”

Using crude language and swear words is rendered by *blue* in *make/turn the air blue*:

- (35) When it happens again on the next cast I turn the air blue with some choice words.
- (36) Upset he was too! And the names he called me turned the air blue! I could only stand quietly and scratch my poor head.”

However, *blue talk*, meaning an ‘indecent conversation’, has another metonymic origin; a borrowing from French *Bibliothèque Bleu* reveals that “harlots are called ‘Blues’ from

the blue gown they were once compelled to wear in the House of Correction [DPF], the phrase is based two metonymic mappings. SALIENT FEATURE FOR THE CATEGORY maps the colour onto the outfit, which is further, via SALIENT ATTRIBUTE FOR THE CATEGORY metonymy, mapped onto the wearer. As a result *blue* becomes laden with negative meanings derived from features attributed to prostitutes and a dissipated lifestyle.

Another meaning of *blue* in the domain of sex, which is related to cultural models, is that cited by the PWN corpus and the Urban Dictionary. Blue may denote the homosexual preference of men, as in:

(37) Jednak już wcześniej “ błękitni “ – jak Rosjanie nazywają homo-seksualistów - zaczęli otwarcie walczyć o swoje prawa.

(38) guys are blue, and girls are pink... when they get together they make purple!⁸ [UD]

As remarked above, this usage has its basis in the traditional treatment of blue as a boyish colour, in contrast to pink, which is regarded as suitable for girls only.

● OF CENSORSHIP

OEDO defines the meaning of *blue pencil* as ‘to mark or obliterate with a blue pencil; to censor’. Quoted twice in the sample of 1,500 quotations, it seems to employ *blue* in terms of the same conceptualisation as *blue laws*, i.e. related to the defence of moral order and decency. Assuming that such an interpretation is plausible, *blue pencil* may be regarded as a case of metonymic mappings. *Blue* may stand for the moral code printed on blue, whereas the whole phrase may incorporate the metonymic mapping INSTRUMENT FOR THE ACTION INVOLVING THAT INSTRUMENT (Kövecses 220).

● CONSTANT, UNCHANGING, LOYAL

The “stable quality” of *blue* may have its source in two alternative conceptualisations. The first is the prototypical sky as a constant feature of the environment, which is taken for granted as something that naturally envelops the world. It may also create the subjective impression of accompanying a traveller, or continually following them. Another conceptualisation has its basis in the traditional terminology of textile dyers, for whom the colours which did not fade or wash out were “true”. Hence, the phrase *true blue* stands metonymically for constancy regardless of the referent. In this respect *blue* is the exact opposite of “treacherous” *yellow*.

● CONSERVATIVE

Constancy, loyalty and devotion are highly praised in conservative circles, which is evident in the use of the colour to symbolise traditional values. The use of *true blue* in this sense is based on the above-mentioned experiential contiguity. In this respect *blue rinse brigade* employs *blue* in both metonymic and metaphorical mappings. Blue rinse dye

stands here for the salient feature, i.e. hair colour, of elderly middle-class ladies who constitute a large and influential electorate of the Conservative party. Within this political context, blue seems to be highlighted and mapped onto the *IDEOLOGY* domain. Obviously, it might be argued that there is an overlap of this domain with that of *VALUES*, involving loyalty to traditional values, which characterises conservative attitudes. Yet, the use of blue first requires a cross-domain mapping between the *COLOUR* and *VALUES/IDEOLOGY* domain matrix. The noun *brigade* yields a pejorative sense within the whole phrase “often employed to castigate middle-class elderly women who are thought to be a bit past it” (Rees 31):

- (39) Blackpool receives a blue rinse: Conservative Party highlights selected by Lesley Abdela by LESLEY ABDELA 10,000 representatives, press and lobbyists will proceed to Blackpool for next week’s Conservative conference which begins on Monday.

● OF CONSERVATIVE PARTIES

Such connotations of morality, loyalty and conservative attitudes, has caused *blue* to become the colour of parties favouring traditional values. Allan (2008) speculates that the choice “was influenced by the colour of the Madonna’s garb” which was associated with a “good, solid, dependable person; a staunch believer” (8).

Blue, considered as the salient feature of conservatism, is used attributively, as in *blue candidate* (for a Tory) and *blue Tory* or *Tories*. Further conceptualisations allow for uses such as:

- (40) my announcements have been circulated to all members of the Council on the blue seats .

Blue as a salient feature also occurs in *ladies in blue*, as Tory female politicians were dubbed in a Guardian article (R.Taylor). This phrase, a case of a metonymic use of this colour term, equates conservative political views with blue clothes. Such a conceptualization is possible thanks to the function of *clothing* itself, providing a mark of *identity in society*. *The colour mapped onto the clothing defines the kind of ideology manifested by the wearers*.

● EXCELLENT, SUPERIOR, VALUABLE, OF FIRST-CLASS QUALITY

Blue also tends to denote ‘high value’ and ‘excellence’, as in *blue chip*. Originally used to denote a high value poker counter, since 1904 it has had the figurative sense of ‘valuable’. In the context of the stock exchange, *blue chips* signify “shares considered a reliable investment” [ETO]. Based on the same conceptualisation of *blue*, *blue ribbon* awards the winner, a *blue flag* indicates that a beach meets the highest standards for public use established by the EU, and a *blue book* is a register of socially prominent people [AHD]. Even colloquial English illustrates the use of blue as an “extreme compliment, meaning

enchancing or bewitching, description of a girl” whose “inner beauty radiates to those around her” [UD], as in:

(41) “Wow, that girl is soooo blue!” [UD]

The slogan “we see blue” has been used in advertisements for the University of Kentucky, which aspires to become a Top 20 university. According to its homepage:

“*see blue* is a lot of things, but most of all it’s about helping students realize their potential and harness the power of their dreams. For more about UK’s efforts to become a Top 20 university and how we *see blue*,” thus confirming the salience of *blue* as superior, first-class, excellent.

● MARKING VICTORY

(42) Not since L’Escargot (1970–71) has any horse emerged triumphant in chasing’s blue riband in successive years.

● MAIN TROPHY

This colour, salient in the context of victory, is metonymically mapped onto trophies as in a *rugby blue* and other BNC citations which employ *blue* in the meaning: ‘an award for sportsmen at university competitions at the highest level’:

(43) A first-class honours degree from a college of higher education still counts for less in the world than a third-class degree from Oxbridge, and even less than a sporting “blue” from the ancient universities.

(44) a person is called “An Oxford rugby blue in 1959 and 1960 and a keen sailor”, or “a double Oxford blue for boxing” where blue, a metonymic extension from blue ribbon, stands for the main trophy.

● ARISTOCRATIC (< BLUE BLOOD from ext. 1)

Blue blood as an indication of aristocratic ancestry has been in use since around 1834, a calque from the Spanish *sangre azul*, “claimed by certain families of Castile as uncontaminated by Moorish or Jewish admixture, probably from the notion of the visible veins of people of fair complexion” [ETO]. The phrase, with 8 citations in the entire corpus, confirms its high entrenchment:

(45) needed a reminder that he could not control everything in this world, despite all his money and his terribly blue blood.

Blue blood, which typically stands metonymically for the heredity of a noble family, can also signify a person of aristocratic ancestry:

(46) he is regarded as one of the city’s blue bloods [DAI]

However, *blue* in *blue blood* need not be figurative, as in (46):

- (47) Less common than Reynaud's disease, are painless **purple** fingers or feet. This is again due to arterial spasm and deoxygenated (**blue blood**) pooling in the veins and making them take on this abnormal hue. This is acrocyanosis. It sometimes makes hands sore, but is more of a nuisance than anything ..."

3. OF CLOTHES, UNIFORMS

Blue is highly salient as the colour worn by UN troops and chosen for its flag, uniforms worn by policemen and soldiers of various armies, and the overalls worn by industrial workers. BNC citations include: *blue-uniformed Serbs*, *blue MPs*, *blue-collar workers*, *blue helmets*, and *blue berets*. In particular, the colour of the UN helmets is involved in metonymic mappings onto the organization, its actions, and facilities, as in "Blue haven in a troubled land".

Another domain in which *blue* is well entrenched is that of *SPORT* and *SPORTS TEAMS*. In a clearly stated context, *blue* is easily recognizable as the colour adopted by Oxford and Cambridge rowing teams, or as a football strip in *Leeds v Blue Manc*. The cultural salience of the colour allows for similes such as:

- (48) parents are having to find £44. And it's leaving them as blue as Chelsea's shirts" and mapping the colour onto both the players and supporters:
- (49) At a time when the rivalry between Rangers and Celtic was rising to a new level of competitiveness, Baxter turned tradition on its head, and befriended a group of like minded Celtic players. Although the more bigoted supporters resented his corrosive friendship, the blue and the green frequently enjoyed nights out at Hampden Bowling Alley divided in the minds of Glasgow by religion but united in their common interest in Bacardi and blondes.

● OF POLICE, SAILORS

As far as clothing is concerned, blue as the colour of police uniforms has achieved a high level of entrenchment. As a result, it is involved in a range of mappings to denote the police and related issues. The most popular phrase referring to the colour of uniforms worn by policemen is *boys in blue*. Others include the metonymic *bluecoat*, and *blue flu* with the meaning: "an organized absence from work by police officers on the pretext of sickness that is staged for the purpose of protest" [MW].

The colour of police uniforms is a motivation behind the phrase *Thin Blue Line* for police and police forces, by analogy with the historical Thin Red Line.⁹ It signifies the conceptual 'thin' line of police forces which separates society from crime and chaos. It has also been used as a police emblem and a title of a TV series, a sitcom set in a police station.

Less entrenched uses of *blue* for clothing include: *blue* for an umpire (in baseball) and *bluejackets* signifying sailors.

• BLUE STOCKING (< PURITANICAL)

Niemeier (145) briefly outlines the series of metonymic changes which have led to the current use of *bluestocking*: an article of clothing (blue stocking) worn by an extravagant member of a literary circle meetings > part-whole metonymy > *bluestocking* for the wearer himself/herself > generalisation > *bluestockings* for all people attending such meetings > narrowing/specialisation > *bluestockings* only for female members of literary circles > specialisation > prudish, asexual women.

A quantitative analysis of the meanings attested in the collection of samples of adjectival blue in the BNC provides the following results:

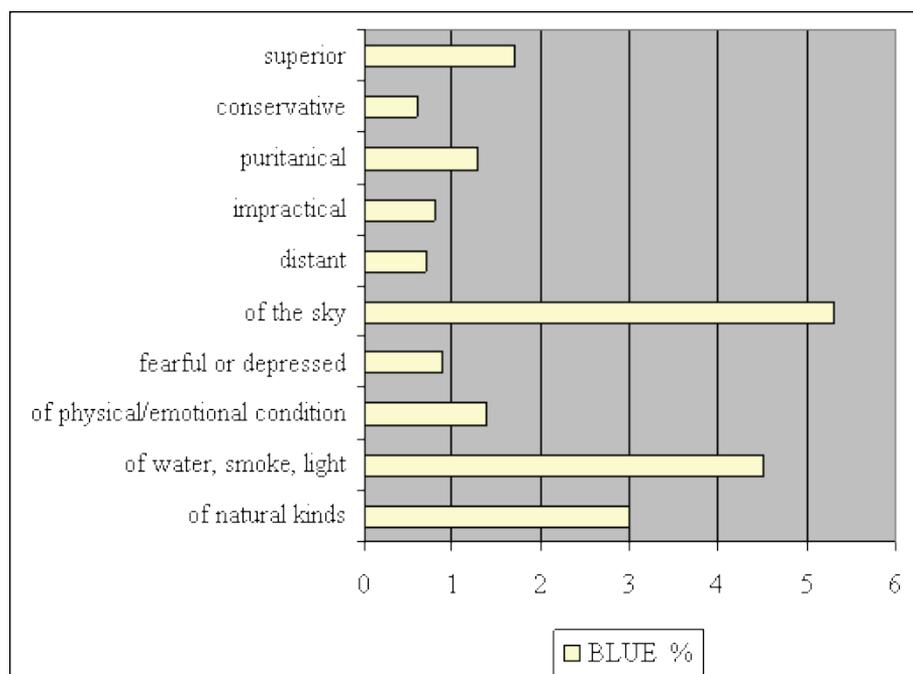


Fig. 1 The percentage of occurrence of *blue* in the main metonymic and metaphorical extensions in a sample of 1,500 citations extracted from the BNC.

8 Meaning extensions of *niebieski*

According to dictionary sources and corpus data, the main extension chains of *niebieski* are as follows:

1. OF NATURAL TAXONOMIES, ELEMENTS, ENTITIES
 - OF WATER (SEA(S), LAKE(S), RAIN etc.)
 - OF SMOKE, VAPOUR
 - OF A WEAK FLAME, PALE ‘COOL’ LIGHT
 - DIVINE (?) LIGHT (<< HEAVENLY)
 - OF BLOOD AND VEINS UNDER THE SKIN
 - BRUISED
2. OF THE SKY
 - CELESTIAL, ASTRONOMICAL
 - DISTANT (on the horizon)
 - DISTANT (like heaven)
 - HEAVENLY
 - DELIGHTFUL > IMAGINARY
 - IDLE
 - RELIGIOUS (of symbols)
 - CONSERVATIVE
 - OF CONSERVATIVE PARTIES
 - EXCELLENT, SUPERIOR
 - ARISTOCRATIC
 - PRIVILEGED, SUPERIOR
3. OF CLOTHES, UNIFORMS
 - OF POLICE, ARMIES, SPORTS TEAMS

1. OF NATURAL TAXONOMIES, ELEMENTS AND ENTITIES

As the corpus data indicate, few natural taxonomies are described with *niebieski*. While Stanulewicz (2007, 9) claims that “*niebieski* is preferred in contexts requiring a neutral plain description of an artifact or a natural object”, this research indicates that *błękitny* is more frequent in the proper names of species and descriptions of natural taxonomies. Even the collocation *niebieskie niebo* appears only five times in the whole corpus of 40 million words, and the reason may not necessarily lie in the fact they are cognates, but in the visual perceptual distinction between shades. The same low frequency has been revealed by *niebieska woda*, an amazing result, since these two nominal collocates of *niebieski* are considered to be prototypical in the semantics of this BCT, and the word *woda* bears no morphological similarity which would result in an awkward collocation of related forms.

- OF SMOKE, VAPOUR

Collocates such as *mgła* (fog), *dym* (smoke), *obłoczek*, *pyły* are also fairly infrequent in the concordance of *niebieski*. As the corpus data indicate, these nouns collocate with *siny* and *błękitny* more frequently.

- (OF LIGHT, FLAME) WEAK, 'COOL'

Plomień/plomyk (flame), *ogień* (fire), *iskry* (sparks), *niebieska błyskawica* (bolt of lightning) collocate with *niebieski*. The frequencies, however, are relatively low in comparison with those of *blue*.

- DIVINE (?) LIGHT

The PWN corpus sample cites *niebieski* in collocations with *aureola* (halo) and *aura egzorcysty* (exorcist's aura). This use is consistent with the reading above as it indicates a pale and weakly emanating light. The "divine" character may also arise from the main non-figurative sense of *niebieski*: 'celestial, heavenly'. Although the BNC sample of 1,500 citations does not attest *blue* in this reading, a search of the entire corpus provides two citations for *blue halo* and one for *blue aura*.

- OF/LIKE VEINS UNDER THE SKIN

Blood vessels seen through the skin look blue, as in *niebieskie żyłki na powiece* ('small blue veins on the eyelid'). More rarely, *niebieskie żyły* may indicate a serious condition such as blood poisoning:

(50) Przyrządzając mięso, widać niezupełnie świeże, skaleczyła się w palec i przyszło zakażenie. Piorunujące, tak że po dwudziestu czterech godzinach żyły jej ręki stały się niebieskie [All Polish citations have been culled from the PWN corpus unless otherwise specified]

Unlike *blue*, *niebieski* does not collocate with 'krew' (blood). *Błękitna krew* (employing a non-basic colour term) is the Polish equivalent of *blue blood* instead.

- BRUISED

It is not natural for *niebieski* to denote the colour of bruises. The PWN corpus cites one example:

(51) Stawiasz się, więc będziesz miał niebieska brodę ...
which is likely to be an example of linguistic interference from English. The adjective *siny* appears to be more natural in this context, and offers greater precision.

2. OF THE SKY

As etymological sources (Linde 1807; Brückner 1998; Dubisz 2003; Boryś, 2008) assert, the relationship between the colour *niebieski* and the sky or heaven is still well-entrenched. This is the primary meaning of the word, and traditionally its only meaning. The understanding of the term as 'pertaining to the sky and heaven' proves to be important in modern usage as well:

- (52) malowidło przedstawia postaci z różnych sfer - niebieskiej, piekielnej i ziemskiej
Polish dictionary entries suggest that the clear sky is the best exemplar of *niebieski*. The salient colour has been mapped onto the temporal domain to become an attribute of the evening in:

(53) ...w świetle niebieskiego wieczoru ...

which may suggest that *niebieski* is used for the darker shades, while *błękitny* prevails in descriptions of clear skies on a sunny day. As corpus data show, *niebieski* does not normally premodify *niebo* whereas *błękitny* proves to be a natural choice in descriptions of clear skies.

- DISTANT (on the horizon)

While *blue* denotes distant areas, objects and the horizon, *niebieski* rarely functions in this context. Such a usage is reserved for picturesque/vivid poetic descriptions:

(54) Ptaki skradały sie ku niebieskim dalom (J. Brzechwa)

Another colour term, *siny*, is natural in depicting remote expanses of land and water.

- CELESTIAL, ASTRONOMICAL

This reading is, according to the corpus statistics (see Tab. 3), the most salient, and the primary meaning in diachronic terms. The most frequent phrases cited in the analysed sample include: *ciało /ciała niebieskie* (celestial body/bodies), *sfera niebieska* (celestial sphere), *sklepienie niebieskie* (the heavenly vault), *firmament niebieski* (firmament).

- HEAVENLY

With the sky believed to be the seat of God and the saints, the meaning of *niebieski* is metonymically extended in *królestwo niebieskie* (Kingdom of Heaven), *bramy niebieskie*¹⁰ (heaven's gate), *Zbawiciel niebieski* (lit. 'blue' Saviour), *moc niebieska* (holy power), *niebiescy wysłannicy* (heavenly messengers), *Panna Niebieska* (Holy Virgin), *prorocy niebiescy* (heavenly prophets), *sprawiedliwość niebieska* ('blue'/heavenly justice), *Niebieski Panie* (Holy Lord) and many more phrases relating to God and worship. As the PWN corpus indicates, *niebieski* in the current reading is also applied in more elaborate phrases and unique collocations:

(55) ... wspaniała niebieska radość: Jezus!

(56) ... szarańcza I płomienie niebieskie pożerały Izrael. and the language of poetry

(57) W czas zmartwychwstania Boża moc
Trafia na opór nagłych zdarzeń.

Nie wszystko stanie się w tę noc
Według niebieskich wyobrażeń. (Bolesław Leśmian)

The sense is not limited to the Christian vision of heaven, as the citation below shows:

(58) ...żył z wizją rajy ziemskiego i niebieskiego rajy Allaha.

● DELIGHTFUL > IMAGINARY

The imagery of heaven and eternal life evokes ambivalent associations. On the one hand, it offers a wonderful promise, on the other, an abstract concept which seems “too good to be true”. Notions of a heavenly paradise and heavenly justice may in fact be little more than wishful thinking turned into religious belief. Such a conceptualization may be the reason why ‘celestial’ or ‘heavenly’ *niebieski* is applied to denote unrealistic, imaginary ideas.

A popular idiomatic phrase *niebieskie migdały* (‘blue almonds’) or *myśleć o niebieskich migdałach* (‘think about blue almonds’), usually translated into English as “day-dream” or “chase rainbows” has its origins in the 15th-century Polish with the meaning of *niebieskie migdały* as “something delicious” or “a wonderful person; a treasure” (Długosz-Kurczabowa, n.d.). This interpretation suggests that ‘blue’ is understood as “heavenly, excellent” – the only plausible explanation in the light of the above etymological evidence. The positive meaning: “to think about beautiful things” evolved into a negative one: “to think about trifles; to waste one’s time thinking about unreal things”.

● IDLE

As Długosz-Kurczabowa suggests, the whole phrase *myśleć o niebieskich migdałach*, has finally come to imply idleness. Similarly, the originally heavenly *ptaki niebieskie* (‘blue birds’), known in English as the biblical *birds of the heavens*, or *fowls of the air* are used in reference to scroungers, and layabouts. The concept behind this biblical phraseologism has become distorted, laden with negative values. The *ptaki* (or archaically, *ptakowie*) *niebiescy* from Matthew’s gospel are further differentiated from *niebieskie ptaki* by the positioning of the adjective. The postmodifying function is basically classificatory here, and suggestive of the high register used in literature or official language which is inherited from Latin. The typical, unmarked word order in *niebieskie ptaki*, on the other hand, reflects the negative values attributed to the phrase and the attitude it signifies.

(59) Klientela to “studenci, różnej maści artyści”, “niebieskie ptaki, niepokorne dusze, wyzwolone umysły”

(60) wyrzutkowie z amerykańskich uczelni, niebieskie ptaki i różnej maści leniuchy
Listed along with thieves, *niebieskie ptaki* are despised and described in a condescending manner, with the application of diminutive forms as in:

(61) ... różne niebieskie ptaszki ...

(62) ... niebieski ptak, drobny złodziejasek ...

- RELIGIOUS (in symbols)

Through the associations of *niebieski* with God, the Polish language is consistent with religious symbolism, or rather reflective of cultural models. The *blue robe* of St Mary has been cited in:

(63) Matka Boska w niebieskiej szacie ...

As Teodorowicz-Hellman (87) notes that the depictions of the Virgin Mary in light blue robes (the colour replaced purple) have been present in art since the 15th century.

Niebieski does not itself denote the meaning ‘religious’, despite the strong conceptual proximity of the sky with heaven. Such a conceptualisation, however, while not apparent in semantic realisation, is present in religious symbolism, highly salient in Polish reality.

- CONSERVATIVE

Religion and conservatism go hand in hand. While the Polish political environment does not include a party which has adopted blue colours and emblems, the Polish corpus contains 8 citations with *niebieski* for conservative, anti-communist ideologies and parties. These citations include the metonymic form *niebieski* for a member of such a party, or the plural form: *niebiescy*. The mapping is a two-step metonymy: part-part metonymy with the colour of the emblem mapped onto the party members, e.g. *niebiescy lobbyści*, and part-whole metonymy in which the salient feature is used for the party members themselves, e.g. *niebiescy*.

(64) Czerwony musi mieć czerwonego, biały białego, czarny czarnego, **niebieski** musi głosować na niebieskiego. Nieważne czy ktoś jest kompetentny, czy nie. Ważne, że jest tego samego koloru.

3. OF THE COLOUR OF THE SKY > CLOTHES, UNIFORMS

The PWN Corpus sample cites *niebieski* with a range of nouns denoting garments and accessories. The most frequent collocates, however, are sports teams, uniforms, collars and helmets. In clear contexts, the salient colour of clothes, or pieces of clothing, are mapped onto wearers. This is a conceptual shortcut, based on a part-whole metonymic mapping, also observed in the analyses of the other BCTs.

The phrase *niebieskie kołnierzyki*, due to linguistic and cultural transference, has achieved a significant salience in the Polish language. In military contexts, the blue colour of UN helmets, referred to as *błękitny* or *niebieski* in Polish, is highly entrenched and thus susceptible to various mappings, such as: *niebieskie helmy* (‘blue helmets’), *niebieski pułk* (‘blue regiment’), *niebiescy Francuzi* (‘the blue French’), and *niebiescy żołnierze* (‘blue soldiers’).

• OF POLICE, ARMIES, SPORTS TEAMS

Corpus citations illustrate metonymic patterns in which, for example, blue uniforms stand for policemen:

(65) Plac roił się od niebieskich mundurów.

(66) nie można było zobaczyć choćby jednego **niebieskiego** munduru. Korzystali z tego skwapliwie piraci drogowi. Policijnej aktywności zabrakło także przy, or a whole regiment:

(67) I zsunąwszy na tył głowy beret, towarzysz Laval pewnym elastycznym krokiem ruszył pierwszy do koszar, skąd po godzinie wyszedł już na czele niebieskiego pułku z wytrzaśniętym na poczekaniu, nie wiedzieć skąd, czerwonym sztandarem.

Apart from applications resulting from the conceptual extensions which are based on contiguity and similarity, *niebieski* has also been chosen to signify products and services. For instance, *Niebieska Linia* (Blue Helpline) is an emergency phone service for victims of domestic violence. Internationally recognized (for example as the *Thin Blue Line* in California), the term has been known in Poland since the 1990s, and has 11 citations in the PWN sample of 1,500. Five citations of *niebieska* as low-octane petrol (two-star petrol) occur, all metonymies based on the high salience of colour terms used to signify the commercial types of fuel available at filling stations; *niebieskie kartki na żywność* (food ration cards) issued by the communist government in the 1970s and 1980s were among many others easily distinguished by colour: green for petrol, pink for milk.

9 The categories of blue and *niebieski* in contrast

Compared with *blue*, the category of *niebieski* is rather modest regarding its number of extended meanings, which may partly be explained by differences in encoding colour experience: English *sky blue*, *dark blue* and *navy blue* correspond to Polish *błękitny*, *niebieski* and *granatowy*. As the analysis of *siny* (Gieroń-Czepczor 2010) shows, it also covers a stretch of the English blue spectrum, mainly in the descriptions of livid skin and bruised bodies, or greyish blue shades.

In comparison to *blue*, the conceptualizations underlying *niebieski* do not yield many figurative mappings. For a BCT, *niebieski* is not highly polysemous. Its extended meanings are metonymies; the colour of the sky stands for celestial or heavenly phenomena, real or imaginary. The metaphorical phrases incorporating *niebieski* employ the colour term metonymically to denote the excellence - and simultaneously, the unattainable quality - of the sky and heaven.

The polysemy of *niebieski* reveals conflicting conceptions of this BCT, as in:

(68) Niebieski oznacza mądrość i rozsądek ...

as well as idleness as in *niebieskie migdały* and *niebieskie ptaki*. However, all figurative senses are based on conceptualisations of the sky and heaven. The latter, believed to have

been the original meaning of the adjective, still exerts strong influence on the semantics of *niebieski*, being its second non-literal reading. ‘Celestial’ and ‘astronomical’ *niebieski* prevails in meaning extensions attested by corpus data.

Figure 2 contrasts the frequencies of respective meanings of *blue* and *niebieski*, and thus their levels of entrenchment. The percentages confirm observations in the qualitative sections above. Table 3 juxtaposes figures for the whole range of meanings exhibited by *blue* to demonstrate the limited applications of *niebieski* which is assisted by non-basic terms, or fully replaced, in quite a few meanings attributed to the equivalent English BCT.

The first column lists all readings attested in reference sources and corpus samples.

Columns 2–5 present figures indicating the numbers of occurrences of a given colour term in a particular sense in a corpus sample. All figures are raw, which with the different sample sizes – ranging from 321 to 1500 – does not enable proper comparison with the smaller samples. The table, however, shows the distribution of senses for each respective colour term.

The occurrences of *blue* appear to be more evenly distributed through a wide range of meanings, whereas the 3 Polish ‘blues’ share the functions of the English BCT, each “specializing” in certain readings, apart from the shared role of denoting a natural colour quality. In this respect, however, *siny* refers to purplish blue, and *blekitny* covers the lighter hues of the blue range. On the whole, the statistics reveal a level of incompatibility between the English and Polish BCTs. *Niebieski* retains its traditional meanings, ‘celestial, astronomical’ and ‘heavenly’, the latter being based on the metonymic contiguity between the colour and religious imagery. Its denotational function as a colour term is less significant than that of *blekitny* which collocates with a range of natural entities (the sky, water, natural taxonomies) and is fairly frequent in the Polish equivalent of *blue blood*.

On the whole, *blekitny* competes with *niebieski*, succeeding it in the following readings: OF NATURAL TAXONOMIES, ELEMENTS, ENTITIES; WATER, VAPOUR, SMOKE AND FLAME; OF THE SKY (the plural nominal form, *blekity*, is synonymous with the sky); DISTANT, PRIVILEGED, SUPERIOR. *Niebieski* has higher frequencies in its extensions: BRUISED, WITH VEINS VISIBLE UNDER THE SKIN; CELESTIAL, ASTRONOMICAL; HEAVENLY; IMAGINARY, IDLE; and CONSERVATIVE. As Stanulewicz (“Polish colour terms” 98) suggests, *niebieski* is polysemous while *blekitny* is unambiguous. From a cognitive perspective, the non-basic colour term remains within the domain of *COLOUR*, whereas *niebieski* is involved in mappings which create a more complex semantic category.

The raw frequencies in table 3 indicate a very strong position of the well-entrenched non-basic colour term in comparison with the basic one. *Blekitny*, although regarded as a hyponym of *niebieski*, exhibits a surprising semantic and contextual proximity with the basic colour term as well as a relatively high frequency. According to the PWN Corpus statistics, the occurrence of *blekitny* is higher than that of *fioletowy* (‘purple, violet’), and approximately as high as that of *pomarańczowy* (‘orange’). Another corpus of the Polish language, the PELCRA, ranks *blekitny* even higher, above *fioletowy* and *pomarańczowy*, and equal to *różowy* (pink). In view of such data, it would be tempting to suggest that Polish might have two basic colour terms for blue like Russian, or that *blekitny*, like the French *marron* competing with *brun* (Forbes 1986), exhibits signs of increasing semantic importance and may become a basic colour term at the expense of *niebieski*. Such a

hypothesis, however, would be too radical an assertion without reference to a diachronic perspective which could assess the rate of the change.

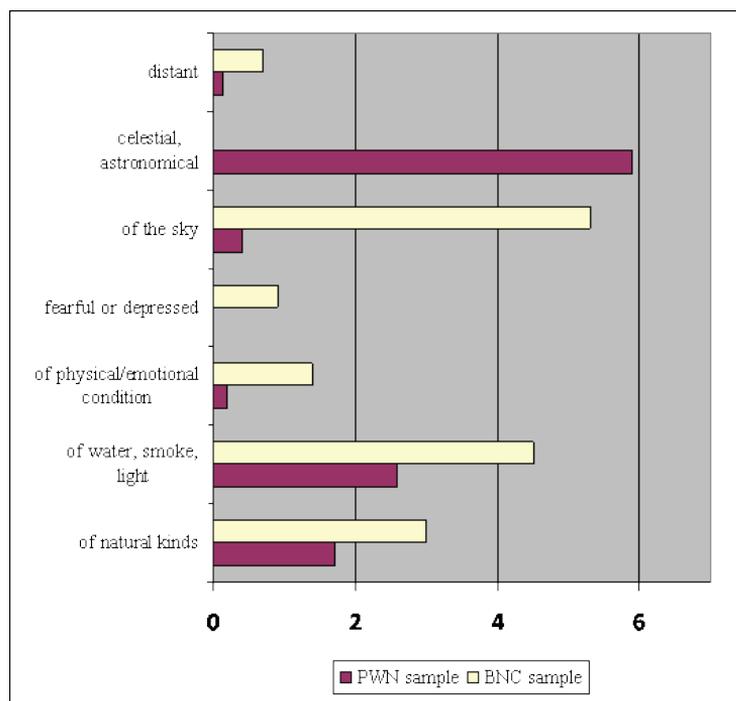


Fig.2 The percentages of occurrences of *blue* and *niebieski* in the main metonymic and metaphorical extensions in samples of 1,500 citations.

10 Is *niebieski* challenged as a BCT?

Tokarski (117) defends the basicness of *niebieski* with three arguments. Firstly, he stresses the fact that *niebieski* is a native term, while *błękitny* is a borrowing. While this opinion is not groundless – *niebieski* being an older and better entrenched term – its use as a colour term arose as late as in the 17th or 18th century. *Błękitny*, in contrast, was already in use as a colour term by the 15th century. Secondly, Tokarski sees frequencies as data confirming the higher psychological salience of *niebieski*. As a matter of fact, *Otwarty słownik frekwencyjny języka polskiego* ranks *niebieski* at 3842, while *błękitny* takes only 5911th place. However, as Tokarski himself admits, the count does not take into consideration the polysemy of *niebieski*, and as the outcome of this research shows, *niebieski* seems to be more heaven- than colour-oriented. Thirdly, and most convincingly, he argues that there is a hyponymical status of *niebieski* which is confirmed in the juxtaposition of seemingly synonymous sentences:

- Zosia ma niebieską sukienkę, lecz nie jest ona błękitna,
- Zosia ma błękitną sukienkę, lecz nie jest ona niebieska (Tokarski, 117)

MEANING EXTENSIONS	BLUE 1500	NIEBIESKI 1500	BŁĘKITNY 679	SINY 321
OF NATURAL KINDS, ELEMENT, ENTITIES	46	25	22	--
> OF WATER (SEA(S), LAKE(S), RAIN ETC.)	20	12	30	11
> OF SMOKE, VAPOUR	11	10	11	17
> OF WEAK FLAME, PALE LIGHT	37	10	3	2
> OF DIVINE LIGHT		2	--	
> OF VEINS UNDER THE SKIN (> BLUE BLOOD)	2	2	1	4
> BRUISED	6	1		13
> LIVID, PALLID, ASHEN	3			39
> INTOXICATED, DRUNK	1			2
> BLUE FROM COLD, STRESS ETC.	9			25
> FEARFUL, ANXIOUS	10			--
> DEPRESSING, DISMAL	1			
> DEPRESSED, MISERABLE > BLUES	2			
OF THE SKY	79	6	44	6
> CELESTIAL, ASTRONOMICAL		89	--	
> DISTANT	10	1	3	28
> UNATTAINABLE, UNUSUAL (over the limit)	6			
> UNREALISTIC, IMPRACTICAL (vs. down-to-earth)	3		1	
> HEAVENLY	--	52		
> DELIGHTFUL > IMAGINARY		20		
> IDLE (< IMPRACTICAL)		16		
> RELIGIOUS (AND PURITAN)	--	?		
> PURITANICAL > BLUE STOCKING	9			
> OBSCENE, INDECENT	6			
> OF CENSORSHIP	2			
> CONSTANT, UNCHANGING > FAITHFUL	4			
> CONSERVATIVE	9	8		
> EXCELLENT, SUPERIOR > BLUE RIBBON	19		--	
> ARISTOCRATIC (< BLUE BLOOD)	3		7	
> PRIVILEGED, SUPERIOR	3			

Only the first sentence is fully acceptable for a native Polish speaker; the other violates the intuitive judgement of *błękitny* being a variant, a shade of *niebieski*. On the other hand, Tokarski (2004) admits the semantic proximity, and occasionally the contextual identity

of *niebieski* and *błękitny*. The explanation he proposes for the strong competition between this basic and non-basic colour term lies in the fact that they share the same prototype, the clear sky. What he does not take into account, however, is the fact that the colour of the sky, like the colour of water, is subject to changes.

Leaving perceptual factors aside, Stanulewicz (2007, 87) observes that “the corpus findings clearly support the claim that *błękitny* is not a typical shade of *niebieski* as it has taken over some of its functions”. Furthermore she asserts that “the noun *błękit* is about ten times more frequent than the noun *niebieskość*, which supports the claim that *niebieski* shares some of its functions of the basic colour term with *błękitny* (Stanulewicz 2002 in Stanulewicz 2007, 98).

Both colour terms, *niebieski* and *błękitny*, are highly salient, collocating with a wide range of nouns. They also share the reference to the prototypical sky, with *niebieski* being the “average” blue (or its darker shades), whereas *błękitny* – contrary to dictionary entries which define it as ‘bright blue, azure’ (Boryś 32) – tends to be seen as ‘pale blue’, as indicated by the research conducted by Stanulewicz (2007, 97). As collocational patterns reveal, *błękitny* modifies adjectives such as *water*, *sea*, *river*, *stream* with a frequency which is 5.5 times higher than that of *niebieski* in the corpus samples analysed. This might imply that the relationship between *niebieski* and *błękitny* is a case of co-extension (MacLaury 2007) in which these two colour terms overlap, sharing more or less the same range of the colour spectrum, but with foci in different areas. So far, the collocational patterns would demonstrate that *błękitny* is a subtle, pale blue – therefore proper in descriptions of animal and plant species – evoking mostly positive associations. *Niebieski*, on the other hand, typically collocates with nouns denoting man-made objects. This might suggest that *niebieski* has come to describe neutral or artificial (brighter) shades of blue. These observations lead to the conclusion that the co-extension of *niebieski* and *błękitny* is not uniquely perceptual; it extends onto the semantics of these ‘blues’ accounting for both their high degree of overlap and specialization.

Notes

¹ The situation is by no means limited to English in the mediaeval period. Lyons, 1999, notes “the deficiency of Greek with respect to blue” on the basis of an analysis of Homeric Greek (MacLaury et al., 234), a fact ... surprising for a language known for richness of colour adjectives. More radically, Deutscher claims that *none of the ancient languages had a proper word for blue*.

² Tokarski (99) notes that *złoty* and its derivatives tend to take over the positive functions of *zólty*. This also seems to be the case in another Slavonic language, Czech, in which *zlatý* marks positive evaluation, while *žlutý* simply denotes a colour quality or evokes negative connotations of old age, jealousy or treachery.

³ As John S. Farmer notes, “Few words enter more largely into the composition of slang, and colloquialisms bordering on slang, than does the word BLUE. Expressive alike of the utmost contempt, as of all that men hold dearest and love best, its manifold combinations, in ever varying shades of meaning, greet the philologist at every turn.” (252)

⁴ According to Joseph Sassoon the systems of values reflected in ideological colour use derive from primaevial human experience and interaction with the environment. Sassoon, who writes from

a sociological and semiotic stance, defines colour as the expression of ideology built upon primary conceptualizations followed by metonymic and metaphorical extensions. Although “the burden of values that weighs on colours is (...) centuries old” (ibid., 170), it presents a challenge for a cognitive semanticist to discover the conceptualisations that underlie this phenomenon.

⁵ Vaňková (111–112) notes that Czech *modrý* and Polish *zsiniały* (Eng. ‘blue’), as opposed to terms meaning ‘red’, connotes ill health or even death. In Polish it is the non-basic *siny* and its derivatives that assume this function, and by extension, the term is restricted to negative readings, allowing *niebieski* to express more ‘neutral’ meanings.

⁶ The suggested inspirations can be found in Davis: one-act farce *Blue Devils* (1798), <<http://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/blues?>> or “Dallas Blues”, the first blues song published and copyrighted.

⁷ Supreme Court Justice McKenna termed the fraudulent activity of selling worthless shares: “speculative schemes which have no more basis than so many feet of ‘blue sky’”. *Wex- LII’s community-built law dictionary and encyclopedia*. 23 March 2009. <http://topics.law.cornell.edu/wex/blue_sky_law>

⁸ This citation illustrates the invariance principle in action: “(m)etaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain” Lakoff (215), which is pervasive in metonymic and metaphorical uses of colour terms which are conceptualised as paints that can be blended to achieve a new (colour) quality.

⁹ *The Thin Red Line* is an icon of courage based on the legendary defence of the Regiment in the battle of Balaclava 1854 by a thin line of red-coated soldiers in the Crimean War.

¹⁰ The word order in *bramy niebieskie*, with the adjective in the post-modifying position, is meaningful here. It indicates a marked, figurative use of *niebieski*, in contrast to *niebieskie bramy* which would simply mean: ‘gates painted blue’.

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Address:

*Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Raciborzu
(State Higher Vocational School in Raciborz)
Institute of Modern Languages
English Philology Department
Słowackiego 55
47-400 Racibórz
Poland
ewagieronczepczor@yahoo.com*