

The Historical Change in the Role of the Two Hungarian Words for Red (*Piros* and *Vörös*) and Their Visual Semantics

Received: February 2, 2020 • Accepted: March 2, 2020

Beáta Bálizs

Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest

Abstract: The present study summarizes the key findings of a multi-year interdisciplinary investigation, performed using specific (ethnographic, anthropological, and linguistic) research methods, into the two color terms mentioned in the title. Originally intended as empirical research involving all Hungarian color terms and individual community-dependent relationships with colors, it was eventually supplemented by a text-based examination of the history of the color terms *piros* and *veres/vörös*. A further objective was to answer questions raised in the course of international research concerning the reason for the existence of two color terms with similar meanings in the Hungarian language to denote the red color range. Earlier studies had already suggested that the modern use of *vörös*, which has more ancient roots in the Hungarian language, may be related to the fact that this color term was previously used more extensively. However, the present research is unique in demonstrating the substantial changes that have taken place in the Hungarian language in relation to the role and meaning of these color terms. It has already been established that the two color terms switched places historically, and that *piros* today fulfills precisely the same function that for centuries belonged to *veres/vörös*, until the color term *piros* began to gain ground in the 19th century.

Keywords: color terms and categories, color categorization, history of Hungarian color terms

The concept of the “basic color term” was first popularized by Berlin and Kay’s work *Basic Color Terms* (1969, see BERLIN – KAY 1991), and nowadays the controversial term is charged with various theoretical connotations and contradictions. Today, even Kay stopped referring to basic color terms that are defined on the basis of specific linguistic criteria, and the monograph summarizing the findings of the *World Color Survey* contains the following simplified definition of basic color terms: “the smallest set of simple words with which the speaker can name any color” (KAY et al. 2009:13). Originally, however, the basic color term was not merely a linguistic expression; rather, it implied a complex concept that included the psychological horizon of color systems, referring not only to words/names, but also to the cognitive categories that coordinate color shades. Furthermore, it referred to the “basic category,” which is rooted in “Basic Level categorization” (PLÉH 1997:458). According to the hypothesis proposed by

Berlin and Kay (1969), a higher level can (also) be distinguished in the psychological/cognitive classification of colors, which corresponds to the organization of primary color categories, along with another, lower level, which is responsible for shaping other color categories of secondary importance:

The PSYCHOLOGICAL level

The LINGUISTIC level

of color categorization

ABOVE:	salient color = perceptual universals ("universal perceptual categories" BERLIN AND KAY 1991:5)	"basic color terms" = semantic universals
BELOW:	other colors	lack of term

or secondary color terms

I consider it useful to separate these two – naturally and inextricably intertwined, but nevertheless – different arenas of categorization; that is, to isolate the psychological/cognitive and linguistic dimensions of color classification (which we might also refer to as "levels," for the sake of simplicity).¹ It would seem logical to assume that the cognitive color categories (regardless of whether they are primary or secondary — that is, whether or not they are essential) of the human mind are linked at the linguistic level to terms that are appropriate for their expression. With an emphasis on precisely this function, in what follows I attempt to introduce the concept of the "category-indicating color term." According to my interpretation, the category-indicating color term is the most important and most common neutral color indicator/adjective pertaining to the cognitive category that incorporates the given color range, which is also the umbrella term for the given color. With the exception of *piros* and *vörös*, the situation with respect to the most important category-indicating color terms is more or less straightforward in the Hungarian language:

fehér – white
fekete – black
zöld – green
sárga –yellow
kék – blue
barna – brown
szürke – grey
lila – purple
rózsaszín – pink

¹ In the context of anthropology, in the 1970s the need emerged to distinguish between the two levels also at the level of descriptive concepts. For example, a case study written on one of the languages of Papua New Guinea in 1975 separated the lexical from the cognitive dimension, referring to the former as "color words" and the latter as "color categories" (HAGE – HAWKES 1975:287).

If we rely exclusively on Berlin and Kay's original criteria for basic color terms (see 1991:6–7), *rózsaszín* [pink, literally: rose color] cannot be regarded as a basic color term since it is not monolexemic. In my opinion, however, in the case of the likewise compound name *narancssárga* [orange, literally: orange yellow], the extent to which it can be regarded as a cognitive category independent from *sárga* is also questionable. Based on a frequency examination carried out in the Hungarian National Corpus, Papp (2009:127) excludes both *rózsaszín* and *narancssárga* from the Hungarian basic color terms. According to my own empirical research, besides pink and orange the status of the color term *lila* [purple] is also peculiar, because until quite recently several different category indicators were used in various Hungarian dialects to express the purple color range. I suggest that this circumstance (along with the fact that no consistently used category-indicating color term for the purple color range can be found in the historical sources) suggests the late cognitive differentiation of the given color category (see BÁLIZS 2013).

In connection with the problem of the parallel use of the color terms *piros* and *vörös*, in what follows – just as in my doctoral dissertation devoted to this topic (in particular Chapter III, see BÁLIZS 2018) – I do not study which of the two color terms is the category indicator for the cognitive red color range; instead, I investigate the reason why, in a particular language variant and context, one rather than the other assumes the role of category-indicating color term.

Since Berlin and Kay's assertion concerning the *piros-vörös* duality in their famous work (i.e. that *piros* is primary while *vörös* is possibly a secondary color term, see 1991:35–36), many researchers have focused on how to define the interrelationship between *piros* and *vörös* (MACLAURY et al. 1997; KISS – FORBES 2001; KISS 2004; UUSKÜLA – SUTROP 2010; UUSKÜLA 2011; BENCZES – TÓTH-CZIFRA 2014; FÖLDVÁRI 2015; TÓTH-CZIFRA – BENCZES 2016; GROSSMANN 2016; SZITÓ 2020).

I have been involved in empirical research on this topic in different parts of the Hungarian language area since 2006. Initially, I explored the problematics of *piros-vörös* exclusively from a synchronic perspective. However, my fieldwork in various communities – that is, the most up to date material – prompted me to undertake diachronic research on this topic. For this reason, my own research is connected with the international discourse that brings to the fore the historical interpretation of basic color terms (see, e.g., BIGGAM 2012).

To begin with, I carried out ethnographic/anthropological fieldwork in relation to Hungarian color classification. In *Basic Color Terms*, Berlin and Kay wrote that: “the data presented in this monograph are admittedly removed from their cultural context; however, we can not accept the stricture offered by some ethnographers that such removal always and necessarily renders data meaningless” (1991:160). In contrast, I believe that we can obtain a proper understanding of color terms and categories – that is, of both the cognitive and linguistic levels of categorization – only if we do not separate color terms from the people who create and use them. People live their lives, and think and talk about colors, not in a vacuum but in a space that is linguistically and culturally defined. For this reason, as is typical in Hungarian ethnography, I undertook short-term fieldwork in various settlements, where I also carried out experiments with color chips — along the lines of the work done by Berlin and Kay. To date – between 2006 and 2011 – I managed to carry out research in eight Hungarian-speaking communities in three countries.



Figure 1. Places of fieldwork carried out by the Author (Illustration: Gábor Máté)

1. In Hungary: in Kazár, Kalocsa, Mezőkövesd, and Bába
2. In Romania: in Gyimesközéplak (Lunca de Jos) and Klézse (Cleja)
3. In Serbia: in Szilágyi (Svilojevo) and Kupuszina (Kupusina)

I participated in the life of these communities and observed their use of colors, besides recording semi-structured interviews with 12 to 15 people per settlement – specifically with women over the age of 50 to 60 – concerning the past and present use of colors in their community. I focused mainly on women, on the one hand because it has long been established that there are differences between the color terms used by women and men, and, according to some contemporary research, even between color categories (see FIDER – KOMAROVA 2019); and, on the other hand, because men did not show any willingness to contribute to the studies, most of them claiming that dealing with colors is a woman's job (cf. SAMARINA 2007:459). In the context of the interviews, I conducted tasks with color chips. At my request, the interviewees named 35 colors of the Munsell color system and organized them into groups. My aim was to identify all the color terms belonging to the participants' active and passive knowledge, while paying special attention to the color terms *piros* and *vörös*. First of all, I encouraged my participants to think carefully and then try to verbalize the differences they observed between the two colors. Next, I asked them to name the color of various animate and inanimate objects that are reddish in color (e.g. apple, blood, fire, etc.), in order to find out which of the many objects they regarded as *piros* and which as *vörös*.

According to my findings, *piros* was the most important word used by respondents to denote the red color range; (in the artificially generated experimental situation outlined above) this word was used almost exclusively to express the tone of the color patterns (cf. nowadays, almost every color red can be described using the word *piros* — as stated, for example, by BOGATKIN 2005:129). An exception in this regard was observed in two settlements: Klézse and Kazár. In Klézse (Cleja) which is situated in the Romanian language area – where I carried out fieldwork on two occasions (2006, 2011) – I found

that the reddish color chips were described by my interviewees almost without exception using the term *veres* (a variant of *vörös*). Even in the course of our conversations, this color term was used almost exclusively; in fact, even the color of an apple, something that is regarded as the most *piros* of objects by Hungarians, was expressed using this word (see KISS – FORBES 2001:195; KISS 2004:163). In the same place, the color term *piros* was rarely used independently. I typically heard it used in two compound structures: *pirosveres* and *piros ruzsinka* [reddish pink].

According to my research, the use of *veres* may once have enjoyed the same importance as in Moldavia among the villagers of Kazár, in the Hungarian language area where people have preserved their own, the so-called *Palóc* dialect for long. Although in Kazár all the interviewees without exception used the word *piros* to describe the color of the chips shown to them, just like the other examined communities in the Carpathian Basin, many people here were familiar with the color term *veres*, which was frequently used by their parents and grandparents. In general, they regarded *veres* as the earlier *Palóc* equivalent of the modern color term *piros*. One old local term (*csupaveres szoknya* [full red skirt], used for the plain red, unpatterned topskirt that is part of the traditional peasant costume) likewise suggests that the term *veres* was once the collective name for any reddish color in Kazár.

Obviously, when interpreting these findings we must take into account the fact that Moldavian Hungarians speak an archaic version of Hungarian. The Klézse dialect is a combination of the so-called southern Csángó dialect, which developed independently from the main body of Hungarian speakers since the Middle Ages; and the so-called Szekler Csángó dialect, which spread following the settlement of various Szekler families in Moldavia in the 18th century. Based on the premise that this regional language preserves many medieval elements (in addition to being significantly influenced by Romanian, of course), it would appear logical to assume that the local significance of the term *veres* is likewise an old/archaic feature. This is confirmed by the fact that, according to the data collected in Kazár, *veres* was once more important than it is today, and may have been more important than *piros*. For this very reason, I assumed that *veres/vörös* may have been the earlier category-indicating color term for the color red.

The correctness of this hypothesis was clearly confirmed by the studied historical sources: following the fieldwork, I complemented my research by a historically focused examination of the linguistic corpus. I chiefly examined the sources contained in three online electronic databases, relying on the digitized textual materials of *Magyar Pávilon*, the *Magyar Történeti Korpusz*, and the *Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár*. (These corpora contain collections of documents of varying quantities, composition, and age: *Magyar Pávilon* contains sources from the 16th to the 18th centuries; the materials in the *Magyar Történeti Korpusz* date from the end of the 18th century; while the *Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár* features many sources from the 19th century or later.) In these three databases, as well as in the *Arcanum Digitális Tudománytár* [Arcanum Digital Database] and the late 18th and early 19th century digitized journals accessible on the “Real-J” homepage of the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, I searched for the words *piros* and *vörös/veres* in order to examine the frequency of these color terms and the contexts in which they occur.

My investigations focusing on the latter historical sources, and my textual analysis, clearly confirmed the assumption made on the basis of the empirical data that, in the past, the primary color term for red was not *piros* but *veres/vörös*. In the following, I will

briefly outline the principal facts from which I infer the historical category-indicating role of *veres/vörös*. The material documenting the findings, along with a series of further observations, can be found in my doctoral dissertation and in the relevant subsections of the subsequent publication (see BÁLIZS 2018, 2020).

1. The etymology of the word *vörös* has cultural significance, since, between *piros* and *vörös*, the latter is derived from the Finno-Ugric word for blood (*vér* → *véres/vörös* → *veres/vörös*).² Thus, in the case of the color terms *piros* and *veres/vörös*, the etymology of the latter can be compared to the majority of Indo-European, Turkic, and Finno-Ugric languages, in which the names of the color red also have their roots in words that mean ‘blood’. In contrast, the word *piros* developed internally and has onomatopoeic origins: it was intended to express the crackling sound that accompanies burning or roasting. In relation to this, the first written occurrence of the word *vörös* is earlier than that of *piros* (the former dates from the 13th century and the latter from the 14th).

2. In the names of medieval settlements in the Carpathian Basin, the word *vörös* appears in greater numbers (in charters from the 13th to the 15th centuries, mostly written in Latin, eight of the Hungarian place names contain the word *vörös*, compared to just one settlement named *Piros*, and the proportion of *veres/vörös* subsequently increases); this color term also appears more frequently than *piros* in Hungarian family names (see BÁLIZS 2018:46). Thus, *vörös* is dominant in both geographical and family names.

3. In the first books written in the Hungarian language (in the 16th to 17th centuries), this term was likewise used more frequently. In sources where the red color range is referred to relatively frequently (mainly in the 16th century medical manuscript collection *Ars Medica*, in Melius’ *Herbarium*, in Lippai’ *Posoni kert* [Pozsony garden], and in Pápai Páriz’ *Pax corporis*), *veres/vörös* occurs far more frequently than *piros* (see BÁLIZS 2018:46–47).³

4. The color term *veres/vörös* was used as a neutral, negative, or positive adjective at least from the 16th to 17th centuries, while, in contrast, *piros* was used exclusively as a positive color adjective in the sources (see BÁLIZS 2018:47–49).

5. Between the 15th and 20th centuries, due to its neutrality, the *veres/vörös* color term was appropriate for general use in many kinds of contexts (to describe objects, plants, animals, human body parts, natural phenomena, etc.) to express the color red (see BÁLIZS 2018:49).

6. The most important evidence for *vörös* as a category indicator was that it was actually used as a generic term in the first Latin–Hungarian glossaries (1395, 1405). In fact, in the *Nomenclatura seu dictionary Latino-Ungaricum* (1590), only *vörös* appears

² The Hungarian language, along with Finnish and Estonian, belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family. Finno-Ugric has links with Asia, consistent with the fact that the ancestors of the Hungarians originally migrated from Asia to Europe and settled in the Carpathian Basin in around 1000 AD.

³ The primary source for the herbarium published in 1578 by the reformer and academic Péter Melius Juhász (1532–1572) was the famous *Kreuterbuch* of Adam Lonitzer/Lonicerus. The first work on horticulture in the Hungarian language was written by the Jesuit teacher János Lippai (1606–1666). The first of the three volumes, *Posoni kert*, was published in 1664. The medical book by Ferenc Pápai Páriz, a Transylvanian academic who studied in Leipzig and Heidelberg, the *Pax Corporis*, dates back to 1690.

among the names of colors (*Ruber*, *Rubedo* – *Vörösség*) and paints (*Minium* – *Vörös festek* [red paint]); this glossary also mentions *piros* as a color term, but exclusively as part of the names of certain fruits, such as *Piros czeresnie* (now *cseresznye*) [red cherry].⁴ In the 18th century sources, I came across several examples where the substantive form of *veres* was pluralized, although I found no equivalent cases with respect to *piros* (see BÁLIZS 2018:51). This suggests that the semantic field of *veres* incorporated several shades of reddish colors that were assigned to different categories in terms of perception, but that belonged to identical categories in terms of cognitive color classification. (This is in contrast to *piros*, where the singular form may indicate that only one shade can be classified as *piros*.) Among the early 19th century sources texts specifically use the words *veres/vörös* as the category designation for red. Moreover, they also specifically designate those shades that were at that time included in the cognitive red color classification — denoted by the name *veres/vörös* (see BÁLIZS 2018:51–52, 128).

In written language, *veres/vörös* was more common than *piros* for centuries; *piros* appears with statistical frequency only from the end of the 19th century. According to research that I carried out based on a digital historical database (the Historical Dictionary Corpus), from about the 1880s onwards it occurred more frequently than *veres/vörös*. As to when *piros* actually became a category indicator in all language variants, a later date, perhaps the first three decades of the 20th century, appears to be a realistic estimate. This is furthermore due to the fact that, for a long time, the educated layers of society continued to insist on *vörös*, and, as has been pointed out by others before me, it is still more common in contemporary scientific language (for the terminology used in physics, see B. PAPP 2006:16). Thus, for example, the following technical terms have preserved *vörös* to date:

physics:

infravörös – infrared

vörös izzás – red glow

mineralogy:

vörös okker – red ocher

vörös vasérc – red iron ore

botany:

vörösfenyő – larch (literally: red pine)

vörös áfonya – cranberry (literally: red blueberry)

physiology:

vörös vérsejt – red blood cell

vörös-zöld színtévesztés – red–green color blindness

⁴ Cf. “Fruit is more likely to be described using *piros*, with the exception of *meggy*, which is a dark red cherry” (FORBES AND KISS 1997:185). In Hungary, a distinction is made between two visually similar early summer fruits, one of which is sweeter: *cseresznye* [cherry] (in German: *Kirsche*), and the other sourer and usually darker in color: *meggy* [morello/sour cherry] (in German: *Sauerkirsche*, *Weichsel*). *Meggy-* is used as a prefix in many color terms. The color term *meggy szín* [cherry color] appears frequently in the historical texts; the women I interviewed also mentioned the term *meggy piros* and/or *meggy bordó* [cherry-maroon]; while in present-day written language *meggyvörös* is also typical.

Significantly, this color term is often used exclusively even in scientific works that were published in the early 20th century (see BÁLIZS 2018:68), or even if they also include *piros*, not yet as a generic term, since the official name of the red color category was still *vörös* at the time. To the best of my knowledge, an influential Hungarian printer by the name of Imre Kner (1890–1944) was the first to use the color term *piros* as the collective term for the cognitive red color class in his paper “A színharmonia” [Color harmony] (published in the 1909 volume of the Hungarian Printers’ Yearbook), in which he lists reddish shades under the name “*Piros csoport*” [Red group] (*újvörös*, *karmazsinvörös*, *bordeauxvörös*, etc.). Thus, in scientific language, or at least in its written variant, the color term *piros* started to become a category indicator in the early 20th century at the latest. However, little is known about how the color terms *piros* and *vörös* were used in the spoken language at that time. Nevertheless, it is certain that in modern, everyday language – in both its written and spoken forms – there is (or, more precisely, there is still) a context in which we adhere exclusively to the word *vörös*. Even today, we refer to a certain hair color as *vörös*, and (partly) we use the same word for the reddish shade of the hair, fur, or plumage of certain animals: *Vörös mint a róka* [red as a fox] (cf. FORBES – KISS 1997:185; DE BIE-KERÉKJÁRTÓ 2003:71). At the same time, in some dialects of Hungarian *piros* can nowadays be found in relation to both hair and animals (e.g. *piros tehén* [red cow]). In Gyimesközélpók (Lunca de Jos, Harghita County, Transylvania), where I spent nearly a month carrying out research in 2006, the color term *piros* is used nowadays in this context, for example, and, according to my observations, reddish blonde hair is occasionally referred to there as *piros szőke*.

Thus, as suggested by both the latest material and the historical sources, the earlier category indicator of the cognitive red color class was the color term *veres/vörös*, although at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century, it was replaced by another category indicator: *piros*. (In the meantime, the respective cognitive category was exposed to historical changes. For more on this see BÁLIZS 2018:123–129.) This claim is further supported by international parallels, since Hungarian is not the only language in which category-indicating color terms were interchanged in the case of certain cognitive color categories. In the case of the red category in particular, the Russian and Portuguese languages correspond to Hungarian. In Russian, червлёный – which has now disappeared entirely from Russian language usage – was replaced by красный in the 15th century, a word that, besides denoting ‘red,’ is still used in its original meaning ‘nice’ (HERNE 1954:53). In Portuguese, the category-indicating color term for red changed in the 13th century. Interestingly, in this Romance language today’s *vermelho* replaced *roxo*, which is now – as a result of a specific semantic development – used to indicate a different color (*roxo* [purple]; on this problem, see SWEARINGEN 2014; for further parallels, see BÁLIZS 2020).

When the relationship between the color terms *piros* and *vörös* is placed in a historical perspective, several hitherto unanswered – or unsatisfactorily answered – questions can be resolved. One such question is why, in compound words that include color terms, *vörös* occurs as a prefix or suffix three times more often than *piros* (see FÖLDVÁRI 2015). Another concerns the reason why *piros* is not used at all in heraldry (see DE BIE-KERÉKJÁRTÓ 2003:74). Diachronic analysis also makes it immediately apparent why it was so problematic for earlier researchers to decide which of the two was the “basic color term.” To date, no attempt – or only to the extent of addressing it hypothetically –

has been made at the possibility that the term for the cognitive red category might have changed in the course of history (e.g. FÖLDVÁRI 2015; GROSSMANN 2016:140). Behind the current use of *piros* and *vörös*, however, there is in fact a change of category indicator. If we accept this, the question arises as to why the former category-indicating color term was not forgotten.

In my opinion, this can best be explained by the fact that the color term *vörös*:

- a) took on a new, secondary sense (*vörös* ‘revolutionary, left-wing, Communist, Socialist,’ etc.) (cf. FORBES – KISS 1997:185).
- b) survived as the exclusive color indicator for certain objects — in other words, it became attached to an object: *vörös haj* [red hair]; *vörös róka* [red fox] (although in living speech *piros kakas* is acceptable as well as *vörös kakas* for red rooster, for example);
- c) preserved its importance in linguistic constructions: proper names, locutions, idioms, phrasemes:
Vörös-tenger [Red Sea], *Vörösmarty*, *Vöröskereszt* [Red Cross], *vörösbor* [red wine], *vöröslámpás ház/negyed* [red light district], *vörös fonálként húzódik végig* – red thread, in the sense of following a theme in a novel, for example (cf. Russian: *проходит красной нитью*), etc.
- d) is still used in certain language variants as the category indicator for the red color class, for example in scientific language, as seen above (cf. GROSSMANN 1988, 2016:138, 140).

In summary, before the 19th century, *veres/vörös* was not only far more common than *piros*, but only the color term *veres/vörös* was used as the category-indicating color term.

But what was the role of the color term *piros* in earlier centuries? According to my research in this respect, the use of this word was limited even in the earliest sources exclusively to denoting the color of certain specific things, and it recurred in those same contexts: it was used in connection with the coloring of the face, roses, and blood, almost as an epithet (see BÁLIZS 2018:49–50). Nowadays, the adjectival construction *vörös róza* [red rose] has become common, especially in written language, cf. DE BIE KERÉKJÁRTÓ 2003:73). Furthermore, my examination of the textual context of *piros* also revealed that, before the 19th century, this color term was not necessarily chosen because of its visual significance (i.e. its position in the color spectrum), but because this color term also has positive secondary connotations, as already observed earlier by Hungarian linguists (e.g. BARTHA 1937:14; on the same problem see: BENCZES – TÓTH-CZIFRA 2014:124–125). An additional factor that contributed to the gradual spread of *piros* was that it was once used to denote things that ‘acquired a reddish hue’. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that the adjective was mainly used for things that gained a reddish hue as a result of exposure to sunlight (fruits, flowers, and also dawn), or as a result of being cooked on a fire. This is likewise suggested by the etymology of the word, since the stem of the word *piros* (*pír-*) is contained in the verb *pirkad* [to dawn], referring to the colors conjured up by the early morning light, as well as in the action *pirítás* [frying], which refers to the (culinary) process by which food turns red. Thus, it is in fact very probable that *piros* became the permanent epithet of apple, rose, and dawn because they are not inherently reddish, but obtain their color gradually. The face is no exception to this latter

claim, since facial skin is red primarily when a person *elpirul* [turns red]. However, the face reddens due to blood flowing beneath the skin, while the epithet for blood – as mentioned above – is also *piros*. Finally, besides redness induced by heat, the adjective *piros* may have been attributed to certain reddish brown animals even earlier than the 19th century, in particular horses, which were greatly revered in medieval Hungary (*piros* was mainly used to describe the horse color known in old Hungarian as *pej* [bay] — a word of unknown origin). Now obsolete, the color indicator *pirók* (which likewise includes the stem *pír*) was used even recently in various dialects to mean a red-faced child, and also a certain color of cow.

As mentioned above, international researchers began to explore the problem of the color terms *piros* and *vörös* in the wake of Berlin and Kay, and it was due to their influence that it became customary to translate *piros* as ‘light red’ and *vörös* as ‘dark red’ in English (they are used in this form, for example, by WALD 1978:127–129 and WIERZBICKA 1996:317). However, Uusküla’s color tile experiment, which involved a total of 125 Hungarian-speaking people in six different Hungarian settlements, demonstrated that in modern Hungarian usage the visual meaning of *vörös* is no different from that of *piros*, in terms of both darkness and hue (UUSKÜLA – SUTROP 2010:371; cf. MACLAURY, who conducted a color tile experiment involving a total of nine people and established merely that “while *vörös* is dark, *piros* is not correspondingly light” 1997:75). In this respect, it should be noted that the animals, plants, or objects whose names feature *vörös* are not necessarily dark, and may not even be red! Typically, the color of *vöröshagyma* [yellow onion], *vörösréz* [copper], *vörösbegy* [robin redbreast], *vörös hangya* [red ant], *vörös róka* [red fox], *vörös okker* [red ochre], etc. is mixed, and in reality their tone is as close to yellow and/or brown as it is to red (cf. BENCZES – TÓTH-CZIFRA 2014:142). When asked about the meaning of *vörös*, many of the women I interviewed mentioned the color of rust, which is certainly no coincidence, since rust can be both yellowish and brownish at the same time. (The Hungarian language contains color terms created specifically with the word *rozsdá* [rust]: a.) the compound *rozsdaszín* [rust color] was already in use in the early 19th century; b.) *rozsdabarna* [rust brown] and c.) *rozsdavörös* [rust red] are still commonly used today; and d.) the color term *rozsdasárig* [rust yellow]⁵, which, however, is known only in Klézse).

Two other things were frequently mentioned by my interviewees in connection with *vörös*: one was the color of dried blood (cf. GROSSMANN 2016:135), and the other the color of flames. I suspect that these were associated because they are also of mixed color: they are not typical shades of red (cf. for native speakers of English, fire has an orange tone. See WIERZBICKA 1996:315). According to my own research, this meaning of *vörös*, expressing ‘yellowish and/or brownish red,’ which can be observed firstly in fixed linguistic structures and secondly in the speech of the older women I interviewed,⁶ can be explained by *semantic narrowing*: the earlier category indicator *veres/vörös* is the residual meaning of ‘all kinds of (i.e. tending towards brown, yellow, purple, and pink) reddish colors’ (BÁLIZS 2018:96). Among these, shades that tend towards yellowish and

⁵ *Sárig* is one of the old variants of *sárga*, and likewise meant ‘yellow.’

⁶ In fact, in certain late 19th century and early 20th century articles on Hungarian linguistics that deal specifically with the color terms *piros* and *vörös*, reference is also made to the fact that the meaning of *veres/vörös* tends more towards the color yellow than the meaning of *piros* (see BÁLIZS 2018:93).

brownish, which were considered as being somewhat disagreeable precisely because of their origins,⁷ have been able to survive to the present day in the form of *vörös* – which had also long been used in neutral and negative contexts – since *piros* was not considered suitable to describe them due to its positive connotations. In science, however, the color term *vörös* retains the former ‘all kinds of red’ meaning, even today. (This explains why Földvári (2015), for example, wrote that the group of colors that can be described using *vörös* “also includes – perceptually – purplish, brownish, and orange-ish colors;” cf. “*vörös* as a language qualification firmly holds onto its position for characterizing objects whose inherent coloration is red, ranging from yellowish brown to blueish purple” DE BIE KERÉKJÁRTÓ 2003:76.)

Nowadays, therefore, *vörös* is used in at least three different senses (BÁLIZS 2018:95):

1. in the sense of ‘yellowish and/or brownish red.’ Mainly used in living speech, most frequently when referring to the color of hair, foxes, onions, etc.
2. in the sense of ‘all kinds of mixed and pure reddish colors’ or ‘macro red.’⁸ This is true of scientific language, when referring to the red band of the color spectrum that contains all perceptible red components as a whole.
3. occasionally, it simply expresses the color red: *vörös* = *piros*; this mainly occurs in written language, when it is simply used as a synonym for the word *piros*, in order to avoid repetition. (This meaning was confirmed by the results of Uusküla’s above-mentioned experiments.)

As mentioned above, the contrast between *piros* as ‘light red’ and *vörös* as ‘dark red’ is questionable. Historically, however, with respect to the original meaning of *piros*, it is partly true that this color term is mainly associated with light hues. When searching for the definition of *piros* in the textual materials I examined, I observed that this color term is often linked with things that have a slightly pink or purplish (bright) red color in reality. Besides the – in fact pink or purple – dawn, rose, and face discussed earlier, *piros* was once the commonly used adjective for velvet fabrics and colors/dyes obtained from murex/kermes. Moreover, the Hungarian nouns *rózsa* [rose], *arc* [face], *bársony* [velvet] and *bíbor/karmazsin* [purple/crimson] were often interlinked in the Hungarian language of the 19th century, or even earlier:

piros/rózsás/bíbor hajnal – red/rosy/purple dawn

piros/rózsás/bíbor arc – red/rosy/purple face

bársonyrózsa – Rosa gallica

bíborcsiga – murex (in old Hungarian *bársonycsiga*)

piros mint a rózsá – red as the rose

⁷ For more on the negative associations of *sárga* (as well as *sárgászöld* [yellowish green] and *sárgásbarna* [yellowish brown]) in Hungarian culture, see Bálizs 2016a; 2016b.

⁸ I have taken the expression ‘macro red’ from Kay (1975), according to whom colors are classified into so-called macro categories in the first two evolutionary phases — that is, the category referred to by the name black includes not merely the color black but all dark colors, and white includes the light shades of all colors, while red indicates a new category that includes not merely all reddish colors, but all warm shades. In my usage, however, most of the warm shades contained in the yellow category are not included in the macro red category.

piros mint a karmazsin – red as the crimson/kermes

bíborpiros – magenta (literally: purple red) (in the earliest complete Hungarian translation of the Bible – dating from 1590 – this color term appears 27 times), etc. Furthermore, among the above, *rózsza*, *bársony* and *bíbor* are also known as color terms:

rózsaszín – pink (literally: rose color) (the category-indicating color term of the cognitive pink category today)

bársonyszín – purplish red (literally: velvet color) (an obsolete color term that appears in written language in the past one hundred years in the form of *bársonylila/bársonypiros/bársonyvörös*)

bíbor – purplish red and/or red (originally used to describe fabric, the word's color-related meaning comes from the Latin *byssus*, although the derivation remains unclear)

Besides these linguistic interlinkages, there is additional irrefutable textual evidence indicating that some authors had earlier used the word *piros* to mean pink and/or purple/purplish red. (As evidence, we cite here only Ferenc Kazinczy's translation into Hungarian of Marmontel's "Les quatre flacons" (1761) in the early 19th century, in which the French word *pourpre*, which refers to the color of a bottle, is rendered neither as *vörös/veres* nor as *bíbor*, but rather using the color term *piros*. It was likewise Kazinczy, who, in his recollections – written in different periods but referring to the same event – used the adjective *czéklaszín* [beetroot color] on one occasion and *piros* on another, in exactly the same context; see BÁLIZS 2020.)

My research therefore suggests that, prior to the 19th century, the word *piros* was most often used with respect to the following two color ranges:

1. reddish brown colors, especially with reference to food prepared by baking or roasting, such as bread, cakes, meat, fish, etc. (This meaning, as we have seen, is related to the etymology of the color term)
2. pink and/or purplish red shades, especially in the context of roses, human skin, or dawn. (However, in the case of marble and grapes, for example, it generally indicates 'pink with slight blueish hues,' while in the case of wine,⁹ and partly of rubies, it generally indicates 'dark red tending towards purple.')

The above list does not include blood. But why exactly was blood linked with the adjective *piros* in the old sources? One obvious answer might be that, due to the original meaning of *vörös/veres* (bloody), a comparison of the color of blood to itself would have been tautological. However, the positive connotations of *piros* themselves can explain the phrase "*piros vér*," since this can also be interpreted as follows:

a) blood shed for a noble cause (in the case of Christ, for the salvation of humankind from their sins; in the case of the Christian martyrs, for their faith; in the case of soldiers for their homeland, etc.)

⁹ Although in modern Hungarian the compound *vörösbőr* refers to red wine, in the earliest sources *piros* is frequently encountered as the adjective for wine.

b) the healthy, circulating blood of living creatures (as opposed to the congealed blood of the dead)

Nevertheless, references to blood are not the only context in which the positive, secondary meanings of *piros* (beautiful, good, desirable, noble, healthy) should be emphasized. Such meanings may also be present in many other contexts:

<i>piros arc</i>	an attractive, healthy complexion
<i>piros hajnal</i>	a beautiful/entrancing dawn
<i>piros bársony</i>	a beautiful/fine/noble material or fabric
<i>piros karmazsin</i>	good-quality/noble leather or fabric (or kermes)
<i>piros csizma</i>	boots made from fine leather
<i>piros rubin</i>	a beautiful/precious ruby
<i>piros kláris</i>	beautiful/precious coral (necklace) / string of beads
<i>piros bor</i>	good/fine wine ¹⁰
<i>piros búza</i>	good/fine wheat, ¹¹ etc.

In the case of various concepts, however, the word *piros* was used (and is partly still used today) solely because of its secondary meanings in connection with *öröm* [joy], *nevetés* [laughter], and *kedv* [pleasure] or [good humor], as these things actually have no color (BÁLIZS 2018:253–254).

In fact, in the vast corpus that I reviewed, various authors from the 15th century to around the mid-19th century used the word *piros* preferentially to denote two different color ranges: pinkish purple and reddish brown. In addition, *piros* was preferred over other color terms in at least three communication situations (BÁLIZS 2018:257):

1. when they wished to express the positive aspect of an object or concept
2. until the end of the 18th century when they wanted to emphasize the process of becoming red (in Hungarian: *pirulás*)
3. from the 19th century when they wished to avoid word repetition (primarily in texts in which *vörös/veres* appeared frequently)

The more often one of the above goals came into play in one and the same communication situation, the greater the probability that the word *piros* was used primarily at the expense of the category indicator *vörös*, or other, less common color terms.

In summary, a synchronic and diachronic approach, along with a combination of ethnographic fieldwork using color chips experiments and corpus linguistics, proved effective in the exploration of the issues raised. By means of this complex methodology, it was possible to clarify definitively that, in the Hungarian language, the definition ‘red’ of the word *piros*, and its widespread use in this sense, is connected specifically to the modern age, or, more precisely, to the 20th century. It was possible to substantiate the

¹⁰ If we consider wine as a symbolic substitution for blood (see PASTOUREAU 2017:66), it seems logical that wine – which is thus likewise a symbol of life – should be given the attribute of blood: *piros*.

¹¹ Wheat, just like blood and wine, can also be interpreted as a symbol of life, which may explain its connection with the word *piros*.

idea – raised in earlier studies but not tested more exhaustively until now – that *veres/vörös* was the dominant color term to indicate this color range until the 19th century. This is also important due to the fact that the current use of the word *vörös*, and its peculiar semantics, varying – as we have seen – between at least three more or less different meanings (‘yellowish and/or brownish red’; ‘macro red’; ‘red’), can clearly be inferred from its former use as a collective expression, and from its role as what I have defined as ‘category-indicating color term.’ The contemporary meaning of the word *piros*, and the high position that it occupies in today’s Hungarian color system, are also associated with the fact that nowadays – at least in most Hungarian dialects, and in both written and living speech – this color term is the category-indicating color term.

The Hungarian *piros* and *veres/vörös* example points beyond itself: it can also be a teaching point in international research in general, as it demonstrates the plasticity of the relationship between cognitive color categories and the words that are used to describe them. It demonstrates how color terms (like cognitive color categories) – whether less common names or widely known category indicators – are permanently subject to historical changes.

REFERENCES CITED

BÁLIZS, Beáta

- 2013 A lila színekategória a kupuszinai borszín és a kazári orgonaszín tükrében [The Color Category ‘Purple’ in the Context of *Borszín* ‘Wine Color’ in Kupuszina and *Orgonaszín* ‘Lilac Color’ in Kazár]. In FARKAS, Judit – KESZEG, Vilmos (eds.) *Kolozsvártól Pécsig, a Yaoitól a juhászatig Néprajzi-kulturális antropológiai tanulmányok két doktori iskolából*, 339–256. Budapest: L’Harmattan.
- 2016a A sárga és színtársai A sárga-fekete, illetve a sárga-zöld jelentése [Yellow and Its Color Associates. The Meaning of *Sárga-Fekete* (Yellow-Black) and *Sárga-Zöld* (Yellow-Green)]. *Erdélyi Múzeum* 2016(2):37–59.
- 2016b “Fertelmes sárga szín”. A sárga negatív megítélése a magyar kultúrában. [“The Nasty Color Yellow.” The Negative Connotations of Yellow in Hungarian Culture]. In CSEH, Fruzsina and SZULOVSKY, János (eds.) *A művéség dicsérete: Tanulmányok Flórián Mária tiszteletére*, 103–111. Budapest: Plusz Könyvek.
- 2018 “Veres vagiok, piros vagiok”. A *piros-vörös* színnévkettős a magyar nyelvben és kultúrában [“Veres Vagiok, Piros Vagiok.” The Dual Color Name *Piros-Vörös* in Hungarian Language and Culture]. Pécs: PhD dissertation.
- 2020 “Veres vagiok, piros vagiok”. A *piros-vörös* a magyar nyelvben és kultúrában. (*Studia Ethnologica Hungarica XIX.*) Budapest: L’Harmattan (in Press).

BARTHA, Katalin

- 1937 *Szókincstanulmány a magyar nyelv színelnevezéseiről* [A Vocabulary Study of Color Terms in the Hungarian Language]. Debrecen.

BENCZES, Réka – TÓTH-CZIFRA, Erzsébet

- 2014 The Hungarian colour terms *piros* and *vörös*: A corpus and cognitive linguistic account. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 61:123–52.

- BERLIN, Brent – KAY, Paul
 1991 *Basic Color Terms. Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University California Press.
- BIGGAM, Carole P.
 2012 *The Semantics of Color. A Historical Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BOGATKIN, Mari (later UUSKÜLA)
 2005 Värvinimed ungari keeles Pohinimed, nende struktuur ja kujunemine. Tartu Ülikool: PhD dissertation.
- DE BIE-KERÉKJÁRTÓ, Ágnes
 2003 A vörös színnév használata a magyarban [The Use of the Color Term *Vörös* in Hungarian]. In BAKRÓ-NAGY, Marianne – RÉDEI, Károly (eds.) *Ünnepi kötet Honti László tiszteletére*, 67–79. Budapest: MTA Nyelvtudományi Intézete.
- FIDER, Nicole A. – KOMAROVA, Natalia L.
 2019 Differences in color categorization manifested by males and females: a quantitative World Color Survey study. *Palgrave Communications* 5(142):1–10. www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0341-7 (accessed February 25, 2020).
- FÖLDVÁRI, Melinda
 2015 *Vörös és piros [Vörös and Piros]*. www.szinkommunikacio.hu/24_04.htm (accessed February 25, 2020).
- FORBES, Isabel – KISS, Gábor
 1999 Colour categorization and naming in French and Hungarian. In BEEDHAM, Christopher (ed.) *Langue and Parole in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective*, 181–188. Amsterdam: Pergamon.
- GROSSMANN, Maria
 1988 Colori e lessico: Studi sulla struttura semantica degli aggettivi di colore in catalano, c astigliano, italiano, romeno, latino e ungherese. *Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik*. Tübingen: G. Narr.
 2016 Piros vagy vörös. Két színnév disztribúciója a magyar nyelvben [*Piros or Vörös. The Distribution of Two Color Names in the Hungarian Language*]. *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi Nuova Serie* 15. 127–145. http://epa.oszk.hu/02000/02025/00032/pdf/EPA02025_RSU_15_2016_127-145.pdf (accessed February 25, 2020)
 [Original article: Piros ‘rosso’ vs. vörös ‘rosso’: distribuzione di due termini di colore in ungherese. In GRANDI, Nicola – IANNACCARO, Gabriele (eds.) *Zhì. Scritti in onore di Emanuele Banfi in occasione del suo 60 o compleanno*, 259–273. Cesena, Rome: Caissa Italia editore, 2006.]
- HAGE, Per – HAWKES, Kristen
 1975 Binumarien Color Categories. *Ethnology* 14: 287–300.
- HERNE, Gunnar
 1954 *Die slavischen Farbenbenennungen Eine semasiologisch-etymologische Untersuchung*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB.
- KAY, Paul
 1975 Synchronic Variability and Diachronic Change in Basic Color Terms. *Language in Society* 4: 257–270.

- KAY, Paul – BERLIN, Brent – MAFFI, Luisa – MERRIFIELD, William. R. – COOK, Richard
2009 *World Color Survey*. Stanford, California: CSLI Publications.
- KISS, Gábor
2004 *Apiros, vörös és más színnevek használata a Magyar Nemzeti Szövegtár alapján* [The Use of *Piros, Vörös*, and Other Color Terms Based on the Hungarian National Corpus]. In GECSŐ, Tamás (ed.) *Variabilitás és nyelvhasználat*, 160–165. Budapest: Tinta.
- KISS, Gábor – FORBES, Isabel
2001 *Piros, vörös – red, rot, rouge*. In GECSŐ, Tamás (ed.) *Kontrasztív szemantikai kutatások*, Budapest: Tinta 190–199.
- MACLAURY, Robert E. – ALMÁSI, Judit – KÖVECSES, Zoltán
1997 Hungarian *Piros* and *Vörös*. Color from points of view. *Semiotica* 114: 67–82.
- PAPP, Eszter B.
2006 Néhány színnév terminológiai vizsgálata [A Terminological Examination of a Few Color Terms]. In FÓRIS, Ágota – PUSZTAY, János (eds.) *Utak a terminológiához*, 7–25. Szombathely: BDF.
- PAPP, Kornélia
2009 Basic and non-basic color terms in Hungarian. In ZLATEV, Jordan – ANDRÉN, Mats – JOHANSSON – FLACK, Marlene – LUNDMARCK, Carita (eds.) *Studies in Language and Cognition*, 123–135. Cambridge: Scholar Publishing.
- PASTOUREAU, Michel
2016 *Red. The History of Color*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- PLÉH, Csaba
1997 Hozzájárulhatnak-e az empirikus pszichológiai kutatások a nyelv–gondolkodás viszony filozófiai problémájának megoldásához? [Can Empirical Psychological Research Contribute to Solving the Philosophical Problem of Language and Thought?]. *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* 41(3–4): 439–540.
- SAMARINA, Luidmila V.
2007 Gender, age, and descriptive color terminology in some Caucasus cultures. In MACLAURY, Robert L. – PARAMET, Galina, V. – DEDRICK, Don (eds.) *Anthropology of Color. Interdisciplinary multilevel modeling*, 457–466. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- SZITÓ, Judit
2020 *A piros és vörös 3–10 éves gyermekek nyelvében: Kollokációk* [*Piros and Vörös in the Language of Children Between Three and Ten Years of Age: Collocations*]. In FÓRIS Ágota – BÖLCSKEI Andrea (eds.) *Nyelv, kultúra, identitás. Alkalmazott nyelvészeti kutatások a 21. századi információs térben* (in Press).
- SWEARIGEN, Andrew
2014 From blood to worms. The semantic evolution of a Portuguese colour term. In BIGGAM, Carole P. – HOUGH, Carole – KAY, Christian – SIMMONS, David R. (eds.) *New Directions in Colour Studies*, 79–92. Glasgow: John Benjamins.

TÓTH-CZIFRA, Erzsébet and BENCZES, Réka

- 2016 *Piros és vörös színneveink korpuszalapú kognitív vizsgálata: produktivitás, figurativitás és alapszínnévi státusz* [A corpus-based cognitive examination of the color terms *piros* and *vörös*: Productivity, figurativeness, and status as basic color terms]. *Magyar Nyelvőr* 140(3): 52–71.

UUSKÜLA, Mari

- 2011 Terms for red in Central Europe. An areal phenomenon in Hungarian and Czech. In BIGGAM, Carole P. – HOUGH, Carole – KAY, Christian – SIMMONS, David R. (eds.) *New Directions in Colour Studies*, 147–156. Glasgow: John Benjamins.

UUSKÜLA, Mari – SUTROP, Urmas

- 2010 The puzzle of two terms for red in Hungarian. In WOHLGEMUTH, Jan – CYSOUW, Michael (eds.) *Rara & Rarissima Documenting the fringes of linguistic diversity*, 343–362. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

WALD, Paul

- 1978 Clôture sémantique, universaux et terminologie des couleurs. In TORNAY, Serge (ed.) *Voir et nommer les couleurs*, 121–138. Nanterre: Laboratoire d’Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative.

WIERZBICKA, Anna

- 1996 *Semantics. Primes and Universals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beáta Bálizs was born in Siklós, Hungary. She studied graphic design at the Vocational School of Arts in Pécs, and her interest in color dates back to this time. From 2001, she studied ethnology and cultural anthropology at the University of Pécs. She graduated with honors as an ethnographer in 2008, then continued her studies at the university’s Interdisciplinary Doctoral School. Between 2006 and 2011, her fieldwork focused on local color classification and color terms in various Hungarian-speaking regions. Between 2013 and 2020, she held a junior scholarship at the Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ Research Center for the Humanities. She obtained her doctorate in 2020. Her dissertation focused on the color red, and in her previous work she studied the Hungarian color categories pink, purple, and yellow, while also exploring the relationship between the color yellow and the colors green and black. E-mail: balizsbeata@gmail.com
