

# **GLASGOW COLOUR STUDIES GROUP**

## **Notes following the Seventh Meeting, 28th January 2009**

The seventh meeting of the GCSG took place in Room 1, Dept of English Language, University of Glasgow. Thanks are due to Christian Kay, who acted as master of ceremonies, and who also organized the refreshments.

Apologies were received from Niall Logan.

Our subject for the evening was **Colour Terms in Scotland**, for which we had two speakers. The first was Dr Wendy Anderson whose paper represented the work of herself, Prof. Christian Kay and Dr Carole Hough, all authors being from the Dept of English Language, University of Glasgow.

### **Wendy Anderson spoke on ‘Red Herrings in a Sea of Data: Exploring Colour Terms with the SCOTS Corpus’**

“The Scottish Corpus of Texts & Speech (SCOTS) is a recently-completed multimedia corpus of texts in Scottish English and varieties of Scots, containing 4 million words of a wide range of written and spoken genres from 1945 to the present day. It is freely available online, and is designed to be used by linguists and students, researchers in other disciplines, and also the general public. One important application of the resource is in the study of the use in context of lexical items. This paper will explore ways of exploiting the SCOTS corpus to investigate the literal, metaphorical and idiomatic uses of colour terms in contemporary Scots. This will involve using the corpus' integrated analysis tools to consider the collocational patterning of these terms, and the accompanying demographic and textual metadata in order to take account of factors such as speaker/writer age and gender, and textual register. Other online resources, such as the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* and the *Historical Thesaurus of English* will be drawn on where these aid us in interrogating the complex body of material in the SCOTS corpus. The paper will outline the potential pitfalls in the use of a minority-language corpus for linguistic research, but conclude that with discernment and a degree of canniness, such a resource can provide valuable information”.

Our second speaker was Ellen Bramwell, also of the Dept of English Language, University of Glasgow.

### **Ellen Bramwell spoke on ‘Colour in Scottish Surnames and Bynames’**

“The most common hundred surnames in Scotland include seven colour terms: Brown, Reid, Gray, Black, Russell, White and Whyte. Similar patterns are also present in other countries. These surnames developed from bynames, as extra names given to individuals to distinguish them from others of the same name. Most surnames are derived from four main categories of byname: locational, occupational, relational and nicknames. Those derived from colours are generally from the nickname category.

Bynames are still in use within some communities, including in some areas of Scotland. By investigating how colours are used in bynaming in a present-day community and comparing this diachronically with the colour bynames from which some surnames originated, it is possible to gain an insight into how people use colours in naming more generally. My research used structured interviews to investigate bynames synchronically in a small close-knit community in the Western Isles of Scotland. This is a bilingual community where both Scottish Gaelic and English are spoken. Results obtained included examples of bynames based on colour - particularly hair colour. Gaining examples from interviews, rather than written records, allows for a firmer understanding of why these names were bestowed and this can contribute towards explaining why and how colours were assigned to people in the past”.

We are most grateful to both speakers and to the co-authors for fascinating and provoking talks, both followed by questions and discussions.

### **News**

- Membership appears to have stabilized at 75 members, which is beyond the expectations of the original organizing committee.
- The email discussion list is very under-utilized. It would be an excellent place for those who have attended meetings to continue their discussions. The address is [ColourStudies@www.jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:ColourStudies@www.jiscmail.ac.uk)
- We hope to have an annual programme in future. Please send Carole Biggam any suggestions you may have for subject areas you would like to see represented, and/or for suggested speakers, bearing in mind that our resources do not currently stretch to paying travel expenses. I would also be interested in whether there would be any support for afternoon excursions to places of colour interest, e.g. to investigate dyeing, paint manufacture, animal appearance etc.

### **Considerations for the Eighth Meeting**

#### **Date:**

- The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, 25th March, when Stuart Lynn will speak on ‘The Colour of the Cosmos’. All members on the distribution list should have received full details.

#### **Talks**

- If anyone would like to volunteer a talk or session, please contact Carole Biggam at [c.p.biggam@btinternet.com](mailto:c.p.biggam@btinternet.com)
- We do not want to exclude any format for future meetings, and, indeed, it would be good to have as much variety as possible, e.g. single lectures, collections of short talks, seminars on particular subjects, short talks on a particular theme etc.

- Please also contact Carole Biggam if you have suggestions for improving the arrangements at the meetings.