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SUMMARY

The aim of this survey is to reveal what kind of influence the human color perception and, in particular, the *brightness* chromatic attribute, can have in the semantic development of English achromatic basic color terms, *black*, *grey* and *white*.

Many studies about color semantics in Anglo-Saxon give prominence to the brightness parameter and argue that the Anglo-Saxon color system focused more on brightness than hue. That is probably right. It's nonetheless true, that brightness has often been conceived only as a property of light-emitting or light-reflecting objects and therefore, achromatic color terms have been almost excluded from the category of brightness. However, in optical physics, only the brightness parameter can distinguish the achromatic colors. This "quantitative brightness", corresponding to 0% (black), 50% (grey) and 100% (white) of light reflectance, has to be considered not only to classify the achromatic basic colors terms, but also in order to define the prototypical perceptive features of extra-linguistic referents. Other achromatic adjectives, like *bright*, *shining* or *glowing* will be included in the "qualitative brightness category", whose brightness depends on referents' material properties. Finally, adjectives like *dark*, *light* and *pale* have to fall within the "lightness category", which depends, unlike the quantitative brightness category, on external quantity of light too. Considering these three categories, their optical physics perceptive features and the prototype semantics theories, English basic color terms, *black white* and *grey* and their corresponding Indo-European roots have been analyzed, in order to verify the importance of the brightness chromatic attribute in their semantic and etymological development.