Adjectives of temperature in Latvian

In this paper I present my preliminary investigation on temperature terms in Latvian. For the aims of the study the semantics of eleven Latvian temperature terms was analyzed: five adjectives denoting warm temperature (karsts, sīlts, tveicīgs, versmains, svelmains), one adjective denoting neutral temperature (remdens) and five adjectives denoting cold temperatures (auksts, salts, vēss, dzēstrs, dzedrs). The data were collected from the corpus of Latvian and from different dictionaries; most collocations were valued by the native speakers and checked up with the use of search machines (Google).

First, the analysis of tactile, non-tactile and experience-based temperature uses [Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2007] has shown that only 4 of 11 adjectives, namely karsts, sīlts, vēss and auksts, may be considered as basic, because, besides some other properties, they may denote all these types of temperature (see also [Plank 2003]). This property of all these terms is, of course, correlated with their possibility of occurring in different syntactic positions:

1. karsta / sīlta / vēsa / auksta tēja
   ‘hot / warm / cool / cold tea’
2. Bija karsta / sīlta / vēsa / auksta naktis.
   ‘The night was hot / warm / chilly / cold.’
3. Šodien ir karsts / sīlts / vēss / auksts.
   ‘It’s hot / warm / chilly / cold today.’
4. Man ir karsti / silti / vēsi / auksti.
   ‘I feel hot / warm / cool / cold.’

It is worth mentioning that vēss, comparing to three other adjectives, is more rare and has a narrower distribution concerning the compatibility with different nouns. Probably it may be explained by the fact that sīlts denotes a warm temperature which is mainly comfortable for humans, auksts and karsts may denote unpleasantly cold and unpleasantly hot, respectively, while vēss is something between sīlts and auksts (i.e. ‘cool’, ‘chilly’) and may often be substituted by other “cold” adjectives.

The semantics of remdens is rather interesting, since it denotes neither particular warm or cold temperature, but rather not warm enough comparing to the expected warm temperature (cf. the analysis of Swedish ljum in [Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Rakhilina 2006]).

So, one may not use the collocation remdens alus in the context ‘It’s hot today, I’d like to slake my thirst with cold beer’, because it will sound strange: warmish beer is not good, it is too warm to drink (cf. auksts alus, vēss alus ‘cold beer’). On the contrary, remdena tēja ‘lukewarm tea’ is rather cold to drink, it hasn’t the right temperature.

Salts denotes the temperature which is very cold (cf. English frosty, Russian морозный). It has a restricted combinability with nouns (mainly salta diena ‘frosty day’ and salta ūdens ‘very cold water’). It’s interesting that the collocation salta diena may also be positively evaluated.

Svelmains, tveicīgs and versmains denote an atmospheric, hot temperature, which is unpleasantly high:

5. Šodien ir svelmains / tveicīgs / versmains.
   ‘It’s hot today.’
   a) * the day is pleasantly warm
   b) ok the day is unpleasantly hot

In my talk, I’m going to give more data on Latvian temperature terms and to speak about their properties, concerning their position on the temperature scale, compatibility with different nouns, evaluative connotations, substitutability and some semantic shifts in this domain.

References

Mūsdienu latviešu valodas tekstu korpuss (The Corpus of Modern Latvian):

http://www.korpuss.lv/
