Declaration

I certify that all the material in this study which is not my own work has been identified and acknowledged, and that no material is included for which a degree has already been conferred upon me.

Signature of the candidate:
Writing a dissertation is not just a matter of getting the work done efficiently and with good input-output ratio, for me it has been much about finding my place in the matrix of different research traditions and people doing that research. I feel very fortunate to have come across and made friends with a large number of kind, bright and encouraging people during my research.

This work would never have been possible without the encouragement and support from my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Quang. I have been extremely lucky to have him as my mentor and guide in writing this thesis.

I am also indebted to all my lecturers at the University for their precious knowledge, useful lectures in linguistics, which lay the foundation for this study.

Lastly, I would like to thank the most important people in my life, my family and friends. I am forever grateful for my parents, who have given me their unconditional support and provided me with the feeling that I am free and capable to pursue any goal in life that I set my mind.

Acknowledgements
Abstracts

This paper is on denotations and connotations of colours in English and Vietnamese from a cross-cultural perspective. The author tries to cover denotations and connotations of colours across cultures. Then, a preliminary contrastive analysis between the two systems is made with eleven basic colour terms in English and nine in Vietnamese. They are differentiated in terms of meanings, collocations and synonyms.

What is to be presented in this paper accounts for only a fraction of similarities and differences between the two systems of colour terms in English and Vietnamese. Hopefully, this will pave the way for further research.
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Part 1: Introduction

I. Rationale:

We are living in world of colours.

Colours play a very important part in our lives. They make our lives colourful and lively. Besides using colours to distinguish things, to decorate, etc., we use colours as symbols and messages because verbal language is not the only way to communicate, non-verbal language manages itself to manifest its meaning. For example, in the street, you can see people stop when the red light is on and they go when the green one is turned on. As in football matches, red and yellow cards are punishments to football players. Each has its own meaning we all know and follow, about which wardens and referees do not have to explain in the streets or in the football pitches.

It is worthy of note that colours are perceived differently in different cultures. Each colour in each culture usually has its own meaning. This affects the way they use language of colours, the way they behave towards colours, the way they attach meaning to colours, etc. Would any of us send white flowers to a newly married couple in China or wear a red suit to a funeral in Vietnam? May be not, if we know what the Chinese and the Vietnamese consider white and red as.

Colours often have different meanings in different cultures. And even in Western societies, the meanings of various colours have changed over time. It is true that we easily get confused if we do not know the exact meaning of a colour in each case or if we do not know what people associate colours with. Hence, in order to help ourselves as well as others the author decides to conduct research on denotations and connotations of colours in English and Vietnamese.
II. Aims of the study:

The aims of this study are:

- To focus on denotations and connotations of colours across cultures
- To contrast denotations and connotations of colours in English and Vietnamese
- To raise learners’ awareness of cross-cultural differences in the denotative and connotative meanings of some basic colours in Vietnamese and English.

III. Scope of the study:

For over fifty years, the domain of colour categorization has been used as a testing ground to investigate the degree to which culture (through language) might influence thought. While it has been known for many years that different cultures use different sets of linguistic categories to describe the visible range of colours, many researchers retain the view, first put forward by Berlin and Kay (1969) that there is a particular set of basic colour categories, shared between all humans, named in English by basic colour terms and deriving from the structure of the visual system. These basic categories (named in English as: red, green, blue, yellow, black, white, grey, pink, orange, purple and brown) are considered distinct from other terms (for example, turquoise or maroon) because they are known to all members of a community, not subsumed within another category and generally named with mono-lexemic words (Kay, Berlin & Merrifield 1991). Therefore, this study will concentrate on the denotations and connotations of the 11 basic colours as mentioned above in English and in Vietnamese from a cross-cultural perspective. Due to the limitation of time and knowledge, however, a deep contrastive analysis between the two languages on the matter may not be attained.
IV. Methods of the study:

The statistical and constrastive methods can be considered the basis for the analysis of the study. Colour terms in English and Vietnamese are described and sorted carefully before their meanings are investigated and analyzed.

Consultation from the supervisor and other lecturers is the important input for the paper.

Besides, Internet is an invaluable source to provide deeper, wider, and updated information for the thesis as well. Reference books from the library is another critical source that results in a comprehensive look of the study.

V. Design of the study:

This minor thesis includes three main parts.

Part 1 is the introduction to the paper, stating reasons and research requirements. It also outlines the delimitation and the organization of the study.

Part 2 consists of the two chapters. Chapter I serves as the theoretical background for investigation. It tries to answer the following questions:

- What is culture?
- What is a denotation and a connotation?
- How do denotations and connotations of colours vary across cultures.

Chapter II describes meanings of colours in English and Vietnamese. It covers meanings, culture of colours, collocations and synonyms of 11 basic colour terms.

And lastly, Part 3 is the conclusion, which summarises the study and states some suggestions for avoidance of culture shock and for further research.
Part 2: Development

Chapter I. Review of Literature

I. 1. What culture?

It is stated that “culture refers to the way of life of a group (including, possibly, a society), including the meanings, the transmission, communication and alteration of those meanings, and the circuits of power by which the meanings are valorised or derogated “ (Kendall and Wickham, 2001: 14). While our day-to-day actions and interactions help to contribute and reproduce cultural norms and assumptions, they are also largely constrained and shaped by cultural context in which they occur. Thus, culture is a very powerful influence in shaping our thinking and behaviour.

As its simplest, culture can be defined by Guirdham as shared ways of seeing, thinking and doing or “a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms” (Guirdham, 1999:61). There is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group’s identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that discourse community. From this membership, they see the importance of using the same language style as the group they belong to. As a result, words and phrases also help to identify a culture because when students use dictionaries to find key word fields, at the same time they learn where the words have come from and how they are used in another culture.

Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge, and values are parts of culture. Some anthropologists would define culture entirely as mental rules guiding behaviour, although often wide divergence exists between the acknowledged rules for correct behaviour and what people actually do. Consequently, some researchers pay most attention to
human behaviour and its material products. Culture also has several properties: it is shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generationally, adaptive, and integrated.

"A culture is a configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society" (Linton, 1954: 32).

The shared aspect of culture means that it is a social phenomenon; idiosyncratic behaviour is not cultural. Culture is learned, not biologically inherited, and involves arbitrarily assigned, symbolic meanings. For example, Americans are not born knowing that the colour white means purity, and indeed this is not a universal cultural symbol. The human ability to assign arbitrary meaning to any object, behaviour or condition makes people enormously creative and readily distinguishes culture from animal behaviour. People can teach animals to respond to cultural symbols, but animals do not create their own symbols. Furthermore, animals have the capability of limited tool manufacture and use, but human tool use is extensive enough to rank as qualitatively different and human tools often carry heavy symbolic meanings. The symbolic element of human language, especially speech, is again a vast qualitative expansion over animal communication systems. Speech is infinitely more productive and allows people to communicate about things that are remote in time and space.

Learning about culture is absolutely enriching. The more one knows others, the more he / she sees his / her own culture more clearly. “By learning about contrasts, we can better understand how culture influences individuals and their communication with others”. (Quang, 1998: 5)

I. 2. What denotations and connotations?

The relationship between words and meanings is extremely complicated, and belongs to the field of semantics. Words do not have single, simple meanings. Traditionally, grammarians have referred to the meanings of words in two parts:
**denotation**
a literal meaning of the word

**connotation**
an association (emotional or otherwise) which the word evokes

For example, both "woman" and "chick" have the denotation "adult female" in North American society, but "chick" has somewhat negative connotations, while "woman" is neutral.

For another example of connotations, consider the following:

**negative**
There are over 2,000 **vagrants** in the city.

**neutral**
There are over 2,000 **people with no fixed address** in the city.

**positive**
There are over 2,000 **homeless** in the city.

All three of these expressions refer to exactly the same people, but they will invoke different associations in the reader's mind: a "vagrant" is a public nuisance while a "homeless" person is a worthy object of pity and charity. Presumably, someone writing an editorial in support of a new shelter would use the positive form, while someone writing an editorial in support of anti-loitering laws would use the negative form.

In this case, the dry legal expression "with no fixed address" quite deliberately avoids most of the positive or negative associations of the other two terms. A legal specialist will try to avoid connotative language altogether when writing legislation, often resorting to archaic Latin or French terms which are not a part of ordinary spoken English, and thus, relatively free of strong emotional associations.

Many of the most obvious changes in the English language over the past few decades have had to do with the connotations of words which refer to groups of people. Since the 1950's, words like "Negro" and "crippled" have acquired strong negative connotations, and have been
replaced either by words with neutral connotations (ie "black," "handicapped") or by words with deliberately positive connotations (ie "African-Canadian," "differently-abled").

Beyond its 'literal' meaning (its denotation), a particular word may have connotations: for instance, sexual connotations. In semiotics, denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signifieds: a denotative signified and a connotative signified. Meaning includes both denotation and connotation.

'Denotation' tends to be described as the definitional, 'literal', 'obvious' or 'commonsense' meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what the dictionary attempts to provide. For the art historian Erwin Panofsky, the denotation of a representational visual image is what all viewers from any culture and at any time would recognize the image as depicting (Panofsky, 1970: 51). Even such a definition raises issues - all viewers? One suspects that this excludes very young children and those regarded as insane, for instance. But if it really means 'culturally well-adjusted' then it is already culture-specific, which takes us into the territory of connotation. The term 'connotation' is used to refer to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional etc.) of the sign. These are typically related to the interpreter's class, age, gender, ethnicity and so on. Signs are more 'polysemic' - more open to interpretation - in their connotations than their denotations. Denotation is sometimes regarded as a digital code and connotation as an analogue code (Wilden, 1987:224).

As Roland Barthes noted, Saussure's model of the sign focused on denotation at the expense of connotation and it was left to subsequent theorists (notably Barthes himself) to offer an account of this important dimension of meaning (Barthes, 1967: 89). In 'The Photographic Message' (1961) and 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), Barthes argued that in photography connotation can be (analytically) distinguished from denotation (Barthes,1977: 15-31). As Fiske puts it 'denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed' (Fisk, 1982: 91). However, in photography, denotation is foregrounded at the expense of
connotation. The photographic signifier seems to be virtually identical with its signified, and the photograph appears to be a 'natural sign' produced without the intervention of a code (Hall, 1980: 132). Barthes initially argued that only at a level higher than the 'literal' level of denotation, could a code be identified - that of connotation (we will return to this issue when we discuss codes). By 1973 Barthes had shifted his ground on this issue. In analysing the realist literary text Barthes came to the conclusion that 'denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature' (Barthes, 1974: 9).

Connotation, in short, produces the illusion of denotation, the illusion of language as transparent and of the signifier and the signified as being identical. Thus denotation is just another connotation. From such a perspective denotation can be seen as no more of a 'natural' meaning than is connotation but rather as a process of naturalization. Such a process leads to the powerful illusion that denotation is a purely literal and universal meaning which is not at all ideological, and indeed that those connotations which seem most obvious to individual interpreters are just as 'natural'. According to an Althusserian reading, when we first learn denotations, we are also being positioned within ideology by learning dominant connotations at the same time (Silverman, 1983: 30).

Consequently, whilst theorists may find it analytically useful to distinguish connotation from denotation, in practice such meanings cannot be neatly separated. Most semioticians argue that no sign is purely denotative - lacking connotation. Valentin Voloshinov insisted that no strict division can be made between denotation and connotation because 'referential meaning is moulded by evaluation... meaning is always permeated with value judgement' (Voloshinov, 1973: 105). There can be no neutral, objective description which is free of an evaluative element. David Mick and Laura Politi note that choosing not to differentiate denotation and connotation is allied to regarding comprehension and interpretation as similarly inseparable (Mick & Politi, 1989: 85).
For most semioticians both denotation and connotation involve the use of codes. Structural semioticians who emphasise the relative arbitrariness of signifiers and social semioticians who emphasize diversity of interpretation and the importance of cultural and historical contexts are hardly likely to accept the notion of a 'literal' meaning. Denotation simply involves a broader consensus. The denotational meaning of a sign would be broadly agreed upon by members of the same culture, whereas 'nobody is ever taken to task because their connotations are incorrect', so no inventory of the connotational meanings generated by any sign could ever be complete (Barnard, 1996: 83). However, there is a danger here of stressing the 'individual subjectivity' of connotation: 'intersubjective' responses are shared to some degree by members of a culture; with any individual example only a limited range of connotations would make any sense. Connotations are not purely 'personal' meanings - they are determined by the codes to which the interpreter has access. Cultural codes provide a connotational framework since they are 'organized around key oppositions and equations', each term being 'aligned with a cluster of symbolic attributes' (Silverman, 1983: 36). Certain connotations would be widely recognized within a culture. Most adults in Western cultures would know that a car can connote virility or freedom.

I. 3. Denotations and connotations of colours across cultures

When Berlin and Kay introduced basic colour terms in their 1969 book “Basic colour terms: their universality and evolution”, a new way of thinking about colours and colour terms had begun. The predominant view of linguistic relativity gave way to cross-cultural colour universals that could be identified for all languages. The Berlin and Kay 1969 study was widely accepted and it became a landmark which later studies built on.

The notions presented in this 1969 study have naturally been augmented and given new clarification, but the basic thesis has been widely accepted until just recently, when some scholars have begun to question the validity of universal colour categories and basic colour terms. The opponents of universal colour categories contest this theory by claiming that colour terms are socio-lingual objects rather than absolutes defined by our physiology. This
sharp contrast raises a question - which theory is correct? Can the theory of colour universals withstand the critique of new cultural relativists?

In this part, the thesis author will present the Berlin and Kay theory (1969) and developments to this theory by Kay and McDaniel (1978). She will also look at an opposing view (Saunders 2000) and discuss the issues raised by this critique.

In 1969 Brent Berlin and Paul Kay devised their seminal theory of colour universals that proved the existence of semantic universals in colour vocabulary. Even more importantly, this theory also mapped out the evolutionary development of colour terms for all languages (1969:7). Berlin and Kay collected experimental data from 20 languages using native speakers of these languages. They extracted the basic colour terms of a language and then mapped these terms to a chart of fully saturated colour chips (1969: 5).

Berlin and Kay performed two conceptual maneuvers that allowed them to overcome the problems caused by large variation in the number of colour terms used in different languages and the seeming irregularity of colour space which a colour term represented (1969). Berlin and Kay used very strict criteria to define a basic colour term (1969: 9). They also focused their research on the foci of colours where consensus on a colour term was the highest (1969: 10).

By limiting the field of study with these maneuvers, Berlin and Kay were able to discover a very limited and universal set of colour terms in all languages that they studied. They found out that all languages drew their colour terms from a set of only eleven colour categories, and that the foci of these colour terms were same for all languages (1969: 2). They also found that all languages acquired their basic colour terms in a fixed sequence of seven evolutionary stages (1969: 14). If a language encoded a colour, all colours from the previous stages had to be encoded (1969: 14).

Kay and McDaniel (1978) further developed the original 1969 theory by incorporating the study of perceptual physiology to explain the universality of basic colour categories. Fuzzy
set theory and the formalism of fuzzy logic were used to explain the way in which languages acquired their basic colour terms.

As a result of these developments, Kay and McDaniel (1978: 639) mapped out an improved model of colour term acquisition where the different stages resulted from fuzzy unions and fuzzy intersections of primary basic colour categories. These primary basic colour categories are derived from a three-cone system in the retina (1978: 618-626).

Barbara Saunders contests the theory of universal colour categories and basic colour terms common to all languages in her paper "Revisiting basic colour terms" (2000). She (2000) proposes that Berlin and Kay only worked against the Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativity in their experimental practice. She claims that the Berlin and Kay study was constructed in a way which made results seem self evident when they were deduced from prior commitments and that research techniques were effaced and data "cleaned" (Saunders 2000). Finally, she declares that the Berlin and Kay thesis is built on layers of mistakes which produce misinterpretations of both colour science and intercultural relations.

Saunders (2000) bases her attack on the Berlin and Kay theory on the fact that they concentrated only on the foci of colours leaving the boundaries untouched. Berlin and Kay stated (1969: 2) that this was necessary in order to gain insight on the common characteristics of colour terms. Saunders (2000) believes that this decision was done because Berlin and Kay needed to contest the Whorfian hypotheses and the only possible way to do this was to oversimplify the field of study. She proposes that this maneuver is the underlying cause for errors made in the experiments and the wrong deduction of Berlin and Kay and others who refined their original thesis.

Saunders (2000) does not believe in the Kay and McDaniel addition of fuzzy set theory, but cites other researchers from the 1970's who used different approaches to colour term study and who managed to create "natural" boundaries in colour space. She (2000) also attacks the tests Berlin and Kay performed using fully saturated Munsell colour chips. She (2000) states
that the chips are culturally biased and that responses to these chips are crude and cannot be used as a basis for thesis or to support theories.

Saunders (2000) is clearly leading an attack against basic colour terms. She is a strong supporter of the relativist view and considers the colour universals as threatening the cultural diversity of our planet. She bases her strong arguments in the methodological decisions that Berlin and Kay made when formulating their theory. She tries to find fault in these decisions, but I am not convinced.

Although Saunders (2000) boasts an impressive list of references, she fails to provide justification for the key claims she is making. When Saunders (2000) contests the decision to concentrate on the foci of colour terms, the only researchers she finds to back her claims are from the same era as the original Berlin and Kay theory. She dismisses the additions made by Kay and McDaniel (1978), which provide a more recent and logically sound solution in the form of fuzzy boundaries. Although her other claim of colour chip experiments being crude has merit. The thesis author do not believe that this crudeness is prohibitive for making observations. Furthermore, Saunders does not back her other claim of the Munsell colour chips as being culturally biased in any way.

The Berlin and Kay theory has endured for more than 30 years in the scientific community. It has been adopted in linguistics and in colour category research, even Saunders (2000) acknowledges this. I do not believe that the theory of colour universals has endured only because of the fraternal spirit of mutual embrace in the scientific community as Saunders (2000) bitterly claims. The theory of basic colour terms is on solid ground and latest research has not refuted its stance, rather refined the original idea and gained new insight on the mechanisms underlying our colour perception. Saunders seems a cultural relativist who wishes to keep universality at an arm's length. She does not, however, make a compelling case in refuting the universality of colour categories. The basic colour terms have stood their test.
Wierzbicka (1996) points out that neither is colour a universal human concept, nor are colour terms a universal phenomenon. In English and in many other languages, colour can be regarded as a reasonably self-contained semantic domain. Nonetheless, it seems to be a universal feature of language that colour can be perceived through visually salient features of referents in the environment such as: the night, the sky, the sea, the sun, minerals, animals or plants, etc.

Wierzbicka (1996) emphasizes that there exist strong associations between *black* and *dark*, and *white* and *light*. However, it does not imply that people think of the day as something white and of the night as something black, for they might think of snow or milk as something white and of charcoal as something black. This can be seen in expressions such as *coal-black eyes*, *snow-white*, *snowy-white*, *white Christmas*, etc.

Regarding *green*, Wierzbicka (1996) shows when asked to give examples of green, native speakers of English usually refer to grass, leaves or fresh vegetation (most commonly grass). Yet, according to her, it does not mean that green is restricted to the colour of grass or vegetation, but to the colour of things growing out of the ground. As green is believed to be etymologically related to “grow”.

There is a strong association between *blue* and the concept of the sky. When asked to give some examples of something blue, informants invariably mention the sky. In addition, Wierzbicka (1996) adds an additional reference point that would be assigned to blue is big water places, such as the sea or lakes (especially seen from afar).

As for *red*, Wierzbicka (1996) reminds that red may be conceptualized via the concept of blood, i.e. red is a colour thought of as the colour of blood; and red is a warm colour as it associated with fire. This association is supported by the existence of set expressions such as: *red-hot, red coals, or fiery red*.

Similarly, *yellow* is thought of as a warm colour, for people associate yellow with the sun. And perhaps only one natural point of reference of the sun which relates to yellow is the fact
that in children’s drawings and paintings, the sun is painted yellow. And perhaps in reality the colour of the sun is not as yellow as that in children’s paintings. Therefore, in most dictionaries, yellow is defined differently (see below).

In a word, a part from the fact every colour term can be identified in terms of physical properties of light such as wavelength or relative energy, we focus on things in our environment such as: the sea, fire, plant, etc. through which be recognized. As a result, the main meanings of Black, White, Blue, Green, Red, Yellow can be recognized as follows:

- **Black**: of the colour of coal or pitch
- **White**: having the colour of pure snow or milk
- **Blue**: having the colour of the clear sky or the deep sea
- **Green**: of the colour that is characteristic of growing grass
- **Red**: of the colour of blood or fire
- **Yellow**: of the colour of ripe lemons, egg yolks or gold

From the dissimilarities in the way different countries cut up the “continuum of colour”, let us consider whether there are any differences in their recognition of the significance of colours.

Damen (1987) made statistics on colour associations that a group of foreign students studying English in the United States reported as generally shared in their countries or cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Latin American</th>
<th>Saudi Arabian</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colour</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
<td>formality, grief, sadness</td>
<td>funerals</td>
<td>sadness, war,</td>
<td>mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sadness</td>
<td></td>
<td>loneliness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td>happiness (combined with)</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>purity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>red, sadness, happiness, beginning, growth, feeling blue, happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>purity, goodluck, wealth, blood, royal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>excitement, some terror, life, New Year's Eve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>foolishness, unripe, pitiful, envy, ---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of response (---) indicates that the students surveyed did not respond. It does not mean that yellow has no significance in China.

According to Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (1992), in English speaking countries, black is traditionally thought of as suggesting sadness, evil, death and mourning. People often wear black clothes to show their grief at funerals and the hearse is black too. Members of the armed forces usually wear black on the occasion of a royal death. However, it is now very rare for people to wear balck for long periods as a sign of mourning. The black raven is also associated with death. The Devil is often shown in pictures dressed in black.

Opposite to black is white. White is usually thought of as the colour of purity and virginity. Therefore, babies are usually dressed in white at christening and brides usually white dressed at weddings that take place in church.

Blue is often thought of as a male colour. Boy babies are sometimes given blue clothes (and girl babies, pink).

Green signals are used to indicate that there is no danger, or that a person or vehicle may proceed.
Yellow is associated with cowardice. Hence, *yellow belly* means a contemptible coward.

Lastly, Wierzbicka notes that fire-engines, fire extinguishers and other instruments used by firemen are often painted red. Thus it is assumed that this colour is used as a symbol of danger or warning; e.g. the red light of the traffic light systems.

Cultures see colours differently. In India, blue is associated with Krishna (a very positive association), green with Islam, red with purity (used as a wedding colour) and white with mourning. In most Asian cultures, yellow is the imperial colour with many of the same cultural associations as purple in the west. In China, red is symbolic of celebration, luck and prosperity; white is symbolic of mourning and death, while "having a green hat" metaphorically means a man’s wife is cheating on him. In Europe colours are more strongly associated with political parties than they are in the U.S. In many countries black is synonymous with conservatism, red with socialism, while brown is still immediately associated with the Nazis. Many believe that blue is universally the best colour as it has the most positive and fewest negative cultural associations across various cultures. The symbolism of colour can also be seen in localised religious divisions, in the UK for example, cities such as Liverpool (England), Glasgow (Scotland) and Belfast (Northern Ireland) where Catholic and Protestant have a history of conflict, the use green (Catholicism) or Orange (Protestantism) are seen as almost taboo by opposing socioreligious groups.

In sum, different countries show different notion of colours. And each colour has its own meanings. Culture and language are as two sides of a coin. They coexist and symbolize characteristics of a country. This can be represented through the usage of words denoting colour in language.

It can be said that colours may be recognized through some objective features: the green of living plants, the red of blood, the blue of the sky, etc. However, there is not always a close relation between the physical features and the colour system in a language. In English, words denoting colour are not always used in ways that correspond to their scientific definition.
Dried peas, for instance, are green in colour, but they would be referred to as green peas because green is often used of unripe fruit. Therefore, we can say these blackberries are green while they are in red colour. Similarly, white is brown when relating to coffee, yellow when referring to wine and pink as applied to people. This mat seem old, but this is reality of language. This brings us no less interest but sometimes trouble. Besides, we should not ignore the influence of cultural and psychological aspects upon the linguistic system, especially upon words denoting colour. These aspects together with the long history of using language have affected word meaning. And we believe that the semantic structures of words denoting colour will be enriched more and more. This contributes to the development of our abundant resource of language.
Chapter II. Denotations and connotations of colours in Vietnamese and English

Colour has symbolic meanings that are reinforced through social rules. For example, the colour red means stop while the green and yellow mean go and caution respectively. Some lesser uniform symbolism of colour derives from culture and religion. For example, in most Western cultures the colour black is used to denote evil or contamination. Eastern cultures however embrace the colour black as being lucky or prosperous. Likewise, brides in Western cultures wear the colour white as a symbol of purity. In Chinese culture the colour red has a deep and powerful meaning and is used throughout wedding celebrations. Red in that culture is the symbol of happiness and ultimate joy, thus all Chinese weddings include the colour red. English find many meaningful definition for colours used in wedding but Vietnamese don’t. English consider that:

*Married in white, you have it right*
*Married in blue, your love is true*
*Married in pink, your fortune will sink*
*Married in green, you’ll never be seen*
*Married in red, you’ll wish you were dead*
*Married in yellow, ashamed of your fellow*
*Married in brown, you’ll live out of town*
*Married in gray, you’ll live far away*
*Married in black, you’ll wish you were back.*

Therefore, in this part, the author will try to differentiate colour meanings of English from those of Vietnamese. 11 basic colour terms (*black, white, blue, green, red, yellow, pink, orange, purple, gray*) will be taken into consideration. They will be described in terms of meanings, culture, collocations and synonyms. The analysis is made based on the consultation of the following dictionaries: *Đại từ điển Tiếng Việt* (1999), *Từ điển Việt-Anh* (2001), *Từ điển Anh-Anh-Việt* (1999) and other related resources.
II. 1. Black (den):

**Ultimate Dark**: Considered the negation of colour, black is conservative, goes well with almost any colour except the very dark. It also has conflicting connotations. It can be serious and conventional. The colour black can also be mysterious, sexy, and sophisticated.

**Culture of Black**: In most Western countries black is the colour of mourning. Among young people, black is often seen as a colour of rebellion. Black is both positive and negative. It is the colour for little boys in China. Black, especially combined with orange is the colour of Halloween. In early Westerns the good guy wore white while the bad guy wore black. But later on good guys wore black to lend an air of mystery to themselves.

Black means a few different things, and almost all of them have negative connotations. That is because humankind instinctively fear the darkness, and anything that lurks in the night.

Black also represents another great fear—being underground, again with no light to see by. Because of these two associations, death, depression, and fear all are part of the colour black.

In a different way, black also represents space, specifically outer space and infinite space. There is also a mystery to things that can not be defined, or seen, and the colour black often accentuates anything with those mysterious or indefinable qualities.

Black is sometimes worn as a symbol of authority, like with court judges and their long black robes. Referees of many sports wear black as well, or a combination of black and white or black and yellow.

In addition, having a black belt in almost any martial art shows expertise at a high level, if not the very highest level possible.

More often than not, however, black is used to reference things that are bad. “The black market” is one such term which describes stolen goods sold at reduced prices.
Blackmail also uses the word “black” just for its negative qualities, and there are many more occurrences as well. The bubonic plague, for instance—responsible for millions of deaths during the middle ages in Europe—was known as the Black Death or Black Plague.

Good black

(Legends: the symbol “●” = only in English; the symbol “□” = both in English and Vietnamese)

- Black tie - formal (as in formal party attire)
- Blackwash - bring things out in the open
- In the black - having money, doing well in business
- Men in black - government agents
- Black box - equipment or apparatus: hộp đen
- Pitch black - dark as night, very black: đen ngòm
- In black and white - in writing or in print: giấy trắng mực đen
- Black belt - expert (especially in martial arts): đai đen

Black in Vietnamese also has other positive meanings such as in đen giòn (attractively tawny), đen nhánh (shining black), đen tuyền (the nice-looking colour of Vietnamese traditional blackened teeth - For centuries, Northern Vietnamese girls had their teeth blackened at puberty. White teeth were thought to be vulgar, and blackening was believed to prevent tooth decay. The practice stopped when Vietnam was colonized by the French, who found black teeth unattractive.)…

Bad black

- Black out - Loss of consciousness or the act of erasing something
- Blackout - loss of electricity or turning out the lights
- Black eye - damage such as damage to one's reputation, slander, unpopular
- Black-hearted - evil
• Blackguard - a scoundrel
• Black sheep - an outcast from a family or from society
• Black market - illegal trade (goods or money)
• Blackmail - obtaining something by threat
  □ Blacklist - list of people or organizations to boycott, avoid, or punish: danh sách đen
  □ To make white black - be shifty: đổi trắng thay đen

In Vietnamese, black colour often refers to something negative, for example, do đen (chance, luck), văn đen (bad luck), đen düi (unlucky), âm muội đen tối (a dark plot), đen bạc (ungrateful), phim đen (sex film), xóm nước đen (slum)

**Black Words**: These words are synonymous with black or represent various shades of the colour black.

Ebony, jet, ink, lampblack, coal, soot, charcoal, raven, midnight, obsidian, onyx, sable.

However, Vietnamese seems more complicated than English when it comes to describing the colour 'black'. The English word "black" can be translated in different Vietnamese words depending on the meaning such as: đen (màu đen, black colour), bạc (đầu bạc, black oil), huyền (tóc huyền, black hair), thâm (môi thâm, black lips), mun (đũa mun, black chopsticks), ô (ngựa ô, black horse; gà ô or gà ác, black chicken), mục (chó mục, black dog), etc.

**II. 2. White (trắng):**

**Ultimate Light**: White is purity, cleanliness, and innocence. Like black, white goes well with almost any colour.

**Culture of White**: In most Western countries white is the colour for brides. In the East in general and in Vietnam in particular, it is the colour for mourning and funerals. White is often associated with hospitals, especially doctors, nurses, and dentists. Some cultures viewed white
as the colour of royalty or of deities. Angels are typically depicted as wearing white. In early Westerns the good guy wore white while the bad guy wore black.

In Western society, it is traditional for a new bride to wear a white wedding dress at the ceremony, often with a matching veil. This tradition is a fairly recent development, however, until the mid-1800s, and even through much of the 20th century, the wedding dress was merely a formal dress that could be reused for any special occasion. The bride could wear any colour except for red or black, which were associated with prostitutes and mourning, respectively.

The first famous woman to wear a white wedding dress was Mary, Queen of Scots — at that time, it was seen as a bad choice, as white was the official colour of mourning for the French. In 1840, however, another royal figure wore white to her wedding — Queen Victoria, at her marriage to Albert of Saxe-Colburg. Queen Victoria's wedding photographs were widely publicized, sparking an interest in the white wedding dress throughout England and beyond.

The white wedding dress was a symbol of wealth. Because the dress could not be washed or reused for other occasion, it was evidence that the bride's family could afford to spend money on an extravagant dress. Through much of the early 20th century, only a rich woman could afford to wear a white wedding dress; most women still wore dresses in various colours. Others wore white dresses which they would dye another colour after the ceremony, so that it could be used for other occasions.

In the 1950s, however, white wedding dress became a mainstream trend throughout Western society. With the advent of television, society was bombarded with images of celebrities like Grace Kelly wearing white dresses to their weddings. The average American woman finally decided that it was time to splurge on an expensive white wedding dress for her own ceremony.

The white wedding dress is typically used as a symbol for virginity. However, the colour white is also associated with innocence and happiness. Over time, as women from all stages
of life are wearing white to their wedding, the white wedding dress has lost the connotations of virginity, and is merely associated with a new bride.

Nowadays, Vietnamese brides often choose white dress instead of traditional red dress ao dai because white is symbol of innocence, purity and the dress makes them the most beautiful on their wedding day. In fact, white long dresses were first designed and worn in Western countries but now become popular in Vietnam. Traditionally, both Vietnamese brides and grooms dressed in red as red is a symbol of happiness (This is similar to Chinese culture).

**Good white**

- White elephant - rare, valuable but perhaps unwanted
- White knight - someone who comes to another person's rescue, someone perceived as being good, noble
- White list - list of good or acceptable items
- White sale - sale of sheets, towels, other linens
- Pearly white - teeth, especially very white teeth
- White lie - harmless or trivial lie, especially one told in order to avoid hurting someone
- White as the driven snow - pure, clean, innocent: **trắng như tuyết, trong trắng**
- White and black - right and wrong : **trắng đen**
- White House - the official residence (in Washington DC) of the President of the USA; the US President and his advisers: **Nhà Trắng**

Also, in Vietnamese, colour white has good meanings in the following cases: **trắng ăn** (beacquitted), **trắng răng đến thuở bác đầu** (from youth to old age), **trắng tréo** (fair), **trắng nợ** (to be clear of debts), **nói trắng ra** (to speak frankly)…

**Bad white**

- Whitewash - cover up, conceal
• Whiteout - zero visibility
• White lightning - moonshine, illegal whiskey
• White elephant - rare, valuable but perhaps unwanted
• White knuckle - something that is fast, exciting, or frightening
  □ White flag – surrender : vây cờ trắng

Bad white in Vietnamese seems not to coincide much with that in English. Here are some examples: trắng dã (with much white in it), trắng mắt (to realize one’s mistakes after bitter failure), trắng tay (cleaned out, cleared out), trắng chiếu (to lose all through a gambling session), trắng trộn (shameless), trắng trot (pale and unappetizing)…

White Words: These words are synonymous with white or represent various shades of the colour white.

Snow, pearl, antique white, ivory, chalk, milk white, lily, smoke, seashell, old lace, cream, linen, ghost white, beige, cornsilk, alabaster, paper, whitewash.

In Vietnamese, trắng is synonymous withbach, bạc.

II. 3. Blue (xanh da trời):

Calm and Cool: Blue is calming. It can be strong and steadfast or light and friendly. Almost everyone likes some shade of the colour blue.

Culture of Blue: In many diverse cultures blue is significant in religious beliefs, brings peace, or is believed to keep the bad spirits away.

Blue conveys importance and confidence without being somber or sinister, hence the blue power suit of the corporate world and the blue uniforms of police officers. Long considered a corporate colour, blue, especially darker blue, is associated with intelligence, stability, unity, and conservatism.
Just as *seeing red* alludes to the strong emotions invoked by the colour red, *feeling blue* or getting *the blues* represents the extremes of the calm feelings associated with blue, i.e. sadness or depression, lack of strong (violent) emotion. Dark blue is sometimes seen as staid or stodgy — old-fashioned.

In Iran, blue is the colour of mourning while in the West the *something blue* bridal tradition represents love.

**Good blue**

- True blue - someone loyal and faithful
- Out of the blue - unexpected (could be positive or negative)
- Blue ribbon - first rate, top prize
- Blueblood - person of noble birth, royalty

The term **blue blood** came to be associated with the aristocracy simply because it was not uncommon in earlier times for European nobility to have skin that appeared to have a blue cast. The bluish (or sometimes greenish) discolouration of their skin was often caused by a condition known as Argyria.

Argyria it the result of ingested silver particles that are not able to pass through the body being deposited under the skin. Historically this was caused by particles from silver eating utensils being swallowed along with food or silver being taken for medicinal purposes. Since aristocrats were the ones who could afford medicine and who enjoyed the daily privilege of eating off of silver plates, drinking from silver vessels and as the saying goes being born with "a silver spoon in their mouth" it was a condition that was more common among the upper class.

During this same period in history having pale skin "untouched by the sun" was a mark of status among the wealthy who did not have to labor outdoors. Argyria would have certainly been more noticeable among individuals with untanned skin however it is also thought that
the term may have come about simply because veins were more noticeable among those with pale complexions even if they were not plagued by this condition.

Argryia is not often seen today however it did become newsworthy in 2002 when Stan Jones of Montana ran for the U.S. Senate. Mr. Jones who out of fears that the Y2K bug would render the world helpless and without antibiotics begin a heavy regimen of colloidal silver which permanently turned his skin blue.

- Bluestocking - well-read or scholarly woman
- Bluebook - register of socially prominent people
- The Blues (capitalized) - popular style of music sometimes characterized by melancholy melodies and words
- Baby blues - Blue eyes (also see Bad blue words)

**Bad blue**

- Feeling blue - feeling sad or depressed
- Blue devils - feelings of depression
- The blues (not capitalized) - depression, state of sadness
- Blue Monday - feeling sad
- Baby blues - post-partum depression
- Singing the blues - bemoaning one's circumstances
- Blue laws - laws originally intended to enforce certain moral standards
- Blue language - profanity
- Bluenose - puritanical individual
- Into the blue - entering the unknown or escape to parts unknown
- Out of the blue - unexpected (could be positive or negative)

**Blue Words**: These words are synonymous with blue or represent various shades of the colour blue.
Sapphire, azure, beryl, cerulean, cobalt, indigo, navy, royal, sky blue, baby blue, robin's egg blue, cyan, cornflower blue, midnight blue, slate, steel blue, Prussian blue.

Unlike English, Vietnamese uses the same word “xanh” for both blue (xanh da trời) and green (xanh lá cây). Hence, the colour in Vietnamese will be mentioned following the next part on green.

II. 4. Green (xanh lá cây):

Life and Renewal: Green is life. Abundant in nature, green signifies growth, renewal, health, and environment. On the flip side, green is jealousy or envy (green-eyed monster) and inexperience.

Green is a restful colour with some of the same calming attributes of blue.

Culture of Green: Green is the national colour of Ireland and is strongly associated with that country. Green also has close associations with Islam. Because of all the green in nature the colour is reminiscent of Spring. Coupled with red it's a Christmas colour.

Good green

- Green light - go, permission to proceed (with a task)
- The green room - in theater or televisions it is the room where performers and guests go to relax
- Green thumb - good with plants
- Greenback - US dollar bill, money
- Greener pastures - something newer or better (or perceived to be better), such as a new job

Bad green

- Green-eyed monster - jealousy
Green with envy - jealous or envious
- Green - inexperienced, untested, untrained
- Greenhorn - novice, trainee, beginner
- Green around the gills - pale, sickly

Green Words: These words are synonymous with green or represent various shades of the colour green.

Emerald, sea green, seafoam, olive, olive drab, pea green, grass green, apple, mint, forest, lawn green, lime, spring green, leaf green, aquamarine, beryl, chartreuse, fir, kelly green, pine, moss, jade, sage, sap, viridian.

The English language makes a distinction between blue and green but some languages (including Vietnamese) do not.

According to Brent Berlin and Paul Kay’s 1969 study “Basic Colour Terms”: Their Universality and Evolution, distinct terms for brown, purple, pink, orange and grey will not emerge in a language until the language has made a distinction between green and blue. In their account of the development of colour terms the first terms to emerge are those for white/black (or light/dark), red and green/yellow.

Many languages do not have separate terms for blue and or green, instead using a cover term for both (when the issue is discussed in linguistics, this cover term is sometimes called grue in English). For example, in Vietnamese both tree leaves and the sky are xanh (to distinguish, one may use xanh lá cây "leaf grue" for green and xanh dương "ocean grue" for blue). Chinese has a word qīng that can refer to both, though it also has separate words for blue (lán) and green (lǜ). The Korean word (puruda) can mean either green or blue. In Japanese the word for blue (ao) is often used for colours that English speakers would refer to as green, such as the colour of a traffic signal meaning "go". Some Nguni languages of southern Africa, including Tswana utilize the same word for blue and green. In traditional Welsh (and related Celtic languages), glas could refer to blue but also to certain shades of green and grey;
however, modern Welsh is tending toward the 11-colour Western scheme, restricting glas to blue and using gwyrd for green and llwyd for grey. Similarly, in Gaelic, glas can mean various shades of green and grey (like the sea), while liath is grey proper (like a horse), and the term for blue proper is gorm (like the sky or Cairngorm mountains). In Old Norse the word blá was also used to describe black (and the common word for negroes was thus blámenn 'blue/black men'). In Swedish, blå, the modern word for blue, was used this way until the early 20th century. In many languages of India, blue is "buku" or "blu".

Vietnamese usually does not use separate words for green and refers to that colour using a word that can also refer to blue. In Vietnamese, blue and green are denoted by xanh; blue is specifically described as "xanh like the sky" (xanh da trôi) and green as "xanh like the leaves" (xanh lá cây).

Xanh in Vietnamese can have both bad and good meanings. For good xanh, it has: tuổi xanh (tender age), dâu/tóc xanh (youth), bát đèn xanh (to give the green light to), ông xanh (heaven, the Creator). For bad xanh, it has: sợ xanh mắt (to be pale with fright), xanh cô (dead and gone), xanh vô độc lòng (warm heart, cold hands).

The synonyms of xanh are luc, lam, thanh.

II. 5. Red (dō):

Love and War: Red is hot. It is a strong colour that conjures up a range of seemingly conflicting emotions from passionate love to violence and warfare. Red is Cupid and the Devil.

The expression seeing red indicates anger and may stem not only from the stimulus of the colour but from the natural flush (redness) of the cheeks, a physical reaction to anger, increased blood pressure, or physical exertion.
**Culture of Red**: Red is power, hence the red power tie for business people and the red carpet for celebrities and VIPs (very important people).

Flashing red lights denote danger or emergency. Stop signs and stop lights are red to get the drivers' attention and alert them to the dangers of the intersection.

In some cultures, red denotes purity, joy, and celebration. Red is the colour of happiness and prosperity in China and in Vietnam and may be used to attract good luck.

Red is often the colour worn by brides in the East while it is the colour of mourning in South Africa. In Russia the Bolsheviks used a red flag when they overthrew the Tsar, thus red became associated with communism. Many national flags use red. The red Ruby is the traditional Fortieth Wedding Anniversary gift.

Like Vietnamese, English makes a distinction between “red” and light red (pink, which is considered a different colour and not merely a kind of red), but such a distinction is unknown in several other languages; for example, both "red" (hồng) and "pink" (fěn hồng, lit. "powder red") have traditionally been considered varieties of a single colour in Chinese.

**Good red**

- Red letter day - important or significant occasion
- Red carpet treatment - make someone feel special, treat them as if they are a celebrity
- Roll out the red carpet - same as above: trải thảm đỏ
- Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning; red sky at night, sailor's delight - pay attention to good and bad warning signs
- Paint the town red - celebrate, go out partying
- Red eye - an overnight flight
- The Red Cross/Crescent - an international organization that works to relieve suffering caused by natural disasters, help victims of war, etc.: Hội Chữ Thập/Trăng Luờ Liềm Đỏ
Good red in Vietnamese includes văn/số đỏ (good luck), đỏ da thẩm thâm (healthy-looking), đỏ đèn (light-up), đỏ lửa (keep the pot boiling), đỏ lòng xanh vỏ (warm heart, cold hands)…

Bad red

- Seeing red - to be angry: đỏ mặt tía tai
  - Red herring - something that deceives or distracts attention from the truth
  - In the red - being overdrawn at the bank or losing money
  - Red flag - denotes danger, warning, or an impending battle

In Vietnamese, bad red can be found in đỏ con mắt (very long), đỏ mặt thiên thượng (to blush with shame), thân nhanh đỏ mó (sly)…

Red Words: These words are synonymous with red or represent various shades of the colour red.

Scarlet, crimson, vermilion, carmine, maroon, burgundy, ruby, rose, madder, rouge, brick, blood red, blush, fire engine red, cinnabar, russet, rust, Venetian red, flame, Indian red, tomato.

In Vietnamese, there is no exact synonym of đỏ but some derivatives like đỏ au (bright and cheerful red), đỏ hay (rosy, ruddy), đỏ hoe (reddish), đỏ hồn (blood-red), đỏ lòm (gaudy red), đỏ quạch (dull red)…

II. 6. Pink (hồng):

Cotton Candy and Little Girls: Pink is a softer, less violent red. Pink is the sweet side of red. It's cotton candy and bubble gum and babies, especially little girls.

Culture of Pink: In some cultures, such as the US, pink is the colour of little girls. It represents sugar and spice and everything nice. Pink for men goes in and out of style. Most
people still think of pink as a feminine, delicate colour. Here are the meanings of red in some cultures:

European: Feminine colour, baby girls
East India: Feminine colour
Japan: Popular with both sexes
Korea: trust
Feng Shui: Yin, love

**Good pink**

- In the pink – healthy:  hồng hào

Today the phrase ‘in the pink’ means ‘in good health’ but this has not always been the case. The phrase came out of the English fox hunting tradition where a rider was not granted the right to don the scarlet coloured jackets called pinks until he demonstrated superior horsemanship and service to the hunt. Being “in the pink” meant the rider had reached the pinnacle of achievement or status in the hunt. The use of the phrase “in the pink” evolved to be used more broadly to mean “the very pinnacle of” something but not necessarily the hunt during the 18th century.

This meaning of the phrase is seen in literature beginning in the mid-1700s and continued throughout the 19th century. It isn’t until the early 20th century that we see the phrase being used with its current associations. It is unclear how it transitioned into a phrase that is now specifically health related but possibly as it came into use among those not familiar with the hunt and the original meaning it was thought that “pink” referred to the rosy glow of the complexion that is indicative of good health.

- Tickled pink - happy, content
- Pink collar - female office worker (sometimes used in a derogatory manner)
Hồng in Vietnamese is usually used to refer to a beautiful girl such as má Hồng, Hồng nhan, bóng Hồng, Hồng Quân... It also relates to lucky things like in Hồng phúc (great blessing), Hồng vận (good fortune)...

Bad or neutral pink

- Pink lady - an alcoholic drink
- Pink collar - female office worker (sometimes used in a derogatory manner to imply low person on the office totem pole)
- Pink - cut, notch, or make a zigzag
- Pink elephants - any visual hallucination arising from heavy drinking or use of narcotics

Pink Words: These words are synonymous with pink or represent various shades of the colour pink.

Salmon, coral, hot pink, fuschia, blush, flesh, flush, fuchsia, rose.

Although, like in English, there is a distinction between pink and red in Vietnamese, Hồng (pink) can sometimes, especially in the past’s usage, replace đỏ (red). This is due to the influence of Chinese over the language in translation. Sông Hồng (Red River), Hồng Quân (Red Army of the Soviet Union), Hồng thập tự (Red Cross) and Hồng ylim Giáo òu (Cardinal) are examples.

II. 7. Yellow (vàng):

Hope and Happiness: Yellow is sunshine. It is a warm colour that, like red, has conflicting symbolism. On the one hand it denotes happiness and joy but on the other hand yellow is the colour of cowardice and deceit.

Culture of Yellow: For years yellow ribbons were worn as a sign of hope as women waited from their men to come marching home from war. Today, they are still used to welcome
home loved ones. Its use for hazard signs creates an association between yellow and danger, although not quite as dangerous as red.

If someone is yellow it means they are a coward so yellow can have a negative meaning in some cultures.

Yellow is for mourning in Egypt and actors of the Middle Ages wore yellow to signify the dead. Yet yellow has also represented courage (Japan), merchants (India), and peace.

Yellow has a different meaning in Europe than in Asia. One stands for outcast and jealousy, the other for divine and royal (and other contradictory meanings). In Vietnam, yellow is a good colour representing wealth and prosperity. It also called royal colour. The "golden yellow" has been the traditional colour of Vietnam for over two thousand years. It is also the colour of earth, as understood in the universal scheme of five elements in Oriental cosmology.

Why is yellow the colour of royalty particularly in Vietnam and generally in Asian countries? It should be taken into consideration that they are all influenced by a very large and powerful country in the continent: China.

One of the possible explanations was that "Yellow" was the colour of "Yellow River" (huanghe), where the Chinese civilization originated. Yellow River was also known as the Mother river of Chinese. [The name of the river originated from the fact that the earth/soil around the river are yellow in colour]. One of the pre-ancestors of the Chinese was also legendary "Yellow Emperor" (Huang Di), which supposedly lived around 3000 BC. Hence, the Chinese used the "Yellow" colour to refer to their first ancestor.

The Chinese has treated "Yellow" as a 'high colour' since the ancient times. In ancient records such as "Huai Nan Zi", "Shanhaijing", "Taipin Yulan", there are legendary records of "Nuwa using Yellow Earth to construct man". These Yellow Earth were supposedly from the region of Yellow River. These "Yellow Earth" were used to construct descendents with "Yellow Skin" (Chinese), who are in turn the descendents of the "Yellow Emperor". This root can be
traced to the cradle of the Chinese civilization "Yellow River". Thousands of years of farming around the region of Yellow Earth (around Yellow River) had constructed a strong relationship of the Chinese with the "yellow colour".

The ancient Chinese regarded "Yellow" as the colour of the earth. The yellow colour also means "unchanging natural beauty" and represents the "beauty of heavenly virtue". Thus, people uses Yellow to represent the 'earth' in the 5 phase elements (wuxing) and "center" in the 5 directions (wufang).

Yellow represents the earth from which all beings will grow and develop, thus it also represents "Imperial Power" and "Chinese empire". Yellow was regarded as something sacred, holy, dignified, and majestic. Thus, Chinese emperor wore Yellow robes, sat on Yellow Dragon Seat, all imperial items and houses were decorated with "Yellow" color. Even, the Chinese lunar calendar was known as the "Yellow Calendar" (huang li).

**Good yellow**

- Yellow ribbon - hope, support, remembrance
- Mellow yellow - laid back, relaxation
- The yellow press - popular and sensationalist newspapers; newspapers that deliberately include sensational news items to attract readers
  - Yellow pages – telephone directory, or section of one, listing companies according to the goods or service they offer: **những trang vàng**

Over 120 years ago, the term Yellow Pages was born. It was in 1883, when a printer who was working on a regular telephone directory ran out of white paper and was forced to resort to yellow paper, that the term Yellow Pages was first used. Three years later, Reuben H. Donnelly, founder of Donnelly, produced the first official Yellow Pages Directory. The directory listed business names and phone numbers, categorized by the types of products and services they provided. Since then, consumers have considered the Yellow Pages an invaluable aid to their daily activities.
In Vietnamese, good yellow is seen in tâm lòng vàng (golden heart), những ngày vàng (a special happy time or period in one’s life), thời kỳ vàng son (golden age), cây kéo vàng (talented hairdresser), đôi tay vàng (unusually skilled workers)…

**Bad yellow**

- Yellow or Yellow streak or Yellow-bellied - cowardice or coward
- Yellow journalism - irresponsible reporting

In Vietnamese, bad yellow can be found in some derivatives like in vàng  cheering (dull yellow), vàng khè (dirty yellow), vàng vọt (sallow) or in some expressions like nhạc vàng (sad music), mặt xanh nanh vàng (very pale)…

**Yellow Words:** These words are synonymous with yellow or represent various shades of the colour yellow.

Lemon, yellow ocher, golden, saffron, cream, topaz, mellow yellow.

In Vietnamese, hoàng, a Chinese-Vietnamese word is synonymous with vàng.

**II. 8. Orange (cam):**

**Flamboyant and Energetic:** Orange is vibrant. It's a combination of red and yellow so it shares some common attributes with those colours. It denotes energy, warmth, and the sun. But orange has a bit less intensity or aggression than red, calmed by the cheerfulness of yellow.

**Culture of Orange:** Orange brings up images of autumn leaves, pumpkins, and (in combination with Black) Halloween. It represents the changing seasons so in that sense it is a colour on the edge, the colour of change between the heat of summer and the cool of winter. Because orange is also a citrus colour, it can conjure up thoughts of vitamin C and good health. Orange may have different meanings in different cultures as follows:
European: Autumn, creativity, harvest
Netherlands: Favourite colour (House of Orange)
Ireland: Protestants
USA: Halloween, cheap goods
Hinduism: Saffron (peachy orange) is a sacred colour
Feng Shui: Yang, Earth, strengthens concentration, purpose, organization
Vietnam: Youthfulness and creativity

Unlike English, Vietnamese do not consider cam (orange) as a basic colour. It seems to be a variety of colour vàng (yellow). Therefore, hardly nothing to say about this colour in the language.

**Orange Words**: These words are synonymous with orange or represent various shades of the colour orange.

Pumpkin, gold, flame, copper, brass, apricot, peach, citrus, tangerine.

No exact synonym for cam has been found in Vietnamese.

**II. 9. Brown (nâu):**

**Down-to-Earth**: Brown is a natural, down-to-earth neutral colour. It is found in earth, wood, and stone.

**Culture of Brown**: Brown represents wholesomeness and earthiness. While it might be considered a little on the dull side, it also represents steadfastness, simplicity, friendliness, dependability, and health. People who prefer brown are often conventional and orderly. The negative meaning of brown can be a repressed personality or a lazy person. Brown is the colour of the earth and is associated with the material side of life. Food packaging in the U.S. is often coloured brown, to great success. In Colombia, brown discourages sales. In Vietnam, brown colour symbolises the simplicity and rusticity. In the past, it was the colour of
traditional costumes of Vietnamese farmers. Also, when talking of brown clothes, Vietnamese people often think of Buddhist monks.

**Good brown**

- Brown bottle - beer
- Brown - cook or burn
- In a brown study - seriously contemplating something

In Vietnamese, **nâu sòng** (monk’s brown clothes) can be considered as a symbol of the simplicity and purity.

**Bad brown**

- Brown-nose - someone who attempts to ingratiate themselves with people of authority
- Brown study - someone who is aloof, indifferent
- Brown out - partial loss of electricity

In Vietnamese, **nàng tiên nâu** (drug) has a negative meaning.

**Brown Words:** These words are synonymous with brown or represent various shades of the colour brown.

Sienna, bay, sand, wood, dapple, auburn, chestnut, nut-brown, cinnamon, russet, tawny, chocolate, tan, brunette, fawn, liver-coloured, mahogany, oak, bronze, terra-cotta, toast, umber, cocoa, coffee, copper, ecru, ginger, hazel, khaki, ochre, puce, snuff-coloured.

In Vietnamese, there is no synonym for **nâu** (brown).
II. 10. Purple (tím):

**Royalty and Spirituality:** Purple is royalty. A mysterious colour, purple is associated with both nobility and spirituality. The opposites of hot red and cool blue combine to create this intriguing colour.

**Culture of Purple:** The colour of mourning for widows in Thailand, purple was the favorite colour of Egypt's Cleopatra. It has been traditionally associated with royalty in many cultures. Purple robes were worn by royalty and people of authority or high rank. The *Purple Heart* is a U.S. Military decoration given to soldiers wounded in battle. Below are some different meanings of purple in different places:

- **Thailand:** Mourning
- **European:** Royalty
- **Catholicism:** Mourning, death, crucifixion
- **Feng Shui:** Yin, spiritual awareness, physical and mental healing
- **Vietnam:** Loyalty, romance and dreaminess

**Good purple**

- Purple cow - something remarkable, eye-catching, unusual
- Purple prose - exaggeration, highly imaginative writing (also has negative connotations)

In Vietnamese, *tuổi mơ tím* (school age) is an example of good purple.

**Bad purple**

- Purple speech - profanity, raunchy language
- Purple prose - exaggeration, colourful lies
- Purple haze - state of confusion or euphoria, possibly drug-induced, type of marijuana
  - Go purple - to be angry: *tím gan*
Purple Words: These words are synonymous with purple or represent various shades of the colour purple.

Violet, plum, lavender, lilac, puce, thistle, orchid, mauve, magenta, royal, amethyst, wine, pomegranate, eggplant, mulberry.

In Vietnamese, tím is also called tía.

II. 11. Gray (xám):

Elegant Neutral: Gray is a neutral, balanced colour. It is a cool, conservative colour that seldom evokes strong emotion although it can be seen as a cloudy or moody colour.

Culture of Gray: Like black, gray is used as a colour of mourning as well as a colour of formality. Along with blue suits, gray suits are part of the uniform of the corporate world. Dark, charcoal gray carries with it some of the strength and mystery of black. It is a sophisticated colour without much of the negative attributes of black. Lighter grays are similar to white. Gray tuxedos are common for men at weddings.

Good gray

- Gray matter - brains, intellect
- Gray power - having to do with the elderly or senior citizens

Bad gray

- Gray - dull, dingy, dirty
- Gray page - in desktop publishing, a text-heavy page with little contrast or white space
- Gray-hair - old person (not necessarily derogatory)
- Gray water - dirty water such as water drained from a bathtub or kitchen sink
- Gray with fear - frightened out of one’s wits: xám mệt
Gray in Vietnamese often has bad connotations than good ones. It refers to something dull, brightless and hopeless, for example, vân áo xám (bad luck), cảnh vật xám ngất (a dismal looking scenery), tương lai xám xít (gloomy future)…

**Gray Words:** These words are synonymous with gray or represent various shades of the colour gray.

Charcoal, slate, iron gray, ashen, lead, mousy, gunmetal, silver, dove gray, powder grey, oyster, pearl, taupe, sere, Payne’s gray.

In Vietnamese, there is no synonym for xám.

**II. 12. Conclusion:**

In short, in English, there are eleven basic colour terms (black, white, red, blue, green, yellow, pink, brown, purple, gray and orange) while Vietnamese language has only nine basic colour terms (đen, trắng, đỏ, vàng, xanh, tím, nâu, hồng, xám). English makes a clear distinction between blue and green while in Vietnamese they are not the two separate colours but generally referred to as xanh. In addition, cam (orange) in Vietnamese is not a primary colour term but just treated as a variety of vàng (yellow).

In terms of denotations, the colour systems of Vietnamese and English are identical (except for the cases of green, blue and orange). However, as what has been presented, these systems are not connotationally identical. This is caused by the culturally determined differences between the two sets of terms. Vietnamese also tend to use derivatives to change connotations of a colour term, making it positive or negative, whereas English do not. A case in point is đỏ (red) with such derivatives as đỏ au (bright and cheerful red), đỏ dân (healthy-looking), đỏ lôm (gaudy red), đỏ hè (dirty red), đỏ quạch (dull red)…
**Part 3: Conclusion**

**I. Summary of the study:**

Colours are more than a combination of red and blue or yellow and black. They are non-verbal communication. Colours have symbolism and colour meanings that go beyond ink. The notion of colour is so intertwined with culture and religion that colour itself takes on profound meaning.

Hence, the study *Denotations and connotations of colours in Vietnamese and English from a cross-cultural perspective*, firstly, briefed theoretical background on what were called “culture”, “denotation” and “connotation”. Then, it managed to cover denotations and connotations of colours across cultures, from the past to the present and from the West to the East. Lastly and most importantly, a preliminarily comparative analysis was carried out on denotations and connotations of colour terms in English and Vietnamese. Thanks to this, Vietnamese learners can better understand English expressions such as: "I was so mad that all I could see was **red**", "I'm having a **blue** day", "She's just **green** with envy", or "He's too **yellow** to ever stand up for himself". In these situations red is used to describe anger, blue sadness, green envy, and yellow cowardliness. Also, English-speaking people will find Vietnamese literature less complicated like in the case of the following famous poem:

*Đâu xanh có tôi tình gì*  
*Má hồng đến quá nha thì chưa thôi.*  
(Nguyễn Du - Truyện Kiều)
II. Suggestions for avoidance of culture shock

In everyday life, colours are used as a means to mean something more than to meet the eyes. Vietnamese women like wearing red or pink “ao dai” in their weddings, because these two colours are signs of luck and happiness; and Vietnamese people wear white clothes to show their grief at funerals. This may cause culture shock to a foreigner since in Western countries’ weddings, brides often wear white dresses in their wedding.

Here are some suggestions for avoidance of culture shock with colour connotations:

1. Avoid quick judgments about meanings of colours; try to understand people in another culture from their own point of view.
2. Become aware of what is going on around you, and why.
3. Do not think of your cultural concepts on meanings of a colour as “right” and other people’s as “wrong”.
4. Be willing to try new things and to have new experiences.
5. Try to appreciate and understand other people’s values.
6. Think about your own culture on colours and how it influences your attitudes and actions.
7. Avoid having negative stereotypes about foreigners and their cultures.
8. Show interest in as well as respect, sincerity, acceptance, and concern for things that are important to other people.
9. Just remember the old adage: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Colour has long influenced our lives on several levels. For some this means expression of feelings and emotions, for others it has a direct influence on how we feel. While the relationship of colour and mood is open for debate, colour does have importance in most societies with symbolic meanings reinforced through social rules. We rely on colours to take the place of words and give us simplified cues as to what is expected behaviour. Violation of those social rules, such as driving through a red light, will have consequences. While there is no argument that our responses to colour are learned, some contend that the origins of colour
are deeper and that there is a neurological effect of colour that has not yet been discovered. Whatever the reason, colour is an intricate part of our world and has and will continue to influence human behaviours and actions the world over.

The paper has tried to describe denotations and connotations of colours in English and Vietnamese. Due to time constraint, the study could not cover all aspects of the matter. Thus, it could be regarded as a preliminary. Accordingly, it is thought that further studies in this area are necessary.

In addition, the author is fully aware of limited knowledge in this field, so mistakes are unavoidable. All remarks, comments, suggestions and contribution, therefore, are most welcome and highly appreciated.


