

## Colour Terms in Five Linguistic Images of the World: The Semantic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Social and cultural factors shape the linguistic perception of colour. At the same time, colour terms co-create the linguistic image of the world, which allows us to interpret reality and profile our statements and beliefs. This paper presents six basic colour terms: white, black, red, green, yellow, and blue (both as adjectives and as nouns) in the five different linguistic images of the world of the following languages: English, French, Italian, Polish, and Japanese. The methodological framework is based on cultural linguistics theory and the basis of semantics. The study explores denotative and connotative meanings of colour terms with their collocations. The data gathered from monolingual, bilingual, collocation, and phraseological dictionaries is analysed from the lexical-semantic point of view. The paper discusses semantic differences between contrasting cultures, especially in the blue-green and red lexis. Simultaneously, the findings point to transcultural and global aspects of colour meanings. Both the contexts of cultural diversity and of geographic location are emphasised in the colour semantics. Colours as linguistic signs can specify and categorise reality in terms of feelings, mental attitudes, or sensual reactions. The examined words also refer to location, nature, and the human body. The study shows that colour terms are multifunctional units in the linguistic image of the world, both in terms of the analysed languages separately and as an illustration of the cultural community of different ethnic languages.

**Keywords:** colour terms; connotation; denotation; collocation; linguistic image of the world

## INTRODUCTION

Objective and subjective cognitive values characterise the complex nature of colours. That is why colours are subject to various multidisciplinary examinations. Objective values are studied using rational, material, and measurable research methods, which are common in exact and natural sciences, and engineering and technology. Whereas subjective values referring to the moral code, feelings, and experience, are studied by researchers in social sciences, humanities, and art. Linguistic research on colours fits into subjective values that shape the socio-cultural context, affect perception and create a vision of reality. According to Gage (1999, p. 79), “colour-perception and colour-language turn out to be closely bound up with each other; since symbolizing is essentially a linguistic function, the available colour-vocabulary must have a decisive role in the creation of any language of colour-symbols.” In modern linguistics, colours are examined primarily with the semiotic approach. For a linguist, colour is a sign that has not only a reference but also numerous connotations. Some of them are closely related to culture, whereas others are supra-ethnic. That is the elementary hypothesis that leads to the conclusion that colours participate in creating the meaning of every message, especially in the twenty-first century, when the media often make combinations of words, images, and sounds to form components of the message.

Colours are language signs in a language understood as “the system of communication comprising codes and symbols which is used by humans to store, retrieve, organize, structure and communicate knowledge and experience” (Lee, Su Kim, 2003, p. 1). The words examined in this paper, i.e., white, black, red, green, yellow, and blue (both as adjectives and as nouns), were chosen based on Berlin and Kay’s (1969) concept of the basic colour terms (BCT). The recent research on colour semantics presents most frequently contrastive studies on colour terms in two or three languages, e.g. Spanish and Russian (Kosik-Szwejkowska, 2019) or English, Russian and Hebrew (Tali, 2022). These comparative works examine one or a number of specific colours, which we call “basic”, in line with the concept of “universals of human experiences” (Wierzbicka, 1990). BCTs are monolexic, meaning that they have a simple form, are not semantically dependent on other colour names, have a wide range of collocability, and are psychologically salient in reception.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Colours are a visual phenomenon that is a part of everyday life. When perceived as linguistic signs, they can be named basic terms. Furthermore, one can assume that every language has names for at least some of them, but one thing is sure: colour terms are an essential part of everyday vocabulary. Nevertheless, the languages and their users differ; hence, there are some differences in understanding colours, which are a meaningful constant for sighted people, a form of non-verbal communication, and a powerful psychological tool (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Significantly, people’s understanding can vary depending on their past experiences, gender, natural environment, culture, and what is of most significance, a language. All these factors belong to the aforementioned subjective category; because of them, people may have different connotations with colours.

Nevertheless, even with those variables, some associations and connotations are similar across different cultures. This may be caused by the fact that they can be easily adapted from other

cultures and develop on their own within a given language. The interactions between the members of different ethnic groups enable this cross-cultural exchange. However, some of the connotations with given colours are characteristic only of certain cultures.

Due to these fast-occurring changes, we can observe a constant development in connotations with colours (e.g. disappearance of the connotation of white with women in modern Polish) and, consequently, the collocations in which they are used. This development is as rapid as other changes in various languages; therefore, the colour collocations are worth monitoring. This article aims to present the collocations' current situation with the following BCTs: white, black, red, green yellow, and blue, in the following languages: English, French, Italian, Polish, and Japanese. It is worth noting that, according to Berlin and Kay (1969), all of these languages are in the last stage of the colour language evolution, with Japanese entering it as the last one of the discussed languages (Stanlaw, 2007).

It is believed that the choice of the languages analysed in this article will encourage other scientists to pursue similar projects combining cross-linguistic analysis (Germanic, Romance, Slavic and Japonic languages) and cross-cultural analysis (European and Asian culture). In other words, the choice of exemplary languages enables a comparative study with the inclusion of a synchronic perspective for European-Western culture and a cross-cultural one (Japanese). Nevertheless, the selected languages are merely exemplary, and their choice results mainly from them being understudied in terms of comparative BCT analysis, but also the above-mentioned shared stage of language evolution.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The topic of colours has a rich tradition in humanistic research, in which social and cultural factors shape the linguistic colour phenomenon. Researchers examine this topic around the world, often with an interdisciplinary approach. Research works mentioned in this paper present a research perspective focused on colours as language signs. These works indicate essential research categories and reveal some of the significant achievements of colour linguistics and colour terms analysis. For instance, in their groundbreaking and impactful 1969 research, Berlin and Kay present the model of the seven-stage evolution of colour terms. They introduce the concept of 'basic terms' in relation to eleven names of colours. Hence their research constitutes a reference point for all modern researchers examining colour linguistics. However, Berlin and Kay's research divides the scientific community. Although there are many supporters of the 1969 theory, there are also researchers who question the legitimacy of the name 'basic terms'. For example, Wierzbicka (2008) claims that neither the term 'colour,' nor the names of colours are universal concepts. According to her, while there are certain universals in terms of the sense of sight, the categories should be much broader than those proposed by Berlin and Kay (1969). Moreover, cognitive semantics has had an impact on the colour lexis description (e.g. Rosch, 1972). Colour studies have developed towards the semantics of colour names and the categories of prototypes, and semantic connotations with cultural and psychological contexts (e.g. Tokarski, 1995).

Moreover, in recent years, comparative studies have become frequent in research on colour. Among these, one can name lexical-semantic and connotational analyses of colours (e.g. Mandić, 2017; Qtaishat & Al-Hyari, 2019), research on lexical and word-forming stylistic means (e.g. Gheltofan & Pungă, 2018; Adamia, Shelia & Marhania, 2020), examinations focused on the cultural aspect and symbolism of colours (e.g. Bawej, 2018), and historical-etymological research (e.g. Dębowiak, Vilalva & Cardeira, 2019). In addition to comparative studies, corpus-based

pragmatic analyses of colour names are also to be observed (e.g. Apresjan, 2018). Finally, colours constitute a common topic in linguistic-literary research, usually in terms of lexical nomenclature, semantic connotations, and word-formation (e.g. Skuza, 2021).

### SEMANTICS

At the end of the 1970s, Czeżowski (1979, p. 73) stated that “[m]uch has been written on what ‘to mean’ means.” Semantics examines the meaning of words and the relation between a linguistic sign and its contents in a synchronous and diachronic approach, and also investigates the relations between the primary word’s significance and its meanings in particular usages. Two crucial terms in semantics are denotation and connotation, terms proposed by Hjelmslev in the middle of the last century. Denotation is the primary meaning of a word, while connotation refers to the word’s particular value as conferred by a situational context (Mavrodin, 2008; Perusset, 2020). It has to be stressed that, according to Eco and Pezzini (1982), the connotation signifying a secondary meaning is less conventional than denotation, which it never replaces. The connotation is an additional meaning of a linguistic sign, that can never make the word lose its denotative and inherent significance.

Another term crucial for this paper is collocation, which refers to a lexical combination of two words characterised by contextual proximity and frequent co-appearance. The multi-word expression known as a collocation is statistically significant, and its regularities do not seem accidental (Bolly, 2010; Diagne, 2018; Sułkowska, 2013).

### CULTURAL LINGUISTICS

The keen interest of linguists in the relationship between language and culture dates back to the early 20th century. At that time, in the United States, a new research direction was proposed: cultural linguistics (also known as anthropological linguistics or linguistic anthropology), in which linguistic research is interconnected with ethnographic studies. Researchers who reflected on the relationship between language and culture, such as Boas, Bloomfield, Sapir, and Whorf, among others, claimed that language is a fundamental element of culture. Among other important works on the topic are those of von Humboldt on the dynamic nature of language, of Weisgerber on the creative power of human speech, and of Gipper on language as a carrier of values and beliefs about the world.

The primary goal of cultural linguistics is to fully and comprehensively understand a human being, their nature, and the essence of their inwardness. Language contains content, forms, and patterns, as well as coded approaches to reality and elements of the value system, on which the linguist can shed light (Anusiewicz, 1994).

One of the basic analytical categories of cultural linguistics is the linguistic image of the world (LIW), defined as a language-specific interpretation of reality that can be described as a set of judgments about the world (Bartmiński, 1999, p. 104). This concept is based mainly on von Humboldt’s claim that every language has its own view of reality. The second analytical category is profiling, a subjective linguistic and conceptual operation that shapes the image of an object by describing it through specific aspects, within a given type of knowledge and according to the adopted point of view. In profiling, a profile, i.e., a variant of how the object is perceived, is created (Bartmiński & Niebrzegowska, 1998).

The fundamentals of cultural linguistics and the abovementioned analytical categories are important for the topic of this analysis since the connotative meaning of colours and collocations

created with their use are the result of many possible interpretations of reality and culture. It seems helpful to adopt a linguistic and cultural perspective, given the comparative character of the research and its intercultural scope. Since the research presents a cross-cultural colour perception and focuses on cultural interpretation resulting from LIW, the analyses are sorted by languages, not colours.

## METHOD

This study examines colours' definitions and connotations provided in multiple dictionaries. It applies two types of analysis: one used to study the semantics of selected BCTs (i.e., white, black, red, green, yellow, and blue) and another to examine their connotative meanings. The first one, semantic analysis (SA), is used to analyse denotation preserved in the BCTs dictionary definitions. The second one, the connotative analysis (CA), focuses on the connotation reflected by the collocations. Even though, SA may vary from study to study it still focuses on showing how meaning's features are anchored in linguistic form's features (Baker & Fillmore, 2009). On the other hand, CA studies the connotation, which may vary from person to person due to the different personal experiences; however, some of the connotations may also have their source in the culture of a language user or may depend on their ethnicity. Thus, their study can also be based on lexicographic data.

The data for this study were collected from various seventeen dictionaries, namely monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, collocation dictionaries, and phraseological dictionaries, both in paper and online forms. The number of dictionaries per given language is as follows: English – four dictionaries (two general dictionaries and two collocation dictionaries, all monolingual); French – four dictionaries (general monolingual dictionaries); Italian – two dictionaries (general monolingual dictionaries); Polish – four dictionaries (three general dictionaries, one phraseological; all monolingual); and Japanese – three dictionaries (two general dictionaries, one with collocations; all monolingual) and due to the accessibility, one online corpus. The data for the analyses were collected in a form of a table and is accessible for viewing online, along with the information about analysed sources:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LNX6b9s-9lueU4i2LcIX5W5eHv1rlA5U/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105738492721788887838&rtpof=true&sd=true>

## LEXICAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTED DATA

### WHITE

#### ENGLISH

Most of white's connotative and denotative meanings are based on its visual aspect and refer to things that are not white but simply pale or close to white (*white wine, white bread*). Its connotative meaning can also relate to strong emotions or illness (*to go white*). From the symbolic perspective, according to the dictionaries, white denotes mental attitudes such as innocence, purity, or the good (*white magic*). Based on its definitions and collocations, it can also be observed that English-speaking people associate white with dairy products (*having the colour of milk*), and snow (*white Christmas*). Furthermore, it is also associated with bones (*bone white*), and with death (*dead*



white). Lastly, 'white' is used as a synonym for wine (*bottle of white*) or people with pale skin (*white neighbourhood*).

#### FRENCH

In French, white (*blanc*) generally designates the colour which is made as a result of combining all colours in the solar spectrum. Being the colour of milk and snow, among others, it is a light colour, especially in comparison with something dark. This general meaning associated with the visual aspect can also be depicted in descriptions of what one can call 'light' (*être blanc [be white]*)<sup>1</sup> to describe someone's grey hair, or *race blanche [white race]*; it can be also observed when 'white' is used to refer to nouns which denote objects of white or light colour, e.g. white wine, egg white, and fungus-caused plant disease (which makes the leaves of the plant white); all are called *le blanc*. In terms of symbolism, white is associated with innocence, purity, and honesty (*blanc comme neige [white as snow]*). Not far from these symbolic associations, white can also refer to something clean or intact, both literally (*drap blanc [white sheet]*), and figuratively (*page blanche [white page]*).

#### ITALIAN

Since white (*bianco*) is usually set in opposition to dark colours, it connotes not only white objects but also those of a light colour, e.g. bread (*pane bianco*) or wine (*vino bianco*). Apart from being light in colour, white can also mean being well-lit and bright. Furthermore, white refers to the skin of someone who is pale (either naturally or as a result of being scared) and to the people of the white race (*terre bianche [white terrain]* meaning populated by white people, *musica bianca [white music]*). Referring to the visual aspect, it also describes the ballot of a voter who did not support any of the candidates or options on the ballot. White also describes elements of reality that are connected to winter or snow, such as sports or holidays (*bianco Natale [white Christmas]*, *Olimpiadi bianche [white Olympics]*). White also refers to legitimistic or political factions that are inspired by Christianity.

#### POLISH

Pure snow, milk, and flour are the main referents of white (*biały*), which in comparison with black is described as explicitly positive. In Polish, white can be found in descriptions of the time of day and objects of a light shade (*białe wino [white wine]*). Various collocations, for instance *biały jak ściana [white as a wall]*, show the semantic relationship of white with a reaction based on emotions such as fear, annoyance, or fatigue. These reactions are often accompanied by a visual response, i.e., the paleness of the face. In terms of the sense of sight, white also means having grey hair and belonging to the white race. Furthermore, a large number of collocations extend the semantics of white. *Biały kruk [white raven]* means a rare and valuable object, while *w białych rękawiczkach [in white gloves]* refers to discreet and diplomatic actions. *Biała gorączka [white fever]* is also worth mentioning. In its first meaning, it describes an emotional reaction, i.e., rage, whereas in its other meaning, it indicates a mental state similar to the one described by *widzieć białe myszki [to see white mice]*, which means that one hallucinates in a state of intoxication.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the space limitations of this article, the square brackets may contain literal translations of the non-English examples, made by Joanna Ryszka in the Japanese sections and by Judyta Mężyk in other sections.

#### JAPANESE

The basic meaning of white (白い) and most of its collocations originate from the sensory reaction (i.e. its visual aspect, and to be precise brightness) and colour resemblance. These may refer to food (白い御飯 [*white rice*]) and animals (白い猫 [*white cat*]). White also collocates with objects lacking colour, which are raw or non-dyed (白いテーブルクロス [*white tablecloth*]), and is associated and collocates with snow (白い雪 [*white snow*]). In terms of symbolic value, as the dictionary definitions suggest, white is associated with innocence, purity, light or brightness (白い光 [*white light*]), and lack of experience (“経験にとぼしい”). Despite these meanings being listed in the dictionaries, it is hard to find corresponding collocations. Presumably, this is due to the lack of deep studies on the collocations in Japanese, especially on the colour collocations.

#### BLACK

#### ENGLISH

Most of black's references are to mental attitudes or visual aspects. Contrary to popular belief, black is not an antonym for white in most of the meanings. There are only two meanings that can be shown as being in clear opposition to those of white, namely 'dirty' (*to be black with soot*) and 'bad' (*black sheep*). The first is a visual reference, whereas the second characterises mental attitude. Contrary to white, black has more meanings that represent mental attitudes rather than resulting from its visual aspect. For instance, this colour denotes a lack of hope or sadness (*black despair, black day*) and a type of humour, jokes, and comedy that deals with serious matters, especially death (*black joke*). It can also represent emotions like hate or anger (*to give somebody a black look*). In other words, black has rather bad connotations, in contrast to those associated with white. Lastly, black is also associated with people who originally came from Africa and who have dark brown skin (*black people, black perspective*).

#### FRENCH

Black (*noir*) denotes the darkest colour and can be used to describe things that are literally black, or dark (*ciel noir [black sky]*). When used to refer to people, it can mean people of the black race (*les Noirs*), whites with dark hair or dark complexion, and tanned people. Furthermore, while white can refer to something clean, black is usually associated with something dirty (*mains noires [black hands]*). In terms of symbolic value, being the symbol of mourning (*être en noir [be in black]*), black evokes negative emotions, such as melancholy, pessimism, sadness, or anxiety (*voir tout en noir [see everything in black]*). It can also be used to mark a time when something tragic happened (*jour noir [black day]*) or to describe an illegal act (*travail au noir [working without paying taxes, without a contract]*).

#### ITALIAN

In Italian, black (*nero*) is a colour typical for coal or tar. In opposition to light colours and white, black describes things that are dark, e.g. bread, wine, coffee, eyes, or the sea. It can be also used to describe things that are dirty, such as water, hands, or the face, while when used in relation to the skin in general, it refers to a tanned person, or to the race, and to what is related to the culture



of people of this race, e.g. *musica nera* [black music]. As for emotions, black refers to sadness, melancholy, mourning, and rage, and when used to describe attitudes towards the world, it conveys pessimism and hopelessness. In the same negative way, black indicates adversity and difficulties (*giornata nera* [black day]). Furthermore, black refers to evil beings (*angeli neri* [black angels], *cherubini neri* [black cherubs]), and ideologies that are historically evil such as fascism. At the same time, it also characterises the clergy. With all these connotations to negative feelings, black also refers to scary things, especially in reference to horror books and films (*film nero* [black film]). This colour also indicates something illegal (e.g. money obtained illegally, untaxed and uninsured work, *lavoro nero* [black work], or the illegal way of taking possession of things, *mercato nero* [black market]).

#### POLISH

Black (*czarny*) is a colour with a rich denotation. It is perceived as the colour of night, darkness, and dirt. It is juxtaposed in contrast with white to describe something explicitly negative. The negative aspect is also presented in the connotations of mental attitudes which connect black with the image of an evil, dangerous, and malicious person (*czarny charakter* [black character]). Moreover, the metaphors such as *czarna rozpacz* [black despair] connect black with emotions, therefore extending its connotation with the feelings of sadness, pessimism, despair, and doubt. Furthermore, the semantics of black in terms of perceived mental attitudes is extended by evaluative collocations, such as *czarny koń* [black horse], which presents the power and dominance of black, and *czarna owca* [black sheep], which entails the feeling of shame. Another example worth mentioning is *czarny humor* [black humour], in which opposite values are combined, at the same time extending the semantic scope of black. Finally, in terms of visual perception, black is used to describe a person's race, a suntan, or dark eye rims.

#### JAPANESE

Black (黒い) is often associated with ink as can be seen in one of its definitions “墨のような色である” [having a colour like ink] and multiple collocations (黒い烏賊墨 [black cuttlefish ink], 黒い硯 [black ink stone], 黒いインキ [black ink]). Many collocations are related to clothing (黒い衣 [black robe]) or fabric (黒い財布 [black fabric]), even if the dictionary definitions do not mention any connotations with them. This may be caused by the fact that black is associated with mourning (黒い喪章 [black symbol of mourning]). Yet it is worth noting that none of the analysed dictionaries provide any entry about black as a colour of mourning. The collocations provided characterise the visual experience. Similarly, so do the collocations that follow the definition “of a blackish colour like dark purple or brown,” for instance, collocations related to food (黒い豆 [black beans]). Among other connotative meanings which are based on the visual aspect are those related to dirt or filth (黒い染み [black stains]). Black is also associated with injustice, something illegal, suspicious or bad (黒い噂 [black rumors]). These connotations characterise mental attitudes represented in the form of metaphors.



## RED

### ENGLISH

Most meanings of red in English characterise its visual aspect (*red wine*). Red is also associated with danger (*red flag*), which represents a mental attitude; however, this correlation of red with danger may come from other associations such as blood (*blood red*) and fire (*fiery red*) which represent the visual aspect, as both of these phenomena are red in colour. Furthermore, based on its denotative meaning, it can be stated that red is associated with certain emotions, such as anger and embarrassment. This is due to the fact that when somebody is feeling those emotions their face turns red. This colour in English is also used as a synonym for red wine (*a nice bottle of red*) and communists (*red flag*). In the last context, as dictionaries suggest, the term 'red' may be used to show disapproval.

### FRENCH

Red (*rouge*) designates the colour placed before orange on the light spectrum and is that of blood or a poppy. When used as a noun, *rouge* also denotes red objects, for instance: red wine, lipstick, and red traffic lights, among other things, are all called *le rouge*. In terms of emotional value, red evokes feelings of anger (*être rouge de colère [be red with rage]*), but also of shame or shyness (*être rouge comme une cerise [be as red as a cherry]*). Being one of the colours of fire, red is also connected with any sort of danger, for instance by being used to describe objects that warn against it (*alerte rouge [red alert]*), or by describing a difficult situation (*être dans le rouge [be in the red]*). Red, similarly to yellow, also has a symbolic meaning related to history, that is, *rouge* as a noun means a communist and as an adjective can be associated with the French Revolution (*drapeau rouge [red flag]*). Furthermore, red clothes are often associated with an honorary position, e.g. cardinals' *robe rouge [red dress]*.

### ITALIAN

The data collected from the studied dictionaries confirm that in Italian, red (*rosso*) refers to emotional agitation and nervousness (*diventare rosso [to become red]*). Red also connotes sadness, because it is the colour of the eyes of a person who has been crying (*avere gli occhi rossi [have red eyes]*). In contrast, *essere bianco e rosso [be white and red]* describes a person who is in good health. Moreover, red defines left-wing political movements, inspired by Marxism or socialism, and people of such political views. Red symbols of communism also left their traces in the language (*bandiera rossa [red flag]*). Red also connotes things that are banned and events that are urgent or important, e.g. a red telephone is a form of direct and urgent communication between heads of state. This colour is also associated with traffic lights, warnings and a debited bank account (*andare in rosso [go into the red]*).

### POLISH

According to Polish dictionaries, red (*czerwony*) is the colour of blood, poppies, and ripe tomatoes. The expressiveness of red can often be observed in the linguistic image of feelings, especially shame, fatigue, and anger (*czerwony jak burak [red like a beetroot]* and *działać na kogoś jak czerwona płachta na byka [be to somebody like a red rag to a bull]*). It is worth noting that the

connoted feelings can be additionally reinforced by a visual reaction (*czzerwienić się po uszy* [*go red up to the ears*]). Red is also the colour of vigilance, as in *komuś zapaliła się czerwona lampka* [*someone has lit themselves a red light*]. Finally, in its colloquial use, red connotes the communistic attitude and mindset (*czzerwona przeszłość* [*red past*], or *władza czerwonych* [*the power of the reds*]).

#### JAPANESE

Red (赤い) is used mainly as an abbreviated way to refer to things associated with that colour, e.g. communism, deficit, or red beans, i.e. instead of repeating the word communism, Japanese may simply use 赤い. These connotations result from the visual aspect that later started to characterise mental attitudes. Most of the collocations refer to the colour similarity, e.g. red fruits and vegetables (赤い実 [*red fruit*]), or skin changes (赤い発疹 [*red rash*]). Japanese also associates this colour with hair (赤い髪 [*red hair*]). Furthermore, red represents a mental attitude due to its association with the Japanese belief system, Shinto, which often uses red (赤い鳥居 [*red torii*]). There is also a collocation 赤い鬼 [*red demon*], which refers to a Japanese legend and therefore.

#### GREEN

##### ENGLISH

Green is usually associated with plants and greenery (*green hills*), therefore embodying the visual aspect. Due to this reference, it has come to represent the mental attitude of people who wish to protect the environment (*a green campaigner*) or actions related to that wish (*green politics*). It is also used informally to refer to someone who lacks experience, which comes from the green colour of fruit that is not ready to be picked (*green bananas*); however, while the second meaning is based on the visual aspect, the association with inexperience represents the mental attitude. A different connotation with the sense of sight is the association with an illness (*to look green*).

##### FRENCH

As a colour between blue and yellow on the light spectrum, green (*vert*) is usually depicted as the colour of nature. Therefore, it may denote something that is covered with plants (*cit  vert* [*green city*]), something that is fresh (*bois vert* [*green wood*]) or freshly prepared (*morue verte* [*green codfish*]), or not ready yet to be consumed (*pommes vertes* [*green apples*]). Furthermore, it is often associated with gardening (*avoir les doigts/les pouces verts* [*have green fingers/thumbs*]), ecology (*candidats verts* [*green candidates*]), and the countryside, along with agriculture (*tourisme vert* [*green tourism*]), and the noun *le vert* itself also means ‘the countryside’. On the one hand, the ‘fresh’ denotation of green can also be depicted in collocations such as * tre encore vert pour son  ge* [*still be green for one’s age*], which signifies that someone is still vigorous despite their old age, but on the other hand, collocations such as * tre vert* [*be green*] or * tre vert de peur* [*be green with fear*], meaning to be furious and terrified, respectively, point to a more negative connotation of green. What is more, *vert* may also mean ‘harsh’ (*verte r primande* [*green reprimand*]). However, all dictionaries used for this study stress that this colour usually has positive symbolic value, as it is associated with hope (*espoir vert* [*green hope*]) and important religious figures, e.g. Mahomet in Islam and Ganesh in Hinduism are often depicted in green.



#### ITALIAN

Green (*verde*) is associated primarily with vegetation, and it is the colour used to describe regions rich in vegetation, e.g. *Umbria verde* [*green Umbria*]. Furthermore, in terms of the flora, green defines unripe plants or those in the process of being dried. When used to refer to humans, it describes the age of young people (*anni verdi* [*green years*]), but it can also refer to people full of vigour and vitality. Due to the strong denotation of nature, green also connotes ecology (*benzina verde* [*green fuel*], *partito verde* [*green party*]) and agriculture (*piano verde* [*green land*]). In terms of emotions, green is a part of the collocation *essere verde di paura* [*become green with fear*]. In contrast to red, green, also associated with traffic lights, is a sign of permission, e.g. to cross the road.

#### POLISH

The data collected from the studied dictionaries confirm that green (*zielony*) in Polish is associated mainly with freshness, spring, and nature, which indicates that this colour is semantically connected to immaturity or greenness (which in Polish is conveyed by the same word, i.e., *niedojrzałość*), as in *kwaśne, zielone jabłka* [*sour, green apples*]. In regard to immaturity, collocations point to mental attitudes connecting it with lack of knowledge and experience (*kompletnie zielony* [*completely green*], or *nie mieć o czymś zielonego pojęcia* [*have no green idea about something*]). Furthermore, collocations describing behaviour are in contrast with the positive connotations of green and nature as they point to anger, fear, or jealousy (*zielony z zazdrości* [*green with jealousy*]). An opposite connotation to the overall freshness of green can be observed when the adjective ‘green’ is used to describe the colour of skin, which indicates an illness. Therefore, it can be stated that on the scope nature-humans, it is a colour of contrasts and differing connotations.

#### JAPANESE

When compared with the analysed European languages, green (緑) is a relatively new colour in Japanese, and before it was popularised, green things were described as blue (Stanlaw, 2007). Thus, the dictionaries provide only four meanings and a limited number of collocations. Green, in Japanese, denotes plants and greenery, but also a deep blue indigo colour (深い藍色). Most of the connotations are based on the visual aspect (緑の森 [*green forest*]) that creates a connection between green and nature. Moreover, some collocations, by using green as a synonym, show a connotation with ecology and environment (緑の保全 [*green protection*], 緑を守る [*to protect the green*]).

#### YELLOW

#### ENGLISH

The dictionary definitions suggest that yellow in English often connotes the sun (*sunshine yellow*), gold, butter and egg yolk, based on the colour similarity. Also, most of the collocations point to the visual aspect of objects (*lemon yellow, primrose yellow*). Similarly, its meaning as an offensive way to describe people from parts of Asia (*a yellow person*) also comes from the visual experience.

This colour is also associated with cowardice or a person lacking courage (*yellow-bellied*), which represents a mental attitude. Yet it is worth noting that its collocations are primarily positive (*rich yellow*), with minor exceptions (*sickly yellow*). The negative connotation results from the fact that this colour is associated with jaundice (also called *yellow*s).

#### FRENCH

Yellow (*jaune*) refers to the warmest colour, which is that of a lemon or of gold. This general meaning can be observed in nouns of the same form as the adjective ‘yellow,’ which can mean an Asian person (often perceived to be of the yellow race), a sunflower, pastis, or the yolk of an egg. Similar to black, yellow can also describe something dirty (*les dents jaunes* [*yellow teeth*]). Furthermore, being associated with liver problems, yellow may also mean looking tired and anxious (*teint jaune* [*yellow complexion*]). As definitions in the dictionaries suggest, symbolically, yellow is interlinked with disgrace, as historically it was the colour of the star the Jews were forced to wear in different periods, while today, it can be used to describe a strikebreaker.

#### ITALIAN

At the denotation level, yellow (*giallo*) is defined by dictionaries as a transitional colour between orange and green. It also refers to gold and is often used to distinguish between the white and yellow shades of gold. Like white, in Italian yellow can describe the skin of a person who is pale, scared, or ill; it also refers to Asian people. At the connotation level, the relationship of yellow with various illnesses seems to be significant, as it is associated with yellow fever (*febbre gialla*), as well as with the yellow flag (*bandiera gialla*) hung on ships to signal that people on board are affected by infectious diseases. Yellow is also associated with elements of reality that are mysterious and secretive (*essere in presenza di un giallo* [*to be in the presence of a yellow*]). That is the probable reason why *yellow novel* and *yellow film* represent the criminal genre.

#### POLISH

The main referents of yellow (*żółty*) are the sun, ripe wheat, marsh marigolds, and egg yolk, which are connected to the positive perception of this colour in Polish culture. However, the semantics of yellow has ambivalent connotations in Polish. This is so due to the fact that the noun *żółć* in Polish means both yellow, the colour, and bile, the digestive fluid produced by the liver. Therefore, the semantics of this colour is dominated by emotional reactions (*żółć gotuje się w kimś* [*yellow bile boils in somebody*]), which connote feelings of anger, jealousy, bitterness, and nervousness. In addition to that, *napoić kogoś żółcią* [*give somebody yellow bile to drink*] extends the connotation of this colour with a feeling of sadness and sorrow. *Żółta kartka* [*yellow card*], meaning a caution both literally and metaphorically, is another example of a collocation whose connotation is far from the sunny, positive yellow. Nonetheless, yellow can also be considered neutral, and that is when it denotes the visual experience, for instance, referring to the skin colour in *żółta rasa* [*yellow race*].

#### JAPANESE

Japanese dictionaries do not provide much material for the analysis. From the gathered material, it can be deduced that yellow (黄色い) connotes the sun (黄色い太陽 [*yellow sun*]), and collocates with fruits and vegetables (黄色い実 [*yellow fruits*]), and fabric (黄色いハンカチ [*yellow handkerchief*]). This colour also collocates with the noun race while referring to **Mongoloid people** (黄色人種 [*yellow race*]). Besides its visual aspect, yellow also possesses one meaning which is metaphorical and depicts a mental attitude. Namely, it is associated with a high voice belonging mainly to women or children (黄色い声 [*yellow voice*]).

#### BLUE

##### ENGLISH

Some of the meanings and collocations of blue come from the visual aspect, such as the association with the sky (*having the colour of sky*) and sea (*navy blue*), for which blue also functions as a synonym. Yet most of the meanings represent mental attitudes, as in connotations of blue with richness and royalty (*rich blue*), cold and illness (*blue with cold*), and sexual activity (*blue movie, blue jokes*). As dictionaries point out, in the last meaning, blue is used in a way that may offend people. This colour is also used to characterise emotions, namely sadness and lack of hope, as in *feeling blue* and *having the blues*. It also appears in phrases denoting something sudden or quick (*out of the blue, to talk a blue streak*). Blue is also associated with people who represent Oxford and Cambridge, as it is the official colour of these universities. This connotation was further reinforced in the collocations *Oxford Blue* and *Cambridge Blue*, denoting certain shades of blue.

##### FRENCH

Blue (*bleu*) is the colour of the cloudless sky. This general denotation is evoked not only in common collocations such as *fleur bleue* [*blue flower*] but also in the description of facial features which became blue due to various conditions, such as cold (*lèvres bleues de froid* [*lips blue with cold*]), being hit (in that case as a noun, e.g. *être couvert de bleus* [*be covered with bruises*]) or the feeling of anger or fear (*visage tout bleu de rage* [*whole face blue with rage*]). Nevertheless, the symbolic value of blue is positive and since it is associated with the sky, it also evokes the idea of perfection and dreaminess (*rêves bleus* [*blue dreams*]). As a noun, blue has a variety of different meanings (besides the obvious ‘blue colour’). For instance, it can be used to denote the sea or the ocean (*le grand bleu* [*the big blue*]), as well as the Mediterranean Sea (*la grande bleue* [*the big blue*]). When referring to people, if singular, it can mean ‘a novice,’ or, if plural, the French national sports team, usually the football team (in terms of other games, ‘bleu’ is also a shout used by pool players and a rare card in poker). With France being the country of wine and cheese, the noun ‘blue’ may also mean wine of mediocre quality, and a type of cheese made with cultures of mould (*bleu d’Auvergne*). Finally, due to its visual aspect, it can also refer to blue clothes (*jeunes filles en bleu* [*young girls in blue*]) or blue work clothing (*bleu d’ouvrier* [*the blue of the labourer*]), and to a telegram.



#### ITALIAN

In Italian, there are two words used to describe blue. *Azzurro* means light blue, while *blu* means dark blue. Dictionaries define blue as a colour typical for the sky. It often describes people who belong to specific groups, e.g. athletes representing Italy at international competitions, members of the political party Forza Italia, and members of aristocratic families (*sangue azzurro* [blue blood]). Historically, it is also the colour associated with republicans during the time of the French Revolution. In terms of emotions, blue refers to fear and the pale complexion of a person who got scared (*prendersi una paura blu* [take a blue fear], *fifa blu* [blue fear], or *diventare blu dalla paura* [turn blue with fear]).

#### POLISH

Thanks to both historical and word-forming conditions, the principal and permanent referents of blue (*niebieski*) in Polish are the sky and heaven (which are conveyed with the same word in Polish: *niebo*). Therefore, blue is perceived as the colour of distance and the vault of heaven (*sklepienie niebieskie* [blue vault]). The metaphorical relationship of blue and heaven is also visible in lexical units such as *królestwo niebieskie* [blue kingdom], or *przenieść się do niebieskiej chwały* [move to the blue glory]. Polish extends the semantics of blue with the use of the *pars pro toto* rhetorical figure in *niebieskie kołnierzyki* [blue collars] and *niebieskie hełmy* [blue helmets] to define particular professions. What is more, blue constitutes a basis for mental attitudes (e.g. *niebieski ptak* [blue bird] which is used to describe an unemployed person living at someone else's expense, and *myśleć o niebieskich migdałach* [think about blue almonds] referring to an irresponsible person who thinks unrealistically about life). Nonetheless, blue can also have noble connotations ( *błękitna krew* [blue blood]).

#### JAPANESE

As said above, blue (青い) can denote both blue and green things. Therefore, some of the collocations are the same, or their meaning refers in fact to green (青い草 [blue grass]). It is worth noting that the mentioned collocations characterise the visual aspect. Due to the presence of connotation with fruits and vegetables not ready to be picked, blue has also come to denote lack of experience or immaturity. Interestingly, there are collocations which combine veins and blue (青い静脈 [blue vein]), and one that combines this colour with bruises (青いあざ [blue bruise]), while there is also a definition referring to paleness (青い顔 [blue face]). These collocations and one definition characterise the visual aspect, and it is worth noting how often blue is combined with things related to the human body.

#### FINDINGS

In many languages, white is a colour that is contrasted with black. It describes light, not necessarily white, things that also come in a dark variety, e.g. bread, wine, and chocolate. In terms of the sense of sight, it is also the colour of natural products such as milk and snow. Furthermore, in each of the languages, white can describe parts of the human body, or a person's age or origin. White is also used to indicate light and brightness. Because of that, in Polish, it is used to name the early



parts of the day. Lastly, white symbolises purity, sincerity, and innocence in all of the examined languages, both European and Japanese.

Black, analogously to white, describes things that are dark, not necessarily black, and that come in both light and dark variety, e.g. bread, wine, and coffee. In Italian, this colour is used to name a darker side or a fragment of an object. Black can also be associated with human skin and can determine ethnicity, if used to describe born skin colour, or a suntan.

In many of the analysed languages, black describes things that are dirty, especially in terms of the human body, such as dirty hands. It is also the basis for many collocations pointing to dishonesty. In many languages, both in Europe and in Japan, black connotes suspect content or illegal activities. More generally, black often connotes negative emotions, such as regret, sadness, and fear. However, there are fewer connotations of black that are associated with negative emotions such as rage or nervousness.

Red, in some languages, can be used to describe hair colour. It is also a colour of the human face that is affected by strong feelings such as love or anger, while a long-term ruddy face (slightly reddened by blood flowing at high pressure) is a symptom of health. Furthermore, the analysed dictionaries point to red as a warning colour, indicating important things that should not be missed. As a result, it often connotes danger. In culture, red evokes associations with certain ideologies, particularly with communism, the French Revolution, and especially nowadays, with Catholic cardinals. Similarly to other analysed BCTs, red is also associated with many emotions, such as anger, nervousness, embarrassment, and sadness.

The primary references of green are to vegetation and nature. Therefore, in all of the analysed languages, it is associated with ecology, and in some with agriculture. This colour is often attributed to vegetables and fruits that are unripe and not yet fit for consumption. In addition, in Italian, it is used to talk about vegetables that are being dried. Furthermore, it can be used to characterise a pale face, one that has turned green out of fear or an illness. In many European languages, the green colour connotes the immaturity of a human, presumably on analogy with the greenness of a fruit. In some of the examined languages, green symbolises hope and religiousness.

In the analysed material, yellow is the colour of the sun and gold. It often refers to nature, especially to marsh marigolds, sunflowers, and wheat, whose yellow colour is particularly vibrant in the daylight. In Japan, it also refers to yellow vegetables, serving as a hypernym. Yellow is also used to describe human skin, in particular in relation to experiencing various emotions or illnesses, and therefore, in that context, with no good connotations. This negative connotation results from the fact that in many languages, the bile (the secretion of the liver) is called *the yellow*. Even names of illnesses point to this colour: *żółtaczka* [*hepatitis*], and *yellow fever*. Due to these denotations, yellow started to have a symbolic meaning. For instance, a *yellow flag* on a ship signalled that the crew of this ship were ill with an infectious disease. A milder sense of warning is that of the *yellow card* presented by a referee in a football match. Overall, the analysed data proved that yellow connotes negative emotions, such as anger, worry, and fatigue.

The main referent of blue is the sky. That is probably why this colour is connected to religion and the Kingdom of Heaven. Blue is also connected to the sea, which is a natural mirror of the sky. Meanwhile, in Japan, it is the colour used to describe green vegetables and immaturity, while in France, it describes wine of bad quality and a type of cheese. Furthermore, blue also refers to a human face affected by various emotions, such as fear or other states, e.g. illness or cold. In terms of symbolism, this colour is usually associated with higher social classes, i.e. aristocracy, as it was believed that their members had blue blood.



To summarise, the analysis shows that in the Japanese LIW, blue has numerous references and connotations that are stereotypically attributed to green in Europe. Similar observations can be made about the use of blue in Japanese to describe unripe plants or the immaturity of a human being. Different profiling also applies to red, which in Japanese connotes the religious system native to Japan, i.e., Shinto. At the same time, in the European LIWs, it is blue that is related to religion. Furthermore, the data shows that in the Japanese LIW, unlike in any other of the analysed languages, yellow is used to describe the high-pitched voices of women and children. It is much more interesting because of the synesthesia effect that combines a sense of sight and hearing. Among other interesting issues, there is also the fact that anger is associated with a different colour in French and other European languages. French uses blue, whereas other European cultures perceive anger as red. Blue in European culture most frequently refers to some physical attitudes, like getting cold, except for Polish which associates this colour with mental values.

The following observation can be made by analysing the use of colours to refer to any phenomena related to the culture, e.g. cultural differences based on exemplary food associated with colour (in Japanese red beans, or in French blue cheese). They become elements of the LIW of the examined languages through contact with other cultures. Migration of people, as well as mass media and globalisation, all lead to the formation and strengthening of stereotypes. As a result, in the LIWs, red connotes communism, communists, and revolutionists, while yellow refers to a warning, to being out of one's comfort zone. The study shows the interpenetration of connotations and stereotypes of both global and local nature. For instance, globally, the blue sports team refers to the Italians, while locally, to the players of Ruch Chorzów, a team in southern Poland.

## CONCLUSION

The analysed material proves that culture has a strong influence on the creation of stereotypes in terms of colours. Giving them a certain value and profiling various situations and states with the use of colours is a cultural phenomenon which is not only characteristic to one nation. Also, even though our experience varies by culture, we can observe some universal colour features, which we call the prototypes in a cross-cultural perception, common for European and Japanese culture, e.g. sun for yellow, light for white or green for plants. Similarly to the western culture, the Japanese associate black colour with mourning, although, traditionally, similarly to other countries in Asia, in Japan, it also connotes white. Moreover, globalisation implies some unified values for the human race, like red linked to the ideology of communism or green linked to the environmental movement. Furthermore, one can observe a correlation between the location of where a given language is used and the number of collocations related to nature, e.g. blue and green in Italian. The natural greenery of the Apennine Peninsula and its location in the Mediterranean basin have probably influenced over the centuries numerous examples of green profiling phenomena, processes, and values in the Italian LIW.

Each of the examined colours refers to the human body in some way. Firstly, they refer to a person's origin, i.e., to their white, yellow, red, or black race. Then, in terms of the body parts that are particularly exposed to human sight (e.g., the face, skin, hands, and hair), colours are usually used for positive or negative evaluation. Some are used due to the visual interpretation of love and lust, while others are employed to describe rage and anger. One example of a colour used to describe various emotions is red. Yellow, green, and white refer to illness, and white or yellow skin can be a sign of fear or even terror. The denotative and connotative characteristics of colours

in relation to the human body and nature can be considered global, as they refer to aspects of the planet we are all living on and to us as the inhabitants of the Earth. However, it has to be specified that these characteristics seem to become fixed in the languages analysed here from a white person's perspective, as four of the examined languages are occidental.

Colour as a linguistic sign constitutes a perfect reflection of the assumptions established by cultural linguistics. The study showed that it is a multifunctional unit in the LIW, both in terms of the analysed languages separately, and as an illustration of the cultural community of different ethnic languages. Colours as linguistic signs can specify and categorise reality. Due to numerous connotations fixed in the LIWs, they are often signs of evaluating. Human beings remain the object of axiology since their health, appearance, status, and the products of their actions (similarly to the products of nature) are subject to evaluation. Furthermore, the collected material points to colours playing a significant role in describing the expression of emotions and characterising the intensity of different emotional states and natural phenomena. Colours certainly facilitate the understanding of a given community's value system.

Therefore, the meanings of colours encoded in language are undoubtedly a source of knowledge about culture, but also about nature, values important for humans, and their emotions. Both the contexts of cultural diversity and of geographic location are emphasised in the meanings of colours. That is why this study should be continued with the account of other languages. It would also be worth contrasting other culturally and geographically distant languages. Furthermore, the presented research and collected data suggest another dimension worth exploring: a diachronic study of BCTs with a comparison with synchronic research. That type of study could enable analysis from cross-cultural, cross-semantics, and cross-temporal perspective. The obtained results could help to track the history of similarities in connotations, collocations and denotations in the analysed languages. In conclusion, this article and the collected data can serve as a foundation for future contrastive research.

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## APPENDIX

The data for the analyses were collected in a form of a table and are accessible for viewing online: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LNx6b9s-9lueU4i2LcIX5W5eHv1rlA5U/edit?usp=sharing&oid=105738492721788887838&rtpof=true&sd=true>

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