

# Colors in Culture

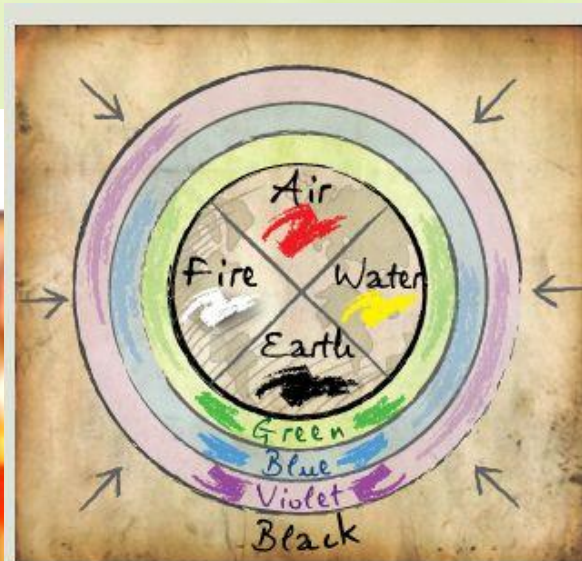


**Cross-Cultural Communication**

**Compiled by Terri Yueh**

***Sounds, colors, heat and cold,  
according to modern philosophy,  
are not qualities in objects, but  
perceptions in the mind.***

(Hume 1738/1911, Bk III, part I, Sect. 1, p. 177; Bk I, IV,  
IV, p. 216)



<http://www.webexhibits.org/causesofcolor/1B.html>



語言的表達受到文化與思想模式 (mode of thought) 的影響。

因種族的不同而反映在語言表達方式的不同，  
例如

- 時間觀念 (thought of time)
- 空間觀念 (space terms)
- 親族觀念 (kinship terms)
- 色彩觀念 (color terms)

**Your Language  
Shapes  
How You Think**

Adapted from Edward Sapir and B.L. Whorf

# How do you interpret it?



Men might identify the shirt as “red,” whereas women viewing the same shirt might call it “cranberry” or “cherry” or “scarlet.”

*“Both the men and the women recognize the color distinctions, but men tend to use fewer words than women to distinguish colors. “*

(Martin, Judith N, and T. K. Nakayama 2010: 224)

# How do you interpret it?

- 赤色 = 紅色?
- 紅綠燈 = 青紅燈
- 青山綠水
- 青天白日
- **Blue sky**
- **Green heaven**



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color>



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visible\\_spectrum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visible_spectrum)

# How do you interpret it?

- The application of terms to ranges of the visible spectrum are essentially arbitrary, cultural conventions.

Example 1: blue and green in various languages

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distinguishing\\_blue\\_from\\_green\\_in\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distinguishing_blue_from_green_in_language)

Example 2: Color vision (BBC)

<http://www.boreme.com/posting.php?id=30670>

青取之于藍  
而青於藍  
荀子[勸學篇]



# Color Terms

- English has *black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange,* and *gray* (11 basic color terms). *Crimson, blonde, taupe* are not basic.  
[http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_colors](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_colors)

- **B-K Hypothesis**

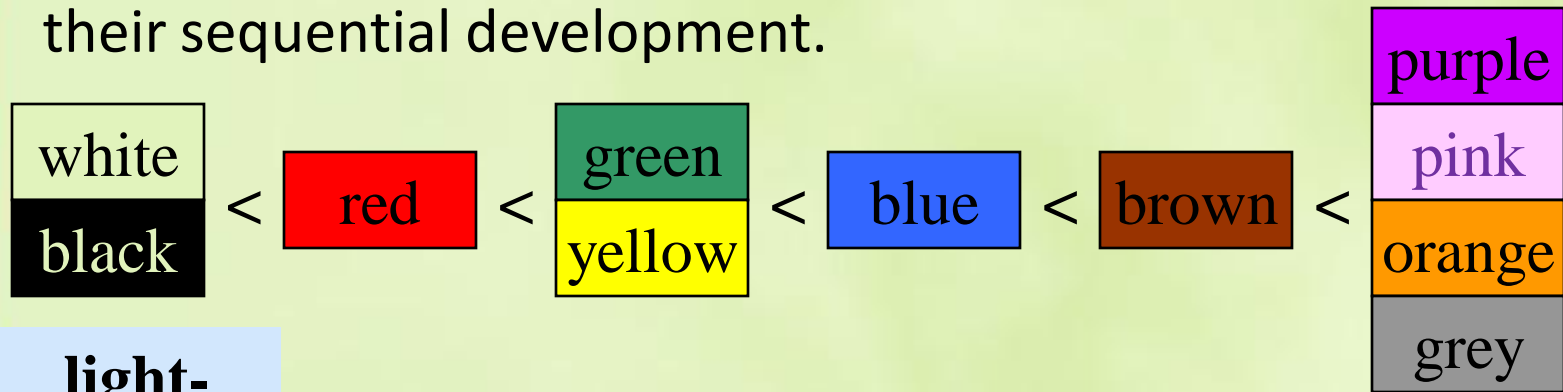
Comparison of almost 100 languages: 2 to 11 universal color categories:

If a language contains only two basic color terms: they are always black and white. When a language has three basic color terms, the third one will be red.

(Brent and Kay 1969)

# B-K Hypothesis (1969)

Berlin and Kay presented a theory of universal color categories and their sequential development.



**light-  
warm  
&  
Dark-  
cool**

X < Y means:

if language contains y, it must also contain x

Only Cantonese, Vietnamese, Western Apache, Hopi, Samal and Papago didn't fit the hierarchy



# B-K Hypothesis (1969)

- Black, white, red, yellow, green and blue seem to be fundamental colors. They are more predictable than *derived terms* (orange, purple, pink, brown and grey).
- Although there may be universal patterns in the development of systems of color-term classification, languages differ in **the symbolic meanings** embodied in color terms.



# Color Terms in Different Cultures

英語	Purple	Blue	Green	Yellow	Orange	red
Shona (羅德西亞)	Clps wke		Citema		Cicena	Clps wke
Bassa 語(利比亞)			hui			zlza



# Colors in Culture

- Understanding a culture's metaphors helps us understand something about the culture itself. Some metaphors are universal and this universality of the metaphor may rest in the universal human physiology.
- English
  - *to feel blue* (feel sad)
  - *a blue moon*
  - *to be in the pink* (to be in the best condition)
- Figurative Language: COLOR IDIOMS

<http://www.quia.com/rr/39470.html>

<https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/idioms-colour.htm>

# Colors in Culture

- What are associated with the color terms in English, Italian, and Chinese?
- Do color terms reflect cultural differences?
- “白” 在某些場合下與顏色毫無關係
  - ✓ “白開水” (boiled water)
  - ✓ “坦白” (to confess)
  - ✓ “白目、白癡” (idiot)
  - ✓ “一窮二白” (poor)



# Colors Metaphors

## White in English Context

- **Meaning: Hope, purity, honesty**
- the **white** future
- a **white** lie
- a **white** hat
- days marked with a **white** stone

## White in Chinese Context

- **Meaning: Death, terror, failure**
- 白包 / 白事 **Funeral**
- 舉白旗 **To surrender**
- 白費力氣 **All in vain**
- 白搭 **Of no use**
- 白丁 **illiterate or commoner**

# Colors Metaphors

## Black in English

**Meaning:** the color of mystery and the symbol of darkness

- **Black** future
- **Black** market goods
- **Black** Friday
- A **black** hole
- In a **black** mood
- A **black** look (angry look)

## Black in Chinese

**Meaning:** associated with negative qualities, awful, evil and illegal

- 黑社會
- 黑心
- 黑幫
- 黑函
- 黑馬 (unexpected winner)
- 黑箱作業

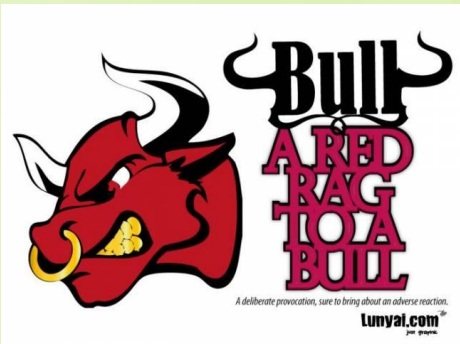
# Colors Metaphors

## Red in English Context

- like a **red** rag to a bull.
- See **red**
- Be in the **red**
- A **red-letter** day
- Be caught **red-handed**
- **Red-light** district

## Red in Chinese Context

- 紅顏
- 紅頂商人
- 紅光滿面 = the face is glowing with health
- 他很紅 = He is well-known and popular



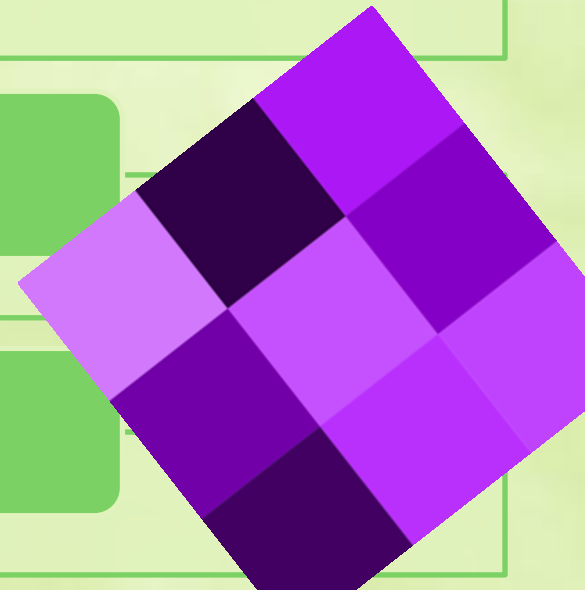
# Do you know the meaning of purple?

**Born to the purple**

**Purple prose**

**Purple speech**

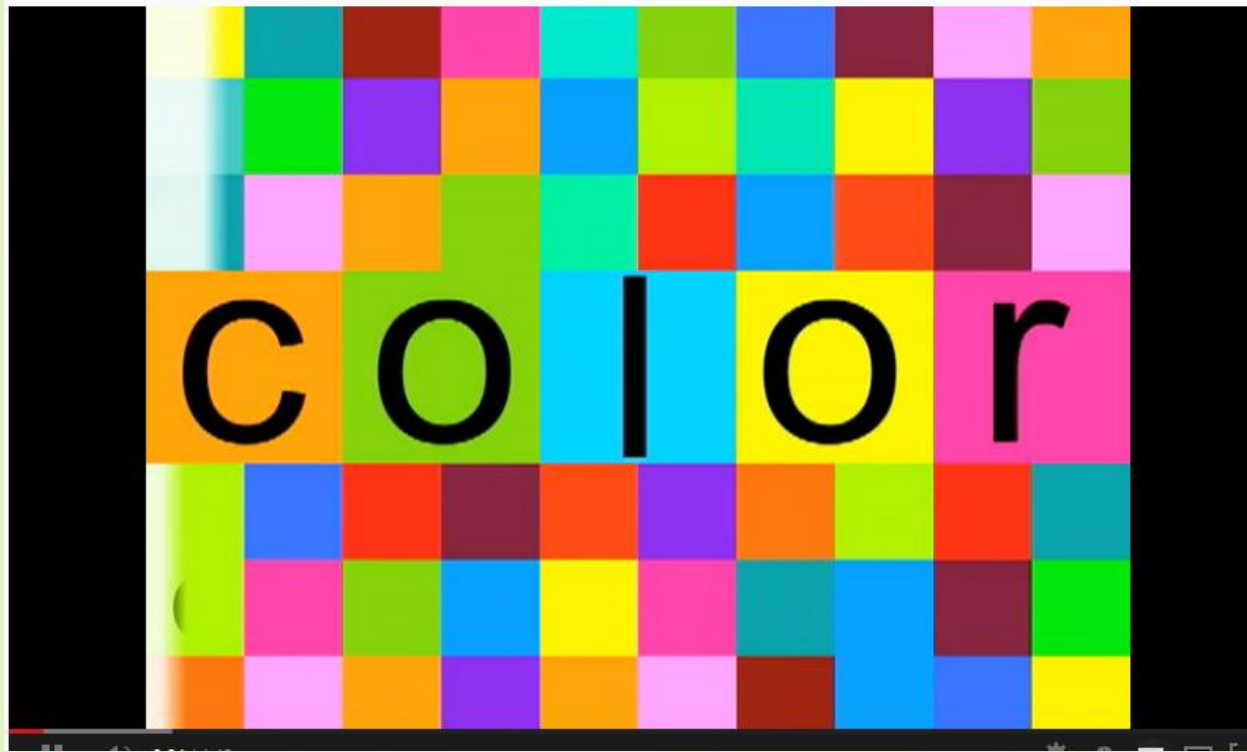
**Purple cow**





# Personal Branding

What Color is Your Brand?



# Do You Know these?

## ● Italian Colors

<http://www.omniglot.com/language/colours/italian.php>

## Color Terms Definitions

<http://phrontistery.info/colours.html>

## ● Color and Fashion

<http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0767755.html>

## ● Color Expressions

<http://www.myenglishteacher.eu/blog/colour-idioms-list-and-their-meanings/>

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- Martin, Judith N, and Thomas K. Nakayama. *Intercultural Communication in Context*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.
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