THE CONNOTATIONS OF ARABIC COLOUR TERMS[*]

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Abstract. Following Allan (2009), this paper investigates the X-phemistic uses of Arabic colour terms with especial reference to Jordanian Arabic. The study, adopting colour-based metaphors, explores the figurative uses of *black*, *white*, *yellow*, *red*, *green*, and *blue*; the most common colours that are used figuratively. The connotations of Arabic colour terms are judged on the basis of whether the phrases in which colour terms occur are orthophemistic, euphemistic, or dysphemistic. It could be said, building on the colours explored in this study, that colours have many orthophemistic connotations, and that dysphemistic connotations of the colours under study are more common than euphemistic connotations. It was also found that the uses of *black*, *yellow*, *red* and *blue* are predominantly dysphemistic. In contrast, *white* mostly has positive connotations, but *green* is found to be associated with both euphemistic and dysphemistic connotations.

1. Preamble

Besides their literal senses, Arabic colour terms could be used loaded with different connotative meanings that are realized in conventional linguistic expressions such as *black-handed*, *white record*, and *yellow leaf*. This indeed implies that "the connotation of a language expression is clearly distinct from its sense, denotation and reference" (Allan 2007). Seen as a thoroughly pragmatic category of meaning, the connotations of a language expression are defined by Allan (2007) as "pragmatic effects that arise from encyclopaedic knowledge about its denotation (or reference) and also from experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which the expression is typically used," and this implies that most of the connotative meanings assigned to colours seem to be grounded, at least to some extent, in reality (Niemeier 1998, cited in Philip 2006: 88). This led Allan (2009: 627) to propose that objects that give rise to the connotations of colour terms have to be colour-bearing objects.

The connotative meaning is defined as the secondary meaning of a word or expression besides its explicit or primary meaning. Leech (1981: 23) classifies meaning into conceptual meaning and associative meaning. He defines the conceptual meaning as the essential part of what language is and the central factor in verbal communication. Conceptual meaning is called cognitive, logical, or denotative meaning. Leech (1981) also recognizes six types of associative meaning: connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic meaning. Connotative meaning is defined as what is communicated by virtue of

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what language refers to. Social meaning is the meaning which an expression conveys about the contexts or social circumstances of its use. Affective meaning is what is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer. Reflected meaning is what is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression. Collocative meaning is what is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word. Finally, thematic meaning is defined as what is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis. Connotative meaning, in comparison with conceptual meaning, is relatively unstable and may vary according to culture, historical period, and the experience of the individual.

Cruse (1986) classifies non-propositional meaning into expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning. Jeffries (1998: 109–44) explains that connotation refers to the expressive and evoked meaning discussed in Cruse (1986). In this study, connotation, used in opposition with denotation and sense, refers to the expressive meaning (also called emotive, attitudinal, or affective meaning) which enables speakers to communicate their evaluations or attitudes.

Colour terms seem to have a great potential of developing different extended meanings. Such extension of meanings could be developed either through metaphoricalization, which is "[…] the analogical mapping of more concrete terms from source domain onto a more abstract term in the target domain" (Traugott – Dasher 2002: 72), or through metonymization, defined as the semantic process of using a part for the whole or one entity is used to stand for another associated entity (Lakoff – Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987, 1993; Traugott – Dasher 2002). The semantic extension is said to be grounded in people's understanding and interpretation of the physical world and is not accidental but pragmatic because it is always context-dependent (Traugott – Dasher 2002: 24). Xing (2009: 88) contends that each colour term has three types of meanings: original meaning, extended meaning, and abstract meaning. Original meaning is defined as the etymological meaning of the colour term; extended meaning is the meaning extended from the original meaning through metaphor, metonymy, or other cognitive means; and abstract meaning refers to the meaning that has been further abstracted from the extended meaning.

Because the colour systems of Arabic and English are not connotationally identical, this study reports on the connotations of Arabic colour terms as an under-researched area of the Arabic pragmatics. This being the case, the study will unveil the similarities and dissimilarities with respect to the connotations of the basic colour terms in Arabic and English, though a discussion of the connotations of the basic colour terms in some other languages, other than English, is sometimes included. Unlike Manav (2006) and Kaya – Crosby (2006) whose findings indicate that colour associations seem to rely on individuals' previous knowledge and experience, this study explores the culturally determined connotations. That is, connotations that are based on cultural conventions and stereotypes, not on the individuals' experiences. The figurative uses of colour terms examined in this study are assumed to represent the established and/or societal connotations of the basic Arabic colour terms that all people are assumed to know. This study stresses the significance of the cultural context, in that differences of the cultural context produce the most significant differences in colour term connotation between languages (Crisp – Chang 1987: 53). In the same vein, Elliot et al. (2007: 156) explain that colour meaning may be a matter of context. Likewise, Soriano – Valenzuela (2009: 440) hypothesize that in case of valence this might

be so, in that Spaniards, for example, may regard ROJO (red) and AMARILLO (yellow) very positively because they are the two colours of the Spanish flag and because *red* and *yellow* outfits are typically used to represent the country in international competitions". It is an interesting possibility that the two colours may have lately become particularly positive in people's minds as a result of Spain winning the UEFA European Football Championship after 44 years, as well as the Davis Cup in tennis" (ibid.: 440). This indeed demonstrates the significance of the cultural context in determining the connotations of the basic colour terms.

In the cultural context of Jordan, *white* and *green* may be viewed positively, in that *white* normally stands for innocence, purity, and peace; and *green* is almost associated with safety and agriculture. However, *black*, *red*, and *yellow* could be valued negatively, as *black* is often associated with evil-related issues, *red* could signify danger and crime, and *yellow* is nearly always linked to sickness. In what follows, I review some of the previous studies conducted on the extended meanings of the basic colour terms.

2. Theoretical background

As mentioned at the outset, colour words are loaded with multiple connotative meanings, many of which are realized in conventional linguistic expressions. This, therefore, has invited researchers from different disciplines to extensively study the connotative meanings of basic colour terms inter- and intra-culturally. Adams – Osgood (1973) study the connotative structure of the English colour terms *black*, *white*, *grey*, *red*, *yellow*, *green* and *blue* and their equivalent colour terms in 20 other languages of the world using the Semantic Differential Technique. They find that young adult subjects rated the colour name *white* more positively than *black* in all of the 23 language-culture groups studied in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Adams – Osgood (1973) find that the colour *red* is an ambiguous case and they locate it near the neutral point. The colour *red* is said to have a positive valence and a negative valence, depending on the features to which it is associated. As for *yellow*, they (1973: 144–5) find that yellow-like terms tend to be positively evaluated across languages, though they have a very negative connotation in Hong Kong Cantonese, where the colour *yellow* is associated with pornography. Adams – Osgood (1973: 144) conclude that the semantic *blue-green* region is more highly evaluated than the *red-yellow* region.

As reported by Chan – Courtney (2001), Osgood et al. (1975) use four categories of colour associations: (1) concrete identification – names of things having a given colour (e.g., blue sky, green cabbage); (2) concrete associations – names of things culturally associated with a colour (e.g., black bow tie); (3) abstract association – metaphorical, (e.g., blue Monday, yellow-bellied, pink film); and (4) abstract symbolism – culturally significant concepts and not obviously metaphorical (e.g., red communism). Some colour associations are considered as universal, such as *red* for warmth and passion and *white* for cleanliness, though cross-cultural differences are noted to exist (Jacobs et al. 1991). That said, fire and the sun are *yellow* in English but *red* in Japanese and Chinese. *Purple* has connotations of anger and passion for Americans, but connotes to royalty only for Chinese and Japanese. And *yellow* does not customarily suggest or imply cowardice for Asians as it does for Americans (Kiato – Kiato 1986).

Because colour names have great potential to refer metonymically to real world objects and phenomena, many metonymically-motivated meanings could be associated with colour words, like when credits are notated in *black* ink, and debts in *red* (Philip 2006: 61, 80). Examining the use of colour-word metaphors in English and Italian, Philip (2006) pays particular attention to the ways in which colour words take on connotative meanings and to the similarities and differences across the two languages. The author hypothesizes that because the colours chosen in conventional linguistic expressions are not selected actively by the speaker, but rather predetermined by the habitual patterns of the language, these language habits subsequently affect the speaker's, and the language community's perception of colour.

Evaluating the responses to bright colours, Saito (1996) and Hemphill (1996) find that brighter colours – including *white, pink, red, yellow, blue, purple*, and *green* – evoke positive responses, whereas darker ones – including *black* and *gray* – evoke negative responses. Positive responses include happiness, excitement, relaxation, and being positive, whereas negative responses are related to anxiety, boredom, sadness, and being negative. In another subsequent study charged with examining the emotional responses of college students to five principle colours, Kaya – Epps (2004) find that the colour *green* evokes positive emotions such as relaxation and comfort. As for the achromatic colours, they find that *white* has the largest number of positive responses. By the same token, Manav (2007) finds that responses to bright colour samples are positive. These findings seem to be in line with those of Meier and his colleagues (Meier et al. 2004; Meier et al. 2007) who are inclined to establish a compulsory systematic association between brightness and valence. That is, light colours automatically elicit a positive evaluation of objects, whereas dark colours elicit a negative one.

Allan (2009) investigates the connotations of English colour terms *black, white, grey, brown, yellow, red, green, blue* and a few miscellaneous colours in terms of 'X-phemisms'; a term which was used in Allan – Burridge (2006) to describe the union set of orthophemisms (straight-talking), dysphemisms (offensive language), and euphemisms (sweet-talking). Orthophemisms and euphemisms are a substitution for words, phrases, or expressions that are offensive or unpleasant, using less offensive language. The use of orthophemisms and euphemisms could be enhanced by the need to hide the identity of the subject of the conversation from potential eavesdroppers, or by the need to be polite. That is, euphemisms and orthophemisms could be used to protect the speaker's as well as the addressee's face. The only difference between orthophemism and euphemism is that the former is typically more formal and more direct (literal) than euphemism, whereas the latter is typically more colloquial and figurative than orthophemism. This means that orthophemistic expressions (straight-talking) are neither sweet-talking, or overtly polite, nor harsh or offensive.

Unlike euphemism, dysphemism refers to the use of an offensive or harsh word or expression instead of a sweet one. Summing up, Allan – Burridge (2006: 34) explain that language expression could be preferred or dispreferred. The preferred language expression could be orthophemism such as *faeces* which is more formal and more direct or euphemism such as *poo* which is more colloquial and more figurative. The dispreferred is termed dysphemism such as *shit*. Classifying colours in terms of "X-phemisms" necessitates discussing the metaphorical uses of colours. In relation to this, Allan (2009: 626) says that colour-based metaphors (and metonyms) are a subclass of appearance-based metaphors, in

that colours are associated with certain perceivable objects (Davidoff 1997; Allan 2001: 306). Additional examples of all three types of "X-phemisms" are *pass away* (typically a euphemism), *snuff it* (typically a dysphemism), and *die* (typically an orthophemism).

Following Allan (2009), I classify the connotations of Arabic colour terms, exploring their euphemistic and dysphemistic connotations, with the discussion being geared to the colour-based metaphors (and metonyms) that are common in Jordanian Arabic, though occasional but unsystematic examples of colour-based metaphors existing in other languages are discussed. The study shows, in agreement with Allan (2009: 627), that dysphemistic connotations of colours are more common than euphemistic ones, besides the fact that the orthophemistic connotations of Arabic colours surveyed are infinite. The colours investigated in this study are *black*, *white*, *yellow*, *red*, *green* and *blue*; the most connotationally important primary colour terms in Arabic and the most widespread colour categories across languages. They are more universal than the colour terms in the later stages of the Berlin – Kay's (1969) model, such as *brown*, *purple*, *pink*, *orange* or *grey*.

3. Data collection

The data for this study were obtained primarily from newspapers, TV-series, books and from the *Dictionary of Colours and Names Associated with Them*. I also aimed to informally ask colleagues, students, friends and relatives whom I know very well in informal settings about the common connotative meanings of colour terms and the words that colour names normally collocate with. I also asked them about their evaluation of the extended meanings of colour terms, as being positive or negative.

The adoption of face-to-face conversational interviews as a qualitative research method is beneficial when compared to the method of questionnaires, as it provides data that exactly describe the informants' conception of their behaviour and of social reality in general. Compared to structured interviews, the open-ended interview – or "ethnographic interview" in Puch's (2005: 172) terms – is viewed as being more flexible and thus more reliable in the provision of valid responses about the informants' perceptions of their experiences and reality. Burns (2000: 425) emphasises the significance of this type of interviewing, saying that it enables the interviewer to spend a great portion of time with the interviewee, and this of course entails high response rates. Furthermore, answers to questions will be provided from the interviewee's point of view and not shaped and affected by the interviewer's perspective. The absence of specific questions means that informants use natural language rather than trying to find specific lexis and expressions which they think would be regarded as an appropriate answer. In support of this argument, Gomm (2004: 220) points out that some researchers view this approach to interviews to be naturalistic on the ground that these interviews are similar to conversations or chats, and that the relationship that holds the interviewer and the interviewee is almost built on a friendship basis.

In a completely informal style and in a stress-free environment, the interviewer started by asking each respondent about his/her evaluation of the secondary meanings of colour terms under study as being positive or negative. The interviewer then moved to the second part of the interview which was aimed at getting the respondents' justification for their positive or negative evaluations of the secondary meanings of colour terms. Respondents

justified their evaluation using common Jordanian idiomatic expressions that include colour terms. The colours examined in this study were selected on the basis of being the most common and frequently used colours in Arabic. The data collection activity took place in my office (4 colleagues and 5 students) at the Department of English Language and Literature at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University and in my house (5 friends and 6 relatives).

As for newspapers, I detected the use of colour terms in three electronic Jordanian newspapers, namely *Ammonnews*, *Sarayanews*, and *Assawsana*[1] for two reasons: First, to enrich my understanding of the multiple connotative meanings of Arabic colour terms. Second, to check if there is matching between the answers received in the informal interviews and those from the electronic newspapers in terms of the evaluation of the connotative meanings of colour terms as being positive or negative. As mentioned in Section 1, this study is concerned with examining the culturally decided connotations, and not the associations that seem to rely on individuals' previous knowledge. The present study is assumed to examine the established and conventional connotations of the basic Arabic terms (colour idioms) that all people are assumed to know. With this in mind, it is not extremely significant to include in this study the contextualized uses of colour terms. Decontextualised uses of Arabic colour terms are likely to provide an informative picture of the positive and negative extended meanings of colour terms. Though dictionaries are less likely to faithfully and completely reflect any language system, it is nevertheless reasonable to use such source of data, plus the informal interviews and newspapers, to capture an overall understanding of the positive and negative connotative meanings of Arabic colour terms.

4. Discussion

In this section, I discuss the X-phemistic uses of Arabic colour terms (*black*, *white*, *yellow*, *red*, *green*, and *blue*). As mentioned in Section 2, this study is designed to exploring the Arabic colour-based metaphors (and metonyms) with especial reference to Jordanian Arabic.

4.1 Black

In Arabic, *black* could be used dysphemistically, euphemistically, and orthophemistically. When used dysphemistically, *black* is nearly always associated with mischievous, soiled, and evil issues. Therefore, *a black plot* (xtˤah sawda?)[2] is a secret plan to accomplish hostile, unlawful, or evil purpose; *black-handed* (aswad alyadayn) could be used to signify a person with unclean or dirty hands; and the expression *black-deeds* (aˤmal sawda?) may signify deceit, malice, and evil. Also, *a black mark in one's record* (ˤalamah sawda? fi sˤafħat almr?) is used to represent things that have a negative impact; *black magic* (assiħir al-aswad) could be used to describe the unseen and demonic magic; and *black spite* (ħiqid aswad) connotes a high degree of hostility, frowning, and outrage. Dysphemistic uses of *black* seem to be more common than euphemistic and even more common than orthophemistic ones. That said, *black luck* (ħaðˤ aswad) is often associated with bad luck, and *a black-hearted* (aswad

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[1] These newspapers could be accessed at: <http://www.ammonnews.net>, <http://www.sarayanews.com>, and <http://www.assawsana.com>.
[2] See appendix for phonetic symbols.

al-galb) person is a one who is full of hatred. If someone is described as having a *black day* (yawm aswad), this may mean that one is having a bad end. Also, *black frost* (asˤaqeeˤ al-aswad) is associated with a severe freezing that results in the internal freezing and death of vegetation, and *black list* (alqa?imah assawda?) symbolizes a list of banned and dangerous issues and people. Perceived negatively, the *black-livered* (aswad al-kabid) was used by ancient Arabs[3] to describe enemies of strong hostility. These examples could substantiate, as mentioned in Section 1, the negative value of *black* in the cultural context of Jordan.

Realizing the negative connotations of *black*, some people strategically avoid the mentioning of *black*. In Egyptian Arabic, for instance, the word *black* could be phonetically modified to the extent it is no longer recognised as *black*. So, instead of (yanhar iswid!) *what a **black** day!* Egyptians are more likely to say (yanhar iswiħ). Alternatively, Egyptians are also more inclined to replace *black* by *white*, and this seems to be clear when saying *what a white* day! (yanhar abyadˤ), or *what white news*! (ya xabar abyadˤ) in reaction to bad and *black* news. Such lexical replacement is mostly enhanced by the need of being polite while addressing others. That is, people are aware of the need to protect the addressee's as well as the speaker's face.

Worldwide, *black* has negative connotations, and in many languages it is directly related to depression, pessimism or anger (Soriano – Valenzuela 2009: 422). It is associated in all nations, with the exception of Mexico, with fear (Hupka et al. 1997: 166). Oyama et al. (1963) report in their study that Japanese subjects connected *red* with anger and *black* with fear. *Black* which symbolizes death, deceit, fear, hatred (Jobes 1962) is also evaluated as protective (Adams – Osgood 1973; Murray – Deabler 1957; Schaie 1961; Wexner 1954), and as an impetus for aggressive behaviour (Frank – Gilovich 1988). *Black* is associated in western communities with funereal clothes and other matters pertaining to death (Allan 2009: 627). All these reinforce the dysphemistic uses of *black*.

It is worth noting that, like *red* and *white*, when *black* appears in dual form in Arabic, it is interpreted as referring to precisely two of the entities. The dual *black* could have either euphemistic or dysphemistic connotations, in that *al-aswadan = the two blacks* (nominative case) signifies *date* and *water*, whereas *al-aswadayin = the two blacks* (accusative case) is another way to mention *snake* and *scorpion*. In relation to this, two points need to be clarified. First, water is not *black* in colour, yet because it is used in combination with *date* which is mostly *black*, both *date* and *water* are called the *two blacks*. This is to propose that *date* and *water* are irreversible coordinates in that *water and date* is rarely used. The foregrounding of *date* is not without reason. That said, *date* collocates with *water* only but *water* could collocate with many words other than *date*. Second, whereas *al-aswadan = the two blacks* (nominative case) is used euphemistically to symbolise *date* and *water*, *al-aswadayin = the two blacks* (accusative case) is used dysphemistically to signify *snake* and *scorpion*. Euphemistic uses of *black* in Arabic include the *black* hair and *black* eyes of women, which are considered as signs of the beauty of women.

4.2 White

White, which symbolizes mourning or death in East Asia (Paul – Okan 2010: 950), is viewed positively in Arabic as it is mostly associated with purity and innocent, harmless,

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[3] Ancient Arabs or Arabs of ancient Western Arabia were fluent speakers of classical Arabic.

and evil-free issues. Seen in this light, *white-hearted* (abyadˁul galb) symbolizes a person who has a *white* heart (pure heart); a person who is honest, good natured, and very giving of his/herself. If someone has been told s/he has a *white* heart, then it is a great compliment. Similarly, the *white line* (al-xatˁ al-abyadˁ) is used orthophemistically to indicate the appearance of day light and fading of the black light.

A *white-record* (sˁafħatuhu baydˁ?) person is often used to describe a person who has a good reputation, and a *white lie* (kiðbih baydˁ?) is an acceptable and harmless lie. Also, a *white flag* (al-rayah al-baydˁ?) is a symbol of truce and surrender, and could be associated with the *white dove* (al-ħamamah al-baydˁ?) which is a symbol of peace. In Egypt, people are likely to greet one another using *have a white day!* (naharak abyadˁ), and this could mirror people's positive perception of *white*. In Section 4.1, I pointed to Egyptians' euphemistic use of *white* and said that Egyptians are predisposed to replacing *black* by *white*, and this is clearly apparent in their saying *what a white day!* (yanhar abyadˁ) or *what white news!* (ya xabar abyadˁ) in reaction to bad and *black* news. Euphemistic uses of *white* are more common than their dysphemistic counterparts. In support of this, a *white-eyed* (ˁein-uh beidˁa) person is often used euphemistically in Jordanian Arabic to politely describe someone who lost sight. The whiteness of eyes is indicative of sight loss. That said, *may Allah whiten your face excluding eyes* (bayyadˁallah widʒhak ħeiʃa eˁunak) could be used as a conventional expression in colloquial Jordanian Arabic to thank someone who has helped you get out of a difficult problem. However, in colloquial Jordanian Arabic and in some southern parts of Jordan, *a white-eyed* (ˁeinha beidˁa) woman could be dysphemistically used to describe a female who is rude and disrespectful of others and a one who has a strong personality more than is required. A *white land* (al-ardˁ al-baydˁ?) symbolizes the unplanted land, whereas a *black land (*al-ardˁ al-sawda?), as used by ancient Arabs, refers to the planted land. This is because ancient Arabs used to perceive and call everything relevant to vegetation *black*.

In Arabic, a *white-handed* (ðu al-ayadi al-baydˁ?) person is associated with a philanthropist who has altruistic concern for human welfare and advancement, usually represented by donations of money, property, or work to needy people and to socially useful purposes. *White revolution* (aθθawrah al-baydˁ?) signifies a peaceful, bloodless political coup that achieves targets without resorting to the use of violence. However, if violence is used, the revolution is called a *red revolution* (aθθawrah al-ħamra?). This opposition indeed seems to be consistent with that between *white terror* and *red terror*, in that "[…] *red* has the connotation of revolution and *white* that of reaction, as the fixed collocation *White* terror shows" (Crisp – Chang 1987: 53). In an article published in *Ammonnews* (an electronic Jordanian newspaper) on the 24th of October, 2010, The Jordanian Minister of Education announced that "we are on the verge of a *white revolution* in the education sector" and this means, as ratified by what was mentioned in the body of the article, that positive and constructive developments will be in effect and use as a way to uplift education in Jordan. *White helmets* (al-xawðat al-baydˁ?) is used to describe a commission whose main target is to provide relief and assistance services to the Palestinian population in Gaza strip. Viewed in this way, *white* has been used positively.

White gold (aððahab al-baydˁ), used orthophemistically, is an alloy of gold and at least one white metal, usually nickel, manganese or palladium. Another orthophemistic use of *white* is *white arms* or *white weapons* (assilaħ al-baydˁ) which is a common Arabic term

for any non-firearm type weapon used for self-defence or killing, including swords, daggers, spears, batons, and cleavers. These weapons were the basis of arming the troops before the spread of firearms in the 15ᵗʰ and 16ᵗʰ century. Such weapons started to disappear gradually in the eighteenth century and the spear and the sword remained as arms in some units of the cavalry until the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas cleavers and daggers remained the cutting weapons of commando forces and paratroopers.

It seems that the colour *white* has more euphemistic than dysphemistic associations in Arabic and English. This being the case, *white death* (al-mawt al-baydˤ) is euphemistically used to connote sudden death. In English, *white death* could be used as another name of the great white shark. It might be that *white death* is used orthophemistically in English to mirror the white colour of sharks, and euphemistically, perhaps, to avoid the mentioning of the voracious and dangerous sharks. The Arabic *white death* could be contrasted with the *black death* (al-mawt al-aswad), which is used dysphemistically as a lexical alternative to plague, an epidemic disease that causes high mortality. *White plague* (atˤtˤaʕoon al-baydˤ) has also dysphemistic connotations, as it could be used to describe any epidemic disease, such as tuberculosis and pneumonic cancer, which makes the patients appear pale.

White-faced (al-wadʒih al-baydˤ) and *black-faced* (al-wadʒih al-aswad) are oppositional in that they are often used to represent success or failure to fulfil one's promise. *White* and *black* are the two colours that have the longest history among colour terms in all languages in the world including Chinese (Xing 2009). This is because they are the most contrastive and easily identified colours (Tao 1994; Baxter 1983; Hays et al. 1972). For this reason, *white* magic is good, *black* magic is bad (Allan 2009: 628). In relation to this, Philip (2006: 75) says that "while black – the antithesis of light – is linked to activities that take place under the cover of darkness, white is the reflection of light and thus assumes positive connotative values associated with daylight, including clarity, visibility, honesty, and perfection". However, there is an opposition of *red* and *white* in English with regard to the directly opposed connotations of purity-chastity and lurid sexuality; "the connotations of purity and chastity for white have already been noted, that of lurid sexuality for red is shown in fixed collocations such as a *red light district*" (Crisp – Chang 1987: 53).

In Saudi Arabia, there are many proverbs that highlight the significance and positive meaning of *white*. As a result, in *not all appeared white is a back of camel* (Ma kul abaydˤ ðˤahir ðalool), a *white-backed* camel is used as a metonymy for a fat camel. In other words, the back of camel turns *white* due to camel carrying many loads and due to being overridden. The pragmatic implicature of this Arabic metonymy is that not every fat animal is fit for carrying heavy loads and for riding in much the same way camels are. The proverb *he cut it and the place of cutting is white* (qassaha waiða maqassuha abaydˤ) is a metonymy for the high cutting speed. If a limb of the body is quickly cut, then the cutting place appears *white*, as blood hasn't gushed yet. If slowly cut, the cutting place appears *red* as blood will have rushed out already. As outlined in Section 1, *white* is almost viewed positively in the Jordanian context, and the same perception of this colour could be true in the whole Arab world.

4.3 Yellow

Yellow, in line with Allan (2009: 630), is less likely to be used euphemistically. "Yellow is nearly always orthophemistic, but occasionally dysphemistic". In Jordanian Arabic, yellow

is likely to be viewed overwhelmingly negative. That said, *as yellow as lemon* (asˁfar kasˁafar allaymoon) could be used in Arabic to describe people who are fearful or diseased. *Yellow-eyed* (ʕuyounuh sˁufur) and *yellow-skinned* (dʒilduh asˁfar) are used metonymically to stand for people with liver disease; people who are jaundiced. A *yellow leaf* (waraqatuh sˁafra) person may be used to describe an elderly person who, due to illness, is expected to die soon. This is because when leaves turn yellow in autumn, they start to fall of the trees, and yellowness is seen in this context as an indication of the end of their life cycle. *Yellow air* (al-hawaʔ al- asˁfar) is used to connote cholera, whereas *the yellow wind* (arreeħ al-sˁafraʔ) is a book by David Grossman who describes the conflict between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. *Yellow pens* (al-aqlam al-sˁufur) refer to pens whose owners' main aim is to fulfil personal interests in their writings at the expense of others'. Summing up, the connotations of *yellow* seem to be predominantly dysphemistic.

Yellow represents warmth in the USA, but infidelity in France. It is associated with jealousy in Russia, but pleasant, happy, good taste, royalty in China (Paul – Okan 2010: 953). Examining the patterns of connotation in Chinese and English colour terms, Crisp – Chang (1987: 57) report that though the predominant connotations of *yellow* and *huang* (yellow) are both attitudinally negative, their contents are different. That is, whereas *yellow* is associated with cowardice, *huang* refers metonymically to pornography. They state that other connotations of *huang* such as nobility, reverence, honor and maturity are positive. Allan (2009: 630) contends that it is very actively dysphemistic and insulting to call someone *yellow* or *yellow-bellied* "cowardly and craven". Likewise, Soriano – Valenzuela (2009: 422) report that *yellow* which is associated with cowardice in English is associated with envy in German (*Gelb vor Neid sein*, "to be yellow with envy"). Additional nations that associate *yellow* with envy are Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, and Turkey (Osgood et al. 1975: 327).

In an article published in the Jordanian electronic newspaper *Ammonnews* on the 25th of June 2011 under the ironic heading of *"Towards a yellow Jordan"* it was reported that dozens of environmental activists opposed and protested the government's intention to cut down the trees of Bargash[4] forest in order to build a new college. Protesters used slogans denouncing the government's decision and demonstrated that the execution of the *green* spots in the kingdom is likely to turn Jordan into *yellow* areas. This and other examples could substantiate the negative symbolic value of *yellow* in the Jordanian context.

4.4 Red

In addition to its orthophemistic uses, *red* could be used both euphemistically and dysphemistically. However, negative connotations seem to be more common than their positive counterparts. *Red* is associated with dangers and hardships. So, when a player receives a *red card* (al-bitˁaqah al-ħamraʔ) in a game, it means expulsion from the game. In Arabic, the perception of *red* by the two sexes could be different, in that *red clothing* (al-malabis al-ħamraʔ) may be sought after by women and rejected by men. In Arabic, *red death* could be negatively associated with something that is too bad. A possible interpretation is that because one could be blinded by horror and anger, one could see the world *red* in one's eyes. *Red death* could also be used to describe any extremely painful disease such as renal

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[4] Bargash is a forest located in the city of Ajloun in Jordan.

colic, murdering death, hard death, or any hardship one might be in. Anger is associated with *red* in many languages, where one can find expressions such as the French *rouge de rage* ("red with anger"), though in Thai, a "body turning green" belongs to an angry person (Soriano – Valenzuela 2009: 422). In Zulu, the angry heart is said to be *red* (Taylor – Mbense 1998: 202–3). By the same token, Japanese connect *red* with anger and jealousy (Oyama et al. 1963). Seen as a colour of doubt and suspicion, *red* is dysphemistically extended in Saudi Arabia to describe suspected people. So, when one is described as having *red hair* (ʃaʕrtuh ħamra), this connotes a person who is always unjustly accused, always suspected, always less trusted, and always blamed upon. The story of this common Arabic metonymy could be explained as when the hair is *red* in colour, anyone might doubt that and think that the hair is not really *red* but dyed *red*. When someone is described as *red-faced* (wadʒhuhu aħmar), this could mean that one is embarrassed or shameful. The face turns *red* when blood involuntarily rushes to the face in an extraordinary response to embarrassment or shame. *Redness* of face in this context should be distinguished from that caused by anger and illness.

In Arabic, to show someone a *red eye* (fardʒah el-ʕein el-ħamra) is to warn and threaten him. *Spending a red night* (amdʕa laylah ħamra?) or *a red evening* (sahrah ħamra?) is an expression that is always associated with a pornographic night or evening. By the same token, *red wax seal* (ʃamiʕ aħmar) has dysphemistic connotation, in that it is often understood as a mark of the closure of law-violating shops, institutions, etc. However, *red* is positively used in *The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, in that this humanitarian movement was founded to protect human life and health and to assuage the human suffering, without any discrimination based on nationality, race, sex, religious beliefs, class or political opinions.

Worldwide, *red* means unlucky in Nigeria and Germany, but lucky in China, Denmark and Argentina. It represents ambition and desire in India and love in China, Korea and Japan (Paul – Okan 2010: 953). Philip (2006: 80) says that as part of the metonymically-motivated meanings associated with *red* is found in finance, where credits are notated in *black* ink, and debits in *red*. The expressions *in(to) the red* and *out of the red / into the black* serve to differentiate and highlight the contrasting sides of the account. Though the previous examples highlight the negative and dysphemistic uses of *red*, the same colour has many euphemistic uses in many languages. This being the case, *red* could serve as the colour of authority, importance and royalty and this is represented by *rolling out the red carpet* for someone to give him/her *a [right] royal welcome* (Philip 2006: 80). Moreover, euphemisms for menstruation use figures such as *the Red Sea's in, it's a red letter day, riding the red rag, flying the red flag, surfing the red wave, red sails in the sunset, snatch box decorated with red roses,* and *her cherry is in sherry* (Allan 2009: 632).

Ancient Arabs also used *red* to connote positive and negative meanings. This being the case, *the two reds* (al-aħmaran) could stand for gold and saffron, bread and meat, or bread and wine. A *red afternoon* (ħamra? al-ðʕaheerah) is often associated with a very hot afternoon. If someone is called *red* then he might be unarmed. It is also insulting and dysphemistic to call someone *red* nowadays. For ancient Arabs, *red* was sometimes used to signify *white* and was used to describe non-Arabs, whereas *black* is used to describe Arabs. Because Arabs tend to be *brown* in colour they are called *black*, and because non-Arabs tend to be *white*, they are described *red*, bearing in mind, as said, that what was *white* was

called *red*. *Red camels* (ħumur al-niʕam) are really *white* camels. If *red* was perceived *white* by ancient Arabs, then what was the colour *white* used for? Indeed, it was used to indicate anything pure and free from defects.

4.5 Green

Though *green* symbolizes danger or disease in Malaysia (Paul – Okan 2010: 953) and envy in Spanish (Soriano – Valenzuela 2009: 422) and in the United States (Hupka 1997: 167), it could be seen, in agreement with Allan (2009: 633), as the most restful colour, as it symbolizes different positive concepts such as growth, harmony, health, and safety. In Arabic, *a green-toothed* (axdˤar annawadʒið) person could be used to describe a healthy person who constantly eats spring onion and leek. A *green light* (adˤdˤuʔ al-axdˤar) is viewed as the mark of safety and permission to pass through something and walk. Though *green* apples, pears and peaches, said Allan, are unripe and thus unpalatable, *green fish* (samak axdˤar) could be used positively in the Jordanian context to symbolize fresh fish. *Green-handed* (al-ayadi al-xadˤraʔ) seems to be positively used to describe a successful gardener; everything he/she plants in the ground grows well. The connection between *green* and plant life is also used in English and present in the expression *to have green fingers* (Philip 2006: 83).

 There are many positive connotations of *green*. The *Green Revolution* (aθθawrah al-xadˤraʔ) is a term used to describe the international efforts to increase food production in developing countries. This indeed demonstrates the positive use of *green* in this context. *Greenpeace* (assalam al-axdˤar) is a non-governmental environmental organisation that is aimed at changing the industrial and governmental policies that threaten the natural world. It draws attention to the dangers – global warming, deforestation, overfishing, commercial whaling and anti-nuclear issues – that threaten the environment. Without recourse to the use of force, members of *greenpeace* use the means of direct nonviolent protest. *Green vehicles* (assayarat al-xadˤraʔ) or environmentally friendly vehicles are hybrid electric vehicles that are powered by alternative fuels. *Green power* (atˤtˤaqah al-xadˤraʔ) represents the renewable energy resources and technologies that are environmentally friendly. In an article published in *Ammonnews* on the 11th of September 2009 under the heading of *the green Jordanian Petroleum: Jordanians are preparing to reap the fruits of 17 million olive trees*, *green* petroleum is positively used to refer metonymically to olive trees. The title is indicative of the fact that Jordan is not an oil-producing country, and this stresses the positive value of the *green* olive trees as an alternative for oil.

 Allan (2009) says that unripe fruit such as apples, pears and peaches is *green* and thus unpalatable. He also says that the negative features of *green* have been transferred and extended to dysphemistically describe things and people. When people and things are dysphemistically called *green*, then they are immature, inexperienced, undeveloped, unripe, and raw. Instances of such negative extension do exist in colloquial Jordanian Arabic, in that *a green leaf* (waraqatuh xadˤra) person could be used to describe someone who died in his prime. This is to be contrasted with *yellow leaf* (waraqatuh sˤafra) person, an expression which could be used to describe an elderly person who, as explained in Section 4.3, is expected to die soon. A *green wood* (ʕuduh axdˤar) *person* symbolizes a boy or a man who is immature or inexperienced. In *green clothes* (ɣaseel axdˤar) and *green mix concrete* (tˤeenih xadˤra), *green* is negatively used to stress that clothes and mix concrete are not dry

yet. Also in Jordanian Arabic, a *green-souled* (nifsuh xadˤra) man could be used to describe an old and married man who, however old and married, loves the opposite sex and keeps trying to make self, through some patterns of behaviour, younger in the eyes of women. Such line of behaviour is not welcome by people and is a reason to disrespect him. Summing up, the connotations of the colour *green* seem to be dysphemistic when associated with people or things that are immature, inexperienced, or non-dry.

4.6 Blue

Blue is the colour of the unclouded sky and sea, and is often associated with highly positive values such as tranquillity and calmness. Light *blue* is a symbol of cleanliness, in that most hospitals are internally painted light *blue*. Filters used to purify water, and cleaning liquids are mostly *blue* in colour. Light *blue* as such is associated with health, healing and tranquillity. Because boys, in comparison with girls, are dressed in *blue*, some propose that *blue* is a masculine colour. In colloquial Jordanian Arabic, metaphorical uses of *blue* seem to be predominantly dysphemistic, in that *blue-blooded* (dammuh azrag) – which symbolizes a person of noble birth in English – could be used as equivalent to *black-hearted* (aswad al-galb). *Someone with blue canine tooth* (nabuh azrag) could stand for a fox-like person who is skillful at deception. When someone's face is described as turning *blue*, then someone seems to be getting sick, or someone fell unconscious. If someone says the *blue* demons are playing in front of my eyes, then someone could be in a state of extreme anger. A *blue* prison uniform is associated with convicts, and the colour of prison uniform could differ from one country to another. It could be insulting to call someone *blue*, and the colour *blue* was used by ancient Arabs in their prose and poetry to describe an enemy of a high degree of hostility. In relation to this, Al-Hareeree (1900) says:

> What is that better than *green* living and visiting the *yellow* beloved? My *white* day was *blackened*, and my *black* hair was *whitened* and when the *blue* enemy was visible to me, then (I said) how lovely the *red* death is. (Translated by the author)

In the above text, *green living* is used as a metonymy for the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous. The *yellow beloved* is the diseased sweetheart. The *blackening* of the *white* day is a metonymy for the many worries and hardships. The *whitening* of the black *hair* is another metonymy for old age and weakness. The *blueness* of enemy is a metonymy for the enemy's high degree of hostility. *Red* death is a metonymy for the severity of the type of death which might include blood shedding.

Blue bead (al-xarazaeh azzarga) could be used euphemistically in Jordanian culture as part of the preventive measures against the evil eye which is believed to be a look causing bad luck, and sometimes death, for the person at whom it is directed for reasons of envy or dislike. In Jordanian culture, like the case in some other Arab cultures, babies and young children are thought to be the main victims of the evil eye because they are often praised by strangers and childless men and women. As a preventive measure to avoid the evil eye, some parents in Jordanian culture attach a *blue* bead to the clothes of babies and young children. Though this is a superstitious belief, people keep hanging *blue* beads inside cars, houses, and on babies' clothes as a way to avoid the envious and ill-wishing looks of others. Seen in this light, *blue* seems to be viewed positively by people.

The story of *blue beads* dates back to pharaohs who used to believe that gemstones such as *blue beads* have magical and protective power besides their function as adornments (Al-dred 1978). Ancient Egyptians believed in three colours: *red, green,* and *blue*; the colours that were prevalent in their jewelry. *Red* symbolizes the *red* blood that goes on in the veins and gives life and activity. *Green* symbolizes the greenery of crops. *Blue* is linked to the *blue* sky where the sun (the symbol of the god of ancient Egyptians) swims and where the god, that protects and blesses people, lives. The belief in the magical power of gemstones such as *blue beads* passed from one generation to generation until it reached today's world with the people knowing nothing about the origin of that myth.

Though *blue bead* is used for the prevention of envy, *blue-eyed* (ʕuyounuh zurug) seems to be always used dysphemistically to connote the worst enviers. In Jordanian culture, the common metonymy of "*blue-eyed and spaced-teeth*" (ʕuyounuh zurug wa snanuh furug) person could describe an enormously envious person. *Blue-eyed* is currently used to always describe detrimental envious people, and ancient Arabs used *blue-eyed* to describe enemies of a high degree of hostility. In spite of the positive connotation of *blue bead*, the uses of *blue* seem to be predominantly dysphemistic. This finding does not conform to Allan's (2009), in that the uses of *blue* are found to be rarely euphemistic in Jordanian Arabic.

5. Conclusion

This study has attempted over the previous sections to investigate the connotative meanings of colour terms, *black, white, yellow, red, green* and *blue* in Arabic in general and in Jordanian Arabic in particular. The study, adopting Allan's (2009) approach, classified the connotations of colour terms in Arabic, positive and negative, in terms of "X-phemisms"; a term which was used in Allan – Burridge (2006) to describe the union set of orthophemisms, dysphemisms, and euphemisms. In Jordanian Arabic, all colors have euphemistic and dysphemistic connotations but while *black, yellow, red* and *blue* were found to be predominantly dysphemistic and associated with mostly negative connotations, *white* is used euphemistically, and mostly has positive connotations, yet *green* is found to be having both euphemistic and dysphemistic connotations.

Black has dysphemistic connotations more often than *yellow, red* and *blue* do, and this is in fact not a specific feature of Jordanian Arabic but it is a thing common to most languages. Allan (2009: 636) points out that in English, "black is used orthophemistically but not euphemistically; it has dysphemistic connotations more often than other colours do". In Jordanian Arabic, *black* could be linked to mischievous, soiled, and evil issues. It could also be associated with unseen and demonic magic, bad luck, bad end, enemies with strong hostility. Euphemistic associations of *black* seem to be relatively few and only three examples were found to be examples of positive connotations: *black-eyed, black-haired*, and *the two blacks* (nominative case) as signifying date and water. It could be said that the above expressions are culture-specific in that they are unique to Arabic language in general and Jordanian Arabic in particular.

White mostly has positive connotations and is often used euphemistically. It is positively associated with purity and innocent, harmless, and evil-free issues. *White-hearted, white flag, white dove, white revolution* and *white helmets* are all examples of positive associations.

White seems to be rarely used dysphemistically in Jordanian Arabic, as is clear in a *white-eyed* woman; an expression which could be used to describe a rude woman who has a strong personality more than is required, and *a white land* which is used to describe the unplanted land. These findings seem to be in line with Allan's (2009), in that white is found to be linked to light and purity, and it mostly has positive connotations in English.

In contrast to *white*, *yellow* is rarely used euphemistically. This being the case, *yellow-eyed* and *yellow-skinned* which could be used to describe people who are jaundiced, a *yellow leaf* person which could be used as a way to describe an elderly person who is expected to die soon, and *yellow air* which is often used to connote cholera are all examples of dysphemistic uses of *yellow*. In English, yellow is nearly always orthophemistic but occasionally dysphemistic. "Yellow is dysphemistically used of cowards and cheap paper, and sometimes of East Asiatic people; but it is orthophemistic and positively used of light-coloured African Americans" (Allan 2009: 636).

Negative connotations of *red* seem to be predominant, in that *red card* means expulsion from the game, and *red death* is negatively associated with something that is too bad, and could be used dysphemistically as a lexical alternative to any extremely painful disease such as renal colic. *Red hair* stands for unjustly accused person. *Red afternoon* could be used dysphemistically to represent a very hot afternoon. *The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement* is the only occurrence of *red* in positive figurative expression. These findings seem to conform to that of Allan (2009: 631) in that in English *red* has more dysphemistic than euphemistic associations. Instances of dysphemistic association of *red* in English include *Red Indians, to be in the red, red tape, red herring*, etc.

The uses of *blue* seem to be also predominantly dysphemistic; *blue-blooded* which could be used to dysphemistically describe someone who dislikes others, *someone with blue canine tooth* which could be used to describe someone who is skilled at deception, and *blue demons* as uttered by person who could be in a state of extreme anger are all instances of dysphemistic uses of *blue*. It would be also dysphemistic and insulting to call someone *blue*. The only positive connotation of *blue* occurs in the *blue bead* which is used as a preventive method against evil eye. Unlike the case in Arabic, the uses of blue are rarely dysphemistic in English and in relation to this, Allan (2009: 636) says:

> As the colour of the Madonna's robe, blue is connected with the virtuousness and chastity of a bride. The negative aspects of figurative uses of blue arise from fear, fighting, despodency, and tabooed language and behaviour. It is arguable that the use of blue to speak about these topics is euphemistic and that uses of blue are rarely dysphemistic.

Green symbolizes different positive connotations such as growth, harmony, health, and safety. *Green-toothed, green-handed, Green Revolution, green peace, green vehicles,* and *green power* are all examples of positive associations of green. However, *green leaf* person, someone who died in his prime; *green-wood* person, someone who is immature or inexperienced; and *green-souled* as used to describe an old and married man who loves the opposite sex and who likes to appear younger in the eyes of women are all examples of dysphemistic uses of green. In English green is linked to living vegetation, and negative connotations arise when it is the colour of illness or jealousy (Allan 2009).

Appendix: Phonetic Symbols used in the study

b: Voiced bilabial plosive

m: Bilabial nasal

f: Voiceless labiodental fricative

d: Voiced dental plosive

t: Voiceless dental plosive

n: Dental nasal

ð: Voiced dental fricative

θ: Voiceless dental fricative

z: Voiced alveolar fricative

s: Voiceless alveolar fricative

r: Alveolar trill

ʒ: Voiced postalveolar fricative

ʃ: Voiceless postalveolar fricative

dʒ: Voiced postalveolar affricate

tʃ: Voiceless postalveolar affricate

l: Postalveolar lateral approximant

j: Palatal approximant

g: Voiced velar plosive

k: Voiceless velar plosive

ɣ: Voiced velar fricative

x: Voiceless velar fricative

w: Labio-velar approximant

q: Voiceless uvular plosive

ʕ: Voiced pharyngeal fricative

h: Voiceless pharyngeal fricative

ʔ: Glottal plosive

h: Voiceless glottal fricative

Pharyngealised consonants are marked with ˤ: tˤ, dˤ, sˤ, ðˤ, lˤ. (Adopted from Suleiman 1985: 30)

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