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# Semantic Expansion of Primary Colour Adjectives: A Cognitive Semantic Analysis

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the semantic expansion of primary colour adjectives *merah* (red), *biru* (blue), and *kuning* (yellow) within classical Malay texts using a cognitive semantic framework grounded in Prototype Theory. Drawing on 443 tokens extracted from the Malay Concordance Project (MCP) corpus, the research reveals that these adjectives function not merely as descriptive terms but as culturally embedded conceptual tools that encode emotion, ideology, and social identity. Through prototype mapping and semantic domain analysis, the study demonstrates how literal meanings evolve into symbolic and connotative expressions across genres such as hikayat, pantun, and syair. The findings affirm that meaning in classical Malay discourse is context-sensitive and culturally mediated, offering insights into the cognitive mechanisms that shape linguistic symbolism. This research contributes to the advancement of Malay cognitive semantics and highlights the relevance of Prototype Theory in analyzing culturally grounded lexical structures.

**Keywords:** Cognitive semantics, Prototype Theory, Malay Concordance Project, colour polysemy, cultural symbolism

#### INTRODUCTION

The polysemous nature of primary colour adjectives: merah (red), biru (blue), and kuning (yellow) in classical Malay texts illustrates the fluidity of lexical meaning shaped by cultural, cognitive, and contextual factors. These adjectives, while originally used to describe physical attributes, evolve into symbolic expressions of emotion, status, and ideology. For instance, merah may signify courage, anger, or danger; biru can evoke tranquility, loyalty, or social hierarchy; and kuning may oscillate between royal authority and illness. The Malay Concordance Project (MCP) corpus captures this semantic richness, revealing how classical Malay discourse reflects the dynamic interplay between linguistic form and cultural cognition (Kho Thong Eng, 2023).

Cognitive semantics, particularly Prototype Theory, provides a robust framework for analyzing this semantic expansion. Introduced by Eleanor Rosch (1975), the theory posits that categories are organized around prototypical exemplars, with peripheral meanings emerging through cultural experience and conceptual extension. In the context of Malay colour adjectives, literal meanings serve as cognitive anchors, while symbolic meanings unfold across domains such as emotion, social hierarchy, and cultural values. George Lakoff (1987) emphasizes that prototypes function as default conceptual structures, enabling meaning to be mapped through culturally shared experiences (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin & Rozaimah Rashidin, 2008).

This phenomenon of colour polysemy is not unique to Malay tradition but reflects a broader cross-cultural pattern. In Chinese culture, red symbolizes prosperity and celebration, while in Western contexts it connotes love, danger, or aggression (Berlin & Kay, 1991). Blue may represent sadness in European traditions but purity and harmony in Japanese society (Wierzbicka, 2008). Similarly, yellow is revered in Indian culture as a sacred colour linked to fertility and divinity, contrasting with its Malay associations with royalty or illness. These



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cultural divergences affirm that while sensory perception may be universal, semantic interpretation is culturally contingent and historically situated.

Despite the theoretical depth of Prototype Theory, its empirical application within the MCP corpus remains limited. Many studies adopt descriptive approaches, often overlooking the cognitive mechanisms that drive semantic evolution. This gap is especially evident in interpreting layered meanings in classical Malay texts, which are rich in metaphor and cultural symbolism. The challenge of decoding colour polysemy particularly when adjectives diverge from their literal referents complicates efforts to discern authorial intent and semantic precision. Misinterpretation of symbolic constructs can distort textual meaning and undermine analytical validity (Nur Nazira Nazrii & Hasmidar Hassani, 2021).

Accordingly, this study advances a cognitive semantic analysis of colour polysemy in classical Malay texts, aiming to uncover the mechanisms of semantic expansion and examine how linguistic symbolism shapes cultural identity and worldview. The research objectives are twofold: (1) to investigate the semantic variation of primary colour adjectives in the MCP corpus through prototype mapping and cultural domain analysis; and (2) to explore how literal and connotative meanings evolve and influence textual interpretation. By applying Prototype Theory within a corpus-based paradigm, this study contributes to the advancement of Malay cognitive semantics and offers a nuanced framework for interpreting symbolic language in classical literature.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Polysemy in Malay Lexical Semantics**

Yop Othman et al. (2022) examined polysemy in spontaneous speech among young Malay speakers using Nida's Componential Analysis. Words like *madu*, *gaduh*, and *kurung* revealed semantic shifts shaped by emotional, social, and interactional contexts. The study highlights that polysemy is not merely structural but deeply embedded in everyday communication, reflecting dynamic social relationships and pragmatic nuance.

Complementing this, Kho Thong Eng (2023) analyzed adjectives such as *baik* and *mentah* in Malay texts, showing how a single word can carry literal, connotative, and metaphorical meanings depending on syntax and context. These findings underscore the semantic elasticity of Malay and affirm that understanding polysemy is essential for communicative clarity and interpretive precision in both spoken and literary domains.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that polysemy is not a formalistic linguistic issue but a cognitive and social phenomenon that reflects how language functions across diverse communicative domains. Semantic expansion is shaped not only by linguistic factors but also by cultural experience, social context, and human interaction. Therefore, polysemy research must be situated within a broader cognitive semantic framework to elucidate the complex interplay between linguistic form, meaning, and cultural experience.

#### **Symbolism of Colour in Classical Malay Texts**

Nurizzati Ismail (2014) explored how colours like yellow, red, and blue function as symbolic tools in *Sulalat al-Salatin*, encoding social status, political authority, and emotional depth. Yellow signifies royalty and dignity, while red conveys bravery and lineage. The study positions colour as a semiotic system that reinforces cultural norms and social hierarchy within classical Malay society.

The 2025 Learning Guide expands this view by analyzing colour in texts like *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and *Majnun and Layla*, showing how it conveys emotion, internal conflict, and moral values. Using a hermeneutic approach, the guide emphasizes that colour symbolism enhances narrative engagement and reflects layered cultural meaning. Together, these studies affirm that colour must be interpreted through multiple lenses political, emotional, and ideological.

Critically, these studies offer complementary perspectives on colour symbolism. Nurizzati Ismail (2014) foregrounds the socio-political and hierarchical dimensions of colour, framing it as a symbolic instrument that



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structures social relations in classical Malay society. In contrast, the 2025 Learning Guide focuses on emotional and narrative dimensions, illustrating how colour drives internal conflict and moral messaging. This comparison affirms that colour symbolism cannot be interpreted monolithically; it must be analyzed through multiple lenses—political, social, emotional, and cultural. Colour in classical texts thus emerges as a complex polysemous phenomenon, reflecting not only literary aesthetics but also embedded systems of thought, ideology, and cultural values.

#### **Application of Prototype Theory in Semantic Analysis**

Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al. (2021) applied Prototype Theory to the word *alim* in the DBP corpus, revealing its expansion from religious scholarship to broader social meanings. The study demonstrates that semantic evolution is cognitively and culturally motivated, with core meanings extending into peripheral domains through shared experience and discourse.

Ain Nadhirah Mohd Shah and Rozaimah Rashidin (2021) extended this framework to tabloid media, analyzing how terms related to sexual crime are shaped by dominant cultural prototypes. Their findings show that readers interpret meaning through emotional and moral filters influenced by media framing. Collectively, these studies validate Prototype Theory as a powerful tool for tracing semantic expansion across religious, cultural, and media contexts in Malay.

Together, these studies illustrate the explanatory power of Prototype Theory in tracing semantic expansion across domains from religious and cultural contexts to contemporary media discourse. Despite differing corpora and analytical scopes, both studies affirm that meaning is fluid and contextually shaped through linguistic experience and social interaction. Prototype Theory emerges as a significant cognitive semantic approach for understanding polysemy and meaning dynamics in contemporary Malay language.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative text analysis design to examine the semantic expansion of the primary colour adjectives *merah*, *biru*, and *kuning* in classical Malay texts. The research is situated within the framework of cognitive semantics, which views meaning as shaped by culturally shared human experience. Within this paradigm, Prototype Theory provides the analytical foundation, emphasizing that lexical items exhibit graded category structures with central and peripheral meanings that evolve through conceptual extensions influenced by historical, social, and symbolic contexts. This framework enables the identification of semantic domains such as emotion, social status, and cultural values, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of how classical Malay language encodes symbolic meaning.

Data were sourced from the Malay Concordance Project (MCP), a comprehensive digital corpus encompassing classical Malay prose and poetry. A total of 443 tokens of the target adjectives were identified across diverse genres, including *hikayat*, historical chronicles, *pantun*, *syair*, and *gurindam*. The sampling strategy adopts a corpus-driven lexical approach, ensuring authenticity and contextual validity by reflecting natural usage patterns rather than constructed examples. This approach is consistent with established practices in Malay corpus linguistics and has demonstrated reliability in previous semantic studies.

Data collection spanned three months and involved systematic keyword searches within the MCP database. Extracted data were reorganized for semantic domain coding and prototype mapping. Contextual verification between concordance lines and full-text views ensured analytical precision and integrity. This process aligns with corpus-based best practices aimed at revealing culturally embedded semantic structures.

The data analysis combined quantitative description, corpus linguistic techniques, and cognitive semantic interpretation. Each token was analyzed for frequency, syntactic environment, and semantic domain affiliation. Prototype mapping distinguished core meanings from peripheral extensions, allowing structured interpretation of semantic variation. Validity was ensured through content validation confirming contextual accuracy, while



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reliability was strengthened through triangulation across analytical layers. Collectively, these procedures secure methodological robustness and coherence with the cognitive semantic framework.

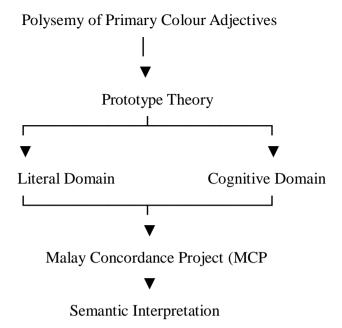


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Findings for RQ1: Semantic Variability (Polysemy) of Primary Colour Adjectives

The findings indicate that primary colour adjectives such as merah (red), biru (blue), and kuning (yellow) within the Malay Concordance Project (MCP) corpus exhibit a wide range of literal, connotative, and symbolic meanings, contingent upon the contextual framing of each sentence. The analysis was conducted on 443 tokens extracted from classical Malay prose and traditional poetry.

#### Primary Colour Adjective: Merah (Red)

#### **Literal Meaning of Merah**

Table 1 presents excerpts from classical Malay narratives where *merah* is used in its literal sense, referring to physical colour, character names, and geographical locations. Texts such as *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Pasai*, and *Sejarah Melayu* demonstrate direct usage of *merah* without metaphorical layering. For instance, "matanya menjadi merah" (Mpt 193) denotes a physiological change, while "Encik Mat Merah" (Pah 21:6) and "Tanah Merah" (Njoh 25:1) function as identifiers within the narrative.

**Table 1: Literal Meaning of Merah** 

<b>Citation Code</b>	Text Excerpt	<b>Literal Category</b>	<b>Semantic Function</b>
Mpt 193	"matanya menjadi <b>merah</b> dan nafasnya memburu"	Physical colour	Physiological depiction
Pah 21:6	"Encik Mat Merah"	Character name	Narrative identity marker
Njoh 25:1	"peranglah di Tanah <b>Merah</b> "	Place name	Geographical reference

These literal usages indicate that *merah* serves as a visual or nominal marker, maintaining a descriptive or referential function. It does not carry additional semantic layers, reinforcing its role as a straightforward linguistic representation of physical reality.



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#### Connotative Meaning of Merah

Table 2 illustrates the connotative use of *merah* to express emotional intensity, particularly anger. The data includes metaphorical expressions such as "merah padam mukanya seperti bunga raya" (INata 93:8), where the colour red transcends its physical referent to symbolize uncontrolled emotional states. In these instances, *merah* becomes a linguistic conduit for psychological depth.

**Table 2: Connotative Meaning of Merah** 

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Connotative Category	Emotion Represented	Semantic Function
INata 93:8	"merah padam muka nya seperti bunga raya"	Visual metaphor	Anger	Emotional intensity via comparison
Tuah 287:38	"warna muka Laksamana <b>merah</b> padam laku orang marah"	Facial expression	Anger	Emotional cue through physical change
SBima 64:9	"terlalu marah <b>merah</b> padam mukanya"	Facial expression	Anger	Emotional escalation via colour

These findings demonstrate that merah is employed to convey emotion indirectly, using physical imagery to reflect internal states. The connotative dimension of merah thus reveals the language's capacity to encode psychological nuance and emotional resonance within narrative structure.

#### **Symbolic Meaning of Merah**

Table 3 highlights the symbolic deployment of merah in proverbs and cultural idioms. Expressions such as "buah masak merah belum tenuto manis" (Zub 514:3b) suggest that external appearances may be deceptive. Here, merah functions as a symbol of visual illusion, false hope, or misaligned values.

Table 3: Symbolic Meaning of Merah

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Symbolic Category	Symbol Represented	Semantic Function
Zub 514:3b	"buah masak <b>merah</b> belum tentu manis"	Proverb	Deceptive appearance	Visual illusion / false expectation
Sikka 200	"di luar <b>merah</b> di dalam pahit"	Cultural idiom	External falsity	Conflict between appearance and reality
Kosta 336a	"Yang <b>merah</b> saga, yang kurik kundi"	Cultural symbol	Heritage identity	Marker of tradition and collective values

The symbolic use of *merah* reflects cultural philosophy and collective worldview. It transcends descriptive and emotional functions, becoming a vehicle for transmitting moral values and societal critique. This semantic depth affirms the role of colour as a cultural semiotic device in classical Malay literature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

In sum, the polysemous nature of *merah* from literal descriptors to emotional metaphors and cultural symbols, demonstrates its semantic versatility and cognitive richness. These findings validate the cognitive semantic approach, revealing how language encodes layered meanings shaped by cultural experience and conceptual



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framing. The adjective *merah* thus emerges not merely as a colour term, but as a dynamic linguistic construct that bridges physical reality, emotional expression, and cultural ideology.

#### Primary Colour Adjective: Biru (Blue)

#### **Literal Meaning**

Table 4 presents data extracted from classical Malay narratives in which the adjective *biru* is employed in its literal sense, referring to the physical colour of objects, garments, and natural phenomena. These instances, drawn from texts such as *Hikayat Inderaputera*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, demonstrate direct usage of *biru* without metaphorical or symbolic layering. For example, "langit pun kelihatan biru bersih" (Indera 112:4) reflects a naturalistic depiction, while "berbaju biru bersulam emas" (Tuah 56:2) and "kain biru yang dibawa dari Pasai" (Pasai 78:9) denote material and aesthetic attributes.

Table 4: Literal Meaning of Biru

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Literal Category	Semantic Function
Indera 112:4	"langit pun kelihatan <b>biru</b> bersih"	Physical colour	Depiction of natural environment
Tuah 56:2	"berbaju <b>biru</b> bersulam emas"	Garment colour	Marker of status and aesthetics
Pasai 78:9	"kain <b>biru</b> yang dibawa dari Pasai"	Object colour	Indicator of origin and trade value

These literal usages affirm *biru* as a visual referent within narrative structure, functioning descriptively without semantic augmentation. In this context, *biru* serves as a linguistic mechanism for representing physical and social reality, underscoring the foundational role of colour adjectives in classical Malay literature as direct markers of observable phenomena.

#### **Connotative Meaning**

Table 5 illustrates the connotative deployment of *biru* to evoke emotional states such as melancholy, introspection, and solemnity. These metaphorical expressions, e.g., "hatinya biru mengenang nasib" (Indera 145:7), demonstrate how colour transcends its literal referent to symbolize internal emotional landscapes. In this usage, *biru* becomes a linguistic conduit for psychological depth and affective resonance.

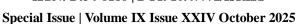
Table 5: Connotative Meaning of Biru

<b>Citation Code</b>	Text Excerpt	<b>Connotative Category</b>	Emotion	<b>Semantic Function</b>
			Represented	
Indera 145:7	"hatinya <b>biru</b> mengenangnasib"	Emotional metaphor	Sadness	Symbol of sorrow and reflection
Tuah 203:5	"suasana <b>biru</b> menyelubungi balairung"	Mood setting	Gloom	Indicator of somber and tranquil ambience
Pasai 99:3	"dengan wajah <b>biru</b> , dia tunduk diam "	Facial expression	Grief	Emotional cue via bodily expression

These findings reveal that biru is used to convey emotion indirectly, through atmospheric and corporeal imagery.



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The connotative function of *biru* reflects the cognitive semantic principle that language maps human experience into symbolic form (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), allowing for nuanced expression of internal states within literary discourse.

#### **Symbolic Meaning**

Table 6 highlights the symbolic use of *biru* in proverbs and cultural idioms, where it signifies noble lineage, social status, and traditional values. Expressions such as "darahnya biru, keturunan raja" (Kosta 412:6) exemplify how *biru* functions as a cultural emblem of aristocracy and inherited prestige. In these contexts, *biru* transcends descriptive and emotional functions to become a marker of collective identity and ideological positioning.

Table 6: Symbolic Meaning of Biru

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Symbolic Category	Symbol Represented	Semantic Function
Kosta 412:6	"darahnya <b>biru</b> , keturunan raja"	Lineage status	Nobility	Indicator of origin and honour
Indera 178:2	"berpakaian <b>biru</b> , tanda kehormatan"	Honour symbol	Social status	Marker of dignity and reverence
Tuah 309:4	"warna <b>biru</b> pada panji diraja"	Power symbol	Sovereignty	Indicator of authority and dynastic identity

The symbolic deployment of *biru* reflects its role in articulating cultural values and social structures within the Malay worldview. It operates as a semiotic device that encodes inherited ideologies and collective memory. This analysis affirms that colour adjectives in classical Malay texts function as layered semantic indicators, aligning with cognitive semantic approaches that emphasize the interrelation between language, experience, and culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

#### Primary Colour Adjective: *Kuning* (Yellow)

#### **Literal Meaning**

Table 7 presents excerpts from classical Malay literary texts in which the adjective *kuning* is employed in its literal sense, referring to the physical colour of objects, garments, and human features. These instances, drawn from texts such as *Balai Keemasan*, *Panji Semirang*, and *M&B*, demonstrate direct usage of *kuning* without metaphorical or symbolic layering. For example, "atapnya dari papan bercat kuning" (BS.L 2/13:46), "perahu kenaikan kuning alatnya" (RJoh 149c), and "kuning langsat muka bujur" (Das 2:6a) reflect straightforward descriptive functions.

Table 7: Literal Meaning of Kuning

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Literal Category	Semantic Function
BS.L 2/13:46	"atapnya dari papan bercat <b>kuning</b> "	Physical colour	Visual depiction of architectural object
RJoh 149c	"perahu kenaikan <b>kuning</b> alatnya"	Physical colour	Marker of ceremonial grandeur
Das 2:6a	"kuning langsat muka bujur"	Skin tone	Character's physical portrayal



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These literal usages affirm *kuning* as a visual referent within narrative structure, functioning descriptively to represent physical reality. It serves as a linguistic mechanism for identifying objects and bodily features, without additional semantic layering. Thus, the literal meaning of *kuning* in classical Malay texts reflects its foundational role as a direct representational element.

#### **Connotative Meaning**

Table 8 illustrates the connotative deployment of *kuning* to evoke aesthetic qualities and physical allure, particularly in the context of feminine beauty. Metaphorical expressions such as "kuning langsat cantik agung" (Panji 13:15) and "kuning langsat... remuk redam hati hancur" (Das 2:6a) suggest that *kuning* transcends its chromatic function to symbolize softness, elegance, and emotional appeal.

**Table 8: Connotative Meaning of Kuning** 

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Connotative Category	Value Represented	Semantic Function
Panji 13:15	"kuning langsat cantik agung"	Physical metaphor	Beauty	Aesthetic marker of feminine allure
Panji 191:35	"kuning langsat"	Physical metaphor	Gracefulness	Evocative physical imagery
Das 2:6a	"kuning langsat, remuk redam hati hancur"	Physical metaphor	Charm	Emotional resonance through appearance

These findings reveal that *kuning* is used to convey aesthetic values indirectly, through physical imagery associated with emotional attraction. The connotative function of *kuning* reflects the language's capacity to encode cultural perceptions of beauty and emotional depth. In this context, *kuning* becomes a symbol of tenderness and elegance within classical Malay narrative.

#### **Symbolic Meaning**

Table 9 highlights the symbolic use of *kuning* in ritual, social status, and cultural identity contexts. Expressions such as "serba kuning, bendera putih, tembak meriam" (Pah 97:4) and "ditaburi dengan beras kuning bercampur dengan duit" (M&B 245:10) demonstrate that *kuning* functions as a symbol of royal grandeur, ceremonial honour, and traditional authority. In these instances, *kuning* transcends descriptive and aesthetic roles to become a cultural emblem of power and reverence.

Table 9: Symbolic Meaning of Kuning

Citation Code	Text Excerpt	Symbolic Category	Symbol Represented	Semantic Function
Pah 97:4	"serba <b>kuning</b> , bendera putih, tembak meriam"	Royal ritual	Sovereignty	Marker of formal ceremony
M&B 245:10	"ditaburi dengan beras <b>kuning</b> bercampur dengan duit"	Cultural ritual	Honour	Symbol of blessing and generosity
Pat 54:8	"Raja <b>Kuning</b> pun dipersuamikan"	Symbolic character name	Power	Indicator of identity and status



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The symbolic deployment of *kuning* reflects its role in articulating cultural values and hierarchical structures within the Malay worldview. It operates as a semiotic device that encodes inherited ideologies and ceremonial significance. This analysis affirms that colour adjectives in classical Malay texts function as layered semantic indicators, aligning with cognitive semantic approaches that emphasize the interrelation between language, experience, and culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

## Findings for RQ2: Development of Literal and Connotative Meanings and Their Cultural-Emotional Implications in Discourse Interpretation

Tables 1 through 3 present data extracted from classical Malay texts that feature the primary colour adjectives *merah* (red), *biru* (blue), and *kuning* (yellow) in both literal and connotative contexts. These excerpts, drawn from historical narratives, hikayat, and traditional literary works, demonstrate the use of colour as a marker of emotion, identity, and cultural symbolism. The findings reveal that *merah* evolves from a literal descriptor to a connotative symbol of anger, bravery, and social status. For instance, in "merah padam mukanya seperti bunga raya" (INata 93:8), *merah* conveys emotional intensity, while "Tanah Merah" and "Merah Miru" reflect semantic expansion into geographical and aristocratic identity.

**Table 10: Feature The Primary Colour Adjectives** 

Colour Adjective	Text Excerpt	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Merah	"merah padam mukanya seperti bunga raya" (INata 93:8)	Facial colour	Intense anger
Merah	"Tanah <b>Merah</b> " (Njoh 25:1)	Place name	Geographical identity
Merah	"Merah Miru" (Aceh 266:14)	Personal name	Aristocratic status
Biru	"haru <b>biru</b> di sini" (INata 149:26)	Colour	Social chaos
Kuning	"perahu kenaikan <b>kuning</b> alatnya" (RJoh 149c)	Royal colour	Symbol of grandeur
Kuning	"bangsa <b>kuning</b> itu tak akan malu" (M 6Feb33:5)	Ethnic label	Cultural stereotype

Similarly, *biru* undergoes semantic shift in expressions such as "haru biru" (INata 149:26), where it denotes social disorder and emotional turbulence. Meanwhile, *kuning* is employed in royal and cultural stereotype contexts, as seen in "perahu kenaikan kuning alatnya" (RJoh 149c) and "bangsa kuning itu tak akan malu ..." (M 6Feb33:5), indicating its function as a symbol of authority and collective identity.

Tables 4 through 6 further illustrate the semantic expansion of *biru* and *kuning*, revealing a more intricate relationship between language and cultural cognition. The phrase "haru biru" (INata 149:26) exemplifies how *biru* extends beyond its chromatic function to index collective emotional states and societal instability. This suggests that colour can serve as a linguistic proxy for communal atmosphere and socio-political tension.

In contrast, *kuning* is consistently used in royal contexts, such as "perahu kenaikan kuning alatnya" (RJoh 149c), where it symbolizes power and ceremonial prestige. The expression "bangsa kuning itu tak akan malu ..." (M 6Feb33:5) reflects how *kuning* operates rhetorically to construct cultural stereotypes and collective identity. These findings affirm that the semantic expansion of colour adjectives in classical Malay texts not only enriches narrative structure but also encodes the emotional and ideological values of historical Malay society.

Overall, the semantic expansion of colour adjectives in classical Malay literature reveals a dynamic interplay between linguistic form, cultural ideology, and emotional expression. Colour functions not merely as a descriptive element but as a semantic medium that bridges linguistic meaning with collective worldview and affective depth. These findings underscore the role of colour as a rhetorical and symbolic device that shapes reader interpretation through layered cultural and emotional resonance (Ahmad, 2020; Zulkifli, 2018).



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#### **DISCUSSION OF RO1 FINDINGS**

The analysis of *merah*, *biru*, and *kuning* within the Malay Concordance Project (MCP) corpus reveals a rich spectrum of polysemy shaped by genre, context, and cultural cognition. Each adjective demonstrates a dynamic semantic range that extends from literal descriptors to connotative and symbolic functions.

- 1. **Merah** transitions from physiological depiction ("matanya menjadi merah") to emotional metaphor ("merah padam mukanya") and symbolic critique ("buah masak merah belum tentu manis").
- 2. **Biru** begins as a naturalistic referent ("langit biru kelam") and evolves into a marker of introspection and melancholy ("hatinya biru mengenang nasib").
- 3. **Kuning** is frequently associated with ceremonial grandeur ("baju kuning berbenang emas") but also encodes vulnerability and social anxiety ("wajahnya kuning lesu").

These findings affirm that colour adjectives in classical Malay texts function as semantic bridges linking physical reality with emotional depth and cultural ideology. Rather than reiterating Prototype Theory in full, the study applies its principles to trace how core meanings expand into peripheral domains through metaphor and symbolic framing.

#### **DISCUSSION OF RQ2 FINDINGS**

The development of literal and connotative meanings in classical Malay texts reveals a semantic expansion that transcends chromatic description and enters the realm of emotional expression, social identity, and ideological symbolism.

- 1. Merah functions as a metaphor for emotional intensity ("merah padam mukanya seperti bunga raya") and aristocratic identity ("Merah Miru").
- 2. *Biru* undergoes semantic shift in expressions like "*haru biru*," indexing social disorder and collective unrest.
- 3. *Kuning* operates rhetorically to signify ceremonial prestige ("perahu kenaikan kuning alatnya") and critique ethnic stereotypes ("bangsa kuning itu tak akan malu").

These patterns suggest that colour adjectives are not merely descriptive but strategically deployed to structure narrative tone, reinforce or subvert social hierarchies, and articulate cultural values. As Zulkifli (2018) argues, colour in traditional texts often reflects hegemonic systems; however, this study shows that colour also serves as a site of semantic contestation, where dominant and marginal perspectives are negotiated.

In texts such as Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa and Riwayat Johor, colour adjectives are used not only to affirm status but also to interrogate power and challenge stereotypes. This layered usage underscores the role of colour as a rhetorical device one that authors employ to encode emotion, critique norms, and shape reader interpretation.

Table 11: Semantic Expansion of Primary Colour Adjectives in Classical Malay Texts

Colour	Text Excerpt	Literal Meaning	Connotative	Symbolic
			Meaning	Meaning
Merah	"matanya menjadi merah"	Physiological	_	_
		change		
	"merah padam mukanya seperti bunga raya"	Facial colour	Anger	_
	"Tanah Merah"	Place name	_	Geopolitical



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				identity
	"Merah Miru"	Personal name	_	Aristocratic status
	"buah masak merah belum	_		Visual deception
	tentu manis"			
Biru	"langit pun kelihatan biru	Natural colour		
	bersih"			
	"hatinya biru mengenang	_	Sadness	_
	nasib"			
	"haru biru di sini"	_	Social chaos	
	"darahnya biru, keturunan	_		Royal lineage
	raja"			
	"warna biru pada panji diraja"	_		Sovereignty
Kuning	"atapnya dari papan bercat	Object colour	_	_
	kuning"			
	"kuning langsat cantik agung"	Skin tone	Beauty	
	"perahu kenaikan kuning	Ceremonial colour	_	Royal grandeur
	alatnya"			
	"bangsa kuning itu tak akan	Ethnic label	_	Cultural
	malu"			stereotype

#### **CONCLUSION**

The semantic evolution of the colour adjectives *merah*, *biru*, and *kuning* in classical Malay texts demonstrates their dual function as cognitively anchored yet culturally fluid lexical items. Through the lens of Prototype Theory, these adjectives reveal a layered interplay between linguistic form, emotional resonance, and sociocultural ideology, functioning not merely as descriptive tools but as conceptual instruments that articulate the symbolic and ideological contours of Malay society. This study contributes to the broader discourse on cognitive semantics by illustrating how language encodes collective identity, cultural memory, and emotional nuance through contextually embedded lexical structures. Building on these findings, future research is encouraged to expand its methodological scope by integrating digital corpus analysis with expert interviews in cultural studies to enhance semantic interpretation. Additionally, examining the use of colour adjectives in contemporary media such as advertising, film, and digital platforms may offer valuable insights into semantic continuity and transformation in modern Malay discourse.

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