

# *Nóng, ấm, mát* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool* and *cold* in English: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to explore the main features of four adjectives of temperature *nóng, ấm, mát, and lạnh* in Vietnamese and four corresponding adjectives of temperature *hot, warm, cool, and cold* in English and to contrast some of their main uses in order to illuminate an important experiential domain of language which is close to the living of man, but does not seem to have received adequate attention in Vietnamese-English contrastive linguistics, in translation studies, and in teaching English as a second/foreign language in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Adjectives of temperature, agreeable, disagreeable, spectrum, sequence.

## 1. Introduction

Over half a century ago, in a seminal paper published in *Words*, the eminent British-born Australian linguist Michael Halliday ([1: 267], cited in Hasan [2: 184]) made this important suggestion: “The grammarian’s dream is (and must be [...]) to turn the whole of linguistic form into grammar, hoping to show that lexis can be defined as ‘most delicate grammar’”. This is precisely the motivation of this paper: exploring in some detail the experiential meanings of four basic adjectives of temperature *nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* in Vietnamese and four corresponding basic adjectives of temperature *hot, warm, cool, cold* in English and comparing some of their main uses. The paper will fall into seven sections. Section 1

provides a brief review of related literature and identifies the basic adjectives of temperature in Vietnamese and English. Section 2 locates *nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool, cold* in English on the temperature spectrum. Section 3 discusses the connotational meanings of *nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool, cold* in English. Section 4 compares the ways in which *nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool, cold* in English are used to describe the relationships between two humans, two institutions or two states. Section 5 compares the ways in which *nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool, cold* in English are used to describe human characters. Section 6 provides a brief résumé of the paper, pointing out what has not yet been explored, and confirming the importance of lexical contrastive study to second/foreign language teaching and translation studies.

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## 2. A brief review of related literature

Language reflects reality. It construes or represents the speaker's world of experience, including his/her inner world of consciousness (Halliday [3], [4]; Matthiessen, [5]; Hasan & Parrett [6]; Halliday & Matthiessen [7]). It is no exaggeration to say that all daily activities of human beings are reflected in language. However, due to the influence of such factors as geography, customs and tradition, particularly the way people perceive the world, different languages construe experience in different ways (cf. Whorf [8]). With regard to the construal of the temperature domain, this difference can be easily observable. Studies on adjectives of temperature in some languages of the world have shown that in different languages, the number of basic adjectives indicating areas of temperature in the *hot – cold* spectrum is different. For example, according to Shen [9], cited in Prator [10: 226], Tagalog, one of the two national languages of the Philippines, has only two basic adjectives of temperature *magninow* and *mainit* in which *magninow* covers the area of the meanings of *cold* and *cool* and *mainit*, the area of the meanings of *warm* and *hot* in English. On the other hand, French, a language which is close to English both historically and geographically, has only three basic adjectives of temperature *froid*, *frais* and *chaud* in which *froid* and *frais* are for the lower temperatures and *chaud* is for the higher temperature (cf. Prator [10: 224])<sup>1</sup>. In a contrastive study on the combinabilities of adjectives of temperature between Russian and Swedish, Koptjevskaja-Tam & Rakhilina [11] have shown that there are six adjectives of

temperature in Russian among which three construe the areas of hot temperature: *горячий* (cực nóng/extremely hot), *жаркий* (nóng dữ dội/intensively hot), *знойный* (nóng nguy hiểm/dangerously hot), one construes the area of neutral temperature: *тёплый* (ấm/warm), and two construe the areas of cold temperature: *прохладный* (mát lạnh/cool) and *холодный* (lạnh/cold). Similarly, in Swedish, there are also six adjectives of temperature, among which two adjectives – *het* and *varm* – construe the areas of temperature equivalent to those construed by four adjectives – *горячий*, *жаркий*, *знойный*, and *тёплый* in Russian, one – *ljum* (ấm/luke warm) construes the area of neutral temperature which lies between the areas of temperatures construed by *тёплый* and *прохладный*, and three – *sval* (giá lạnh/chilly), *kylig* (mát lạnh/cool) and *kall* (lạnh/cold) construe the areas of temperature approximately equivalent to those areas of temperature construed by *прохладный* and *холодный* in Russian.

In a brief, lucid, succinct and penetrating article on some temperature terms of English and several other languages, Prator [10] has identified and recognized four basic adjectives of temperature in English which are referred to respectively as *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold*. Consulting some Vietnamese explanatory dictionaries and some bilingual dictionaries (both English-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-English) such as *Từ điển tiếng Việt* (Dictionary of Vietnamese) by Hoàng Phê [12], *Từ điển Anh-Việt* (English-Vietnamese Dictionary) by Tô Văn Sơn, Nguyễn Văn Liên & Phạm Lữ Hà [13], *Từ điển Việt-Anh* (Vietnamese-English Dictionary) by Lê Khả Kế [14], *Từ điển Việt-Anh* (Vietnamese-English Dictionary) by Bùi Phụng [15], *Từ điển Việt-Anh* (Vietnamese-English Dictionary) by Đặng Chân Liêu, Lê Khả Kế & Phạm Duy Trọng [16] and doing some statistics on the frequency of occurrence of Vietnamese adjectives of temperature in the Weather Forecast programmes on Vietnamese TV and radios, we found that, as with English, there also exist in

<sup>1</sup> Although in French, there is another adjective of temperature whose meaning is almost equivalent to that of *ấm/ôn hòa* in Vietnamese and *warm/mild* in English; this adjective, however, is not used to describe temperature as frequently as *froid*, *frais*, and *chaud*. To a certain extent, *chaud* must carry the burden which is divided between *nóng* and *ấm* in Vietnamese and between *hot* and *warm* in English. It is perhaps for this reason that *doux* is not considered as a basic adjective of temperature in French. (For more details on this point, see Prator [10: 224]).

Vietnamese four corresponding basic adjectives of temperature: *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh*. Now two questions are raised for exploration: (1) “What are the main characteristics of *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold* in English?”, and (2) “What are the similarities and differences between them in their uses?” These questions will be addressed in the sections that follow.

### 3. Locating *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, *lạnh* and *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, *cold* on the *nóng/hot* – *lạnh/cold* spectrum

It should be noted that the sequence of *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and that of *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold* in English as indicated in the title and in Sections 1 and 2 above are arbitrarily made. In reality, to identify which adjective begins and which one ends the sequence in both languages requires a close observation and a careful analysis of their actual uses – something which is technical and, therefore, is not the focus of this study. Normally, when asked the question, “Among the four adjectives of temperature *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold* in English, which adjective begins and which one ends the sequence?”, informants of both languages seem to agree that the adjective which begins the sequence is *nóng* in Vietnamese and *hot* in English, and the one which ends the sequence is *lạnh* and *cold* respectively<sup>2</sup>. However, when asked to order *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool* on the *nóng/hot* – *lạnh/cold* spectrum, informants of the two languages tend to think that *ấm/warm* precedes *mát/cool* and between them *ấm/warm* stands close to *nóng/hot*, and *mát/cool* stands close to *lạnh/cold* and the sequence of these adjectives in the two languages on the *nóng/hot* – *lạnh/cold* spectrum is ***nóng/hot* - *ấm/warm* – *mát/cool* – *lạnh/cold*** (cf. also Shen [9], with reference to Chinese). A closer look at the

following situations in which adjectives of temperature occur will reveal some interesting issues concerning the location of *warm/ấm* and *mát/cool* on the *nóng/hot* – *lạnh/cold* spectrum in Vietnamese and English.

**Situation 1.** On a hot summer day, when the thermometer shows a high temperature, both Vietnamese and English speakers would probably say, *Trời nóng/It's hot*. However, when the temperature goes down, it is certain that speakers of both languages would probably not say in this sequence, *Bây giờ trời ấm/ It's warm now* – *Bây giờ trời mát/It's cool now* – *Bây giờ trời lạnh/ It's cold now*<sup>3</sup>; the sequence from *nóng/hot* to *lạnh/cold* would normally be, *Trời nóng/It's hot* – *Bây giờ trời mát/It's cool now* – *Bây giờ trời lạnh/It's cold now*.

**Situation 2.** On a cold wintry day, when the thermometer shows a low temperature, both Vietnamese and English speakers would probably say, *Trời lạnh/It's cold*. However, when the temperature goes up, it is certain that speakers of both languages would probably not say in this sequence, *Bây giờ trời mát/It's cool now* – *Bây giờ trời ấm/It's warm now* – *Bây giờ trời nóng/ It's hot now*<sup>\*</sup>; the sequence from *lạnh/cold* to *nóng/hot* would normally be, *Trời lạnh/It's cold* – *Bây giờ trời ấm/It's warm now* – *Bây giờ trời nóng/It's hot now*.

Four points should be made here concerning the above situations. First, although *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and their corresponding elements *hot*, *warm*, *cool* and *cold* in English all appear in language in use, there does not seem to have any evidence in support of the sequence *nóng/hot* - *ấm/warm* - *mát/cool* - *lạnh/cold* in both languages. Secondly, there are two separate sequences in which *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool* seem to exclude each other on the *nóng/hot* – *lạnh/cold* spectrum, that is, when the temperature changes from *nóng/hot* to *lạnh/cold*, we have the sequence *nóng/hot* – *mát/cool* – *lạnh/cold*, leaving out *ấm/warm*. In contrast, when the

<sup>2</sup> This order has been widely accepted in many languages; it is, therefore, accepted in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> The asterisk \* indicates that the expression is not applicable.

temperature changes from *lạnh/cold* to *nóng/hot*, we have the sequence *nóng/hot – mát/cool – lạnh/cold*, leaving out *mát/cool* (cf. Prator [10]). Thirdly, considering the relationship between *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool*, one can see that they are similar in that they construe the intermediate area of temperature between *nóng/hot* and *lạnh/cold*; that is to say, they indicate one and the same area of temperature. What distinguishes them is that while *ấm/warm* is used to indicate the change of temperature from *lạnh/cold* to *nóng/hot*, *mát/cool* is used to indicate the change of temperature from *nóng/hot* to *lạnh/cold*. This phenomenon of *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool*, to some extent, can be likened to that of “sao hôm/morning star” and “sao mai/evening star” which are used by both Vietnamese and English speakers to refer to one and the same star appearing in the sky at different times of day. And fourthly, when used to describe temperature, the four pairs *nóng – hot*, *ấm – warm*, *mát – cool*, and *lạnh – cold* seem to be equivalent in meaning in both sequences *nóng/hot – mát/cool – lạnh/cold* and *lạnh/cold – ấm/warm – nóng/hot*. The following examples can serve to prove the point:

1. **The *nóng/hot – lạnh/cold* sequence:**  
*Mùa hè trời nóng ≈ It's hot in Summer,*  
*Mùa thu trời mát ≈ It's cool in Autumn,*  
*Mùa đông trời lạnh ≈ It's cold in Winter.*
2. **The *lạnh/cold – hot* sequence:** *Mùa đông trời lạnh ≈ It's cold in Winter,*  
*Mùa xuân trời ấm ≈ It's warm in Spring,*  
*Mùa hè trời nóng ≈ It's hot in Summer.*

#### 4. “Agreeable” vs. “disagreeable”: Two connotational features of *nóng, mát, ấm, and lạnh* and *hot, cool, warm, and cold*

Words and their meanings are a fairly complex issue. “Every word subsumes a different complex of meanings in different languages – or even different dialects of one language” (Chaika [17: 10]). In studying lexical

items in general and adjectives in particular, semanticists often treat the meanings of words by establishing a dichotomy or even trichotomy to characterize their semantic oppositions, e.g. “positive” vs. “negative”, “inanimate” vs. “animate”, “free” vs. “bound”, “desirable” vs. “undesirable”, etc. (For more details on this point, see Leech [18]; Hasan [2]). With regard to the experiential domain of temperature, there has been a unanimous agreement that temperature perceptions in humans consist of two types of experience. The first type of experience is what Hensel [19: 168] refers to as “rational experience” which can be described as being directed towards an objective world as expressed in *It's cold*. The second one concerns a subjective experience as expressed in *I feel cold*. One important point that should be noted here is that due to the fact that perception of whether the temperature is hot, warm, cool or cold depends largely on the subjective judgment of the people who experience it – on what has been referred to as “anthropocentricity” (cf. Prator [10]; Koptjevskaja-Tam & Rakhilina [11]; Hensel [19]), adjectives of temperature of all languages under most circumstances have either agreeable or disagreeable connotations. A survey of the contexts in which *nóng, ấm, mát, and lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool, and cold* in English occur reveal that *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool* typically have agreeable connotation whereas *nóng/hot* and *lạnh/cold* typically have disagreeable one. The following situations in which these adjectives occur will serve to illustrate the point.

**Situation 1.** On a cold wintry day, when sitting in a room and looking through the window, a native speaker of Vietnamese would never turn to his or her companion and say, *Lan ơi, bên ngoài trời lạnh quá. Bạn có đủ mát/nóng không?\**. Similarly, in the same situation, a native speaker of English would never say, *Kathy, it's so cold outside. Are you cool/hot enough?\** On the contrary, the acceptable expressions by native speakers of both Vietnamese and English would normally

be, *Lan ơi, bên ngoài trời lạnh quá. Bạn có đủ ấm không?* in Vietnamese and *Kathy, it's so cold outside. Are you warm enough?* in English.

**Situation 2.** On a hot summer day, when sitting outside to enjoy a cup of coffee, both speakers of Vietnamese and English would normally say to their companions, *Ở ngoài này nóng lắm. Mình vào trong cho nó mát đi/It's hot outside here. Let's go inside where it's cool*; no speakers of either language would probably say, *Ở ngoài này nóng lắm. Mình đi vào trong cho nó ấm/lạnh đi\*/It's hot outside here. Let's go inside where it's warm/cold\**.

The above situations suggest that *ấm* and *mát* in Vietnamese and *warm* and *cool* in English have the connotation of “agreeable”, and *nóng* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese *hot* and *cold* in English have the connotation of “disagreeable”.

However, in some contexts, the connotation of “disagreeable” may not exist in *nóng/hot* and *lạnh/cold*. This can be seen in the following situations.

**Situation 1.** In a hotel room with poor air conditioning, when the temperature is hot, we are sure to hear the complaint from speakers of both Vietnamese and English, *Phòng này không đủ mát/This room is not cool enough*. And the request that follows would be, *Cho tôi một phòng mát/I want another one which is cool*.

**Situation 2.** Customers are sitting outside drinking beer in hot weather. They want cool/cold beer (beer from the fridge) but the waiter brings them “hot” beer (beer not from the fridge). In this situation, we are sure to hear a complaint from speakers of both Vietnamese and English, *Bia này không đủ lạnh/This beer is not cold enough*. And the request that follows would be, *Cho (chúng) tôi bia lạnh/I (We) want cold beer*.

## 5. *Nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* and *hot, warm, cool, cold* in describing relationships

In describing the relationship between two people, two institutions or two countries, *nóng,*

*ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* present the complexity and diversity in meaning and use. Because *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* and *hot, warm,* and *cold* are usually used to describe the temperature at certain points or periods of time, when describing the relationship between two people, two institutions or two countries, they are rarely used as Attributes (predicates in traditional grammar) in both Vietnamese and English clauses (sentences in traditional grammar). Expressions such as *Mối quan hệ giữa Lan và Hoa lạnh\*/The relationship between David and Kathy is cold\** or *Mối quan hệ giữa Thái Lan và Campuchia nóng\*/The relationship between Thai Land and Cambodia is hot\** seem to be odd (not applicable) in both Vietnamese and English. In describing the relationship between two people or two countries “*ngữ động từ*”<sup>4</sup> in Vietnamese and “*phrasal verb*” in English are often used. However, there are some differences in the capacity of forming a phrasal verb or the capacity of turning an adjective into a phrasal verb in Vietnamese and English. Whereas in Vietnamese, all four adjectives of temperature have the capacity of being turned into phrasal verbs by adding *lên* or *đi* to the end of the adjectives such as *nóng* → *nóng lên, ấm* → *ấm lên, mát* → *mát đi, lạnh* → *lạnh đi*, in English only two adjectives: *warm* and *cool* can be turned into phrasal verbs by adding *up* or *off/down* to the end of the adjective such as *warm* → *warm up, cool* → *cool off/down*. No corresponding phrasal verbs are formed from *hot* or *cold*.<sup>5</sup> One more thing that should be

<sup>4</sup> In Vietnamese linguistic scholarship, there have been existing two different views on the status of *nóng lên, ấm lên, mát đi, lạnh đi*. The first view sees them as free word combinations in which the meaning of the whole is the combination of the meaning of its component parts. The second view, in contrast, sees them as “*ngữ động từ*”. This view, to a large extent, is similar to the one held by English and American linguists who see combinations in English such as *warm up, cool off/down* as “*phrasal verbs*”. For our contrastive purposes and to avoid being involved in a debate which is not directly relevant, in this article, we adopt the second view.

<sup>5</sup> In English, no phrasal verbs are formed from *hot*. This may be that English already has *heat* which is used both as

noted here is that among the phrasal verbs such as *nóng lên*, *ấm lên*, *mát đi* and *lạnh đi* in Vietnamese, *mát đi* does not seem to be used to describe the relationship between two people or two countries. When the tension of relationship between two people or two countries occur, native speakers of Vietnamese often say, *Mối quan hệ giữa Hùng và Lan đang nóng lên* (literally, The relationship between Hung and Lan is heating up) or *Mối quan hệ giữa Cộng hòa Dân chủ Nhân dân Triều Tiên và Hàn Quốc đang nóng lên* (literally, The relationship between North and South Korea is heating up); but when the tension decreases, native speakers of Vietnamese do not say, *Mối quan hệ giữa Hùng và Lan đang mát đi\** (literally, The relationship between Hung and Lan is cooling down) or *Mối quan hệ giữa Cộng hòa Dân chủ Nhân dân Triều Tiên và Hàn Quốc đang mát đi\** (literally, The relationship between North and South Korea is cooling down). Instead, what they often say is, *Mối quan hệ [Sự căng thẳng] giữa Hùng và Lan đang dịu đi* (The tension [relationship] between Hung and Lan is cooling down) or *Mối quan hệ giữa Cộng hòa Dân chủ Nhân dân Triều Tiên và Hàn Quốc đang dịu đi* (The tension between North and South Korea is cooling down). In the contexts in which *nóng lên*, *ấm lên* and *lạnh đi* occur, *lạnh đi* is the antonym of *ấm lên* but not of *nóng lên*. Native speakers of Vietnamese usually say, *Mối quan hệ giữa Hương và Lan đang lạnh đi* (literally, The relationship between Huong and Lan is becoming cold) or *Mối quan hệ giữa Mỹ và Cuba đang lạnh đi* (literally, The relationship between the USA and Cuba is becoming cold) as opposed to *Mối quan hệ giữa Hương và Lan đang ấm lên* (literally, The relationship between Huong and Lan is warming up) or *Mối quan hệ giữa Mỹ và Cuba đang ấm lên* (literally, The relationship between the USA and Cuba is warming up).

Turning to English, when the tension of relationship between two people or two

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a noun and a verb. When combined with *up*, *heat up* seems to be equivalent in meaning to *nóng lên* in Vietnamese. No phrasal verbs are formed from *cold* either.

countries occurs, native speakers of English do not use *hot* to describe this situation; instead, they usually use two synonymous expressions, one, the free word combination *get hot* and the other, the phrasal verb *heat up* as in *The relationship/tension between North and South Korea is **getting hot*** or *The relationship/tension between North and South Korea is **heating up***. Similarly, when the tension of relationship between two people or two countries is decreasing, native speakers of English usually use two synonymous expressions, one, the free word combination *get cool* and the other, the phrasal verb *cool down*. And in these contexts, *get cool* and *cool down* are antonyms of *get hot* and *heat up*. Native speakers of English usually say, *The relationship/tension between the United States and Cuba is **getting cool*** or *The relationship/tension between the United States and Cuba is **cooling down*** as opposed to *The relationship/tension between the United States and Cuba is **getting hot*** or *The relationship between the United States and Cuba is **heating up***. When the relationship between two people or two countries is getting better, native speakers of English usually say, *The relationship between the United States and Cuba is **warming up***. However, when the relationship between two people or two countries turns cold again, *cold* or *get cold* is not used. Native speakers of English do not say, *The relationship between David and Jacob is/is **getting cold\**** or *The relationship between the United States and Cuba is/is **getting cold\****. Instead, the usual acceptable expressions for this context will be, *The relationship between David and Jacob is/is **getting bad/tense*** or *The relationship between the United States and Cuba is/is **getting bad/tense***.

## 6. *Nóng, mát, ấm, lạnh* and *hot, cool, warm, cold* in describing human characters

When used to describe human characters, *nóng, mát, ấm*, and *lạnh* and *hot, cool, warm*, and *cold* present a more complex and diverse picture in meaning and use. Here, it seems that

the meanings of *nóng*, *mát*, *ấm*, and *lạnh* and *hot*, *cool*, *warm*, and *cold* have moved a step farther away as compared with their meanings which are used to describe the points or areas of temperature on the *nóng/hot* - *ấm/warm* - *mát/cool* - *lạnh/cold* spectrum. As mentioned in Section 4, when used to describe temperature, *ấm* and *mát* in Vietnamese and *warm* and *cool* in English have the connotation of “agreeable”, and *nóng* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot* and *cold* in English have the connotation of “disagreeable”. When used to describe human character, *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese indicate clearly these two connotational meanings. In clauses such as *Hắn là người nóng tính*, *Hắn tính nóng như lửa* (literally, He is a man of hot temper), *Mặt hắn lúc nào cũng lạnh như tiền* (literally, His face is always as cold as a coin), *nóng* and *lạnh* have the connotation of “disagreeable”. In contrast, in a clause such as *Cô ấy là một người phụ nữ mát tính* (literally, She is a woman of cool temper), *mát* has the connotation of “agreeable”. However, as pointed out in Section 4, when used to describe temperature, *nóng* and *lạnh* are antonyms as in *Hôm qua trời nóng* (It’s a hot day yesterday) as opposed to *Hôm qua trời lạnh* (It’s a cold day yesterday). But when used to describe human character, *mát* rather than *lạnh* is the antonym of *nóng*. Native speakers of Vietnamese usually say, *Anh ấy là người mát tính* (literally, He is a man of cool character) as opposed to *Anh ấy là người nóng tính* (literally, He is a man of hot temper); they do not say, *Anh ấy là người mát tính* as opposed to *Anh ấy là người lạnh tính\** (literally, He is a man of cold character) or *Anh ấy là người ấm tính\** (literally, He is a man of warm character). Similarly, when used to describe human characters, *ấm* is not the antonym of *lạnh*. Native speakers of Vietnamese usually say, *Anh ấy là người lạnh lùng* (khó gần) (literally, He is a man of cold character [of difficult approach]) as opposed to *Anh ấy là người dễ gần* (He is a man of easy approach); they do not say, *Anh ấy là người*

*lạnh lùng* as opposed to *Anh ấy là người ấm tính\** (literally, He is a man of warm character).

Turning to English, among the four adjectives *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold*, *warm* does not seem to be used to describe human characters. Although there is some ambiguity in meaning, in some specific contexts *He’s hot/cool/cold* is still understood as *He is a man of hot/cool/cold character* (*Anh ấy là người nóng tính/mát tính/lạnh lùng*). With the clause *Anh ấy là người nóng tính* in Vietnamese, English has one more equivalent *He is hot-tempered*. However, with *Anh ấy là người mát tính* in Vietnamese, speakers of English do not say, *He is cool-tempered\** as the equivalent; what they usually say is, *He is a man of pleasant manner/character*. On the other hand, with *He always stays cool* in English in which *cool* is used to describe the calmness of *He*, *mát* in Vietnamese is not used to describe this quality or character. *He always stays cool* in English is not equivalent to *Anh ấy luôn giữ vẻ mát mẽ\** in Vietnamese; its equivalent expression would be, *Anh ấy luôn giữ vẻ bình thản/bình tĩnh*. In contrast, when native speakers of Vietnamese use *ấm* in *ấm đầu* to describe someone’s unusual character as in *Hôm nay hắn hơi bị ấm đầu* (ấm IC) (literally, He is warm-headed today), native speakers of English do not say, *He’s warm in the head today\**. What they would normally say in this context is, *He’s a bit soft in the head today*.

## 7. Concluding remarks

One of the values of learning a second/foreign language is to see how it differs from the mother tongue in segmenting experiences. Realizing the importance of this, in this paper I have explored in some depth the experiential features of four adjectives of temperature *nóng*, *ấm*, *mát*, and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and their corresponding counterparts in English *hot*, *warm*, *cool*, and *cold*, and compare their uses in some contexts. I began my article by providing an overview of

some of the studies on adjectives of temperature in some languages of the world and identifying four basic adjectives of temperature *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English. Then I examined their meanings, making a comparison between them in three contexts: (i) in expressing the connotations of “agreeable” and “disagreeable”, (ii) in describing relationship between two humans, two institutions or two countries”, and (iii) in describing human characters. Our comparison has shown that there are both similarities and differences between *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English which can be summarized as follows:

1. When used to describe temperature, the meanings of *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and those of *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English are basically similar: *nóng/hot* and *lạnh/cold* indicate the two poles of the *nóng/hot – lạnh/cold* spectrum, while *ấm/warm* and *mát/cool* indicate the area of temperature lying between the two poles of the spectrum.
2. Both *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English possess two separate sequences: from *hot* to *cold* we have the ***nóng/hot – mát/cool – lạnh/cold*** sequence, and from *cold* to *hot* we have the ***lạnh/cold - ấm/warm – nóng/hot*** one. As a result, although *ấm* and *mát* in Vietnamese and *warm* and *cool* in English are commonly perceived as if they construed two different areas of temperature, they, in fact, construe one and the same area of temperature lying between the *nóng/hot - lạnh/cold* spectrum.
3. Both *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English are not used to describe directly the relationship between two humans, two institutions or two countries. In this context, phrasal verbs

in both languages are used instead. And in this regard, apart from the similarities, there are differences as well. Whereas in Vietnamese phrasal verbs such as *nóng lên, ấm lên* and *lạnh đi* are used to describe the relationship between two humans or two countries, *mát đi* is not used in this context. By contrast, while in English free word combinations and phrasal verbs of which *hot, warm,* and *cold* are constituent parts such as *get hot, warm up, get cool, cool down* are used to describe the relationship between two humans or two countries, *cold* is not used in this context.

4. When used to describe human characters, both *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in Vietnamese and *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English possess the connotations of “agreeable” and “disagreeable”. However, there is a striking difference between them in the two languages: while in Vietnamese all *nóng, ấm, mát,* and *lạnh* in their different word combinations such as *nóng tính, mát tính, ấm đầu, lạnh lùng* are used to describe human characters, of the four adjectives *hot, warm, cool,* and *cold* in English, *warm* is not used in any form.

As mentioned in Section 4, words and their meanings are a fairly complex issue. This complexity can be seen in that while “...: the grammar of even the most difficult language can be fully mastered in no more than six months, ... whereas it takes a lifetime to become proficient in the choice and arrangement of words” (Akhmanova & Idzelis [20: 10]; see also Sweet [21: 66]). This paper has strongly reconfirmed this statement. As can be seen, in this paper we have only explored in some depth the meanings of four adjectives of temperature in Vietnamese and those of the four corresponding adjectives of temperature in English. There are still many other aspects which have not yet been examined and

compared such as how these adjectives of temperature in the two languages combine with nouns, how they enter into set expressions, and above all, what lies behind the similarities and differences between these adjectives of temperature in the two languages.

It can be confirmed from what has been studied that the field of research for second/foreign language scholars is still wide-open. Apart from areas of research such as curriculum design, material development, second/foreign language classroom management, teaching methodology, language testing and assessment, etc., second/foreign language teaching and learning accommodates a very promising area of research for scholars: comparative/contrastive study between the learner's mother tongue (L1) and the second/foreign language (L2). This area of research provides vast opportunities for serious studies in which the researcher can compare two phonological systems, two lexical systems, two graphological/writing systems, two grammatical/syntactic systems, two semantic systems, and even two cultural systems (Lado [22]; James [23]; see also Le Quang Thiem [24]).

It is hoped that this paper will serve to clarify the fact that teaching and learning a second/foreign language can be effective only when the teacher and student have analytical knowledge of the mother tongue and the second/foreign language, know how to compare the second/foreign language with the learner's mother tongue, and, in particular, have insights into the ways the learner's mother tongue interferes with his learning of the second/foreign language (cf. Prator, [10]). The novice teacher is often not well prepared for this kind of contrastive analysis and if they are, they are not prepared to do this job systematically. With those teachers who are native speakers of the foreign language, contrastive research seems to be a nightmare. This is because they do not know the learner's mother tongue, and, therefore, do not know what aspect of the learner's mother tongue facilitates his/her second/foreign language

learning (positive interference) and what interferes or hinders his/her learning (negative interference). This explains in part why many native teachers of foreign language are not interested in translation – a teaching technique which if used properly, will surely speed up the process of second/foreign language acquisition/learning.

Conducting a contrastive study to find out the similarities and differences between lexical items in two languages is of great significance to the teacher and learner of second/foreign languages as well as to the translator. It helps the teacher and the learner understand more deeply the meaning(s) a lexical unit possesses in the learner's mother tongue and those a corresponding lexical unit in the second/foreign language has so that they can use the word correctly and appropriately in different communicative situations, and thus contributing to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It helps the translator choose what meaning of the target language lexical unit is most equivalent to the meaning of the source language lexical unit, and thus contributing to the effectiveness of translation. Contrastive research also helps to confirm that besides the teaching of vocabulary by using intra-lingual techniques such as defining the meaning of a word, finding a synonym or antonym for a word, guessing the meaning of a word in context, etc., the teaching of vocabulary by using inter-lingual techniques such as finding the word in the mother tongue whose meaning is equivalent to the one in the second/foreign language and vice versa is no less important a teaching technique. If properly employed, this technique will both save time and help the learner understand quickly and clearly the meaning of the word being taught or learned.

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## *Nóng, ấm, mát, lạnh* trong tiếng Việt và *hot, warm, cool, cold* trong tiếng Anh: Một nghiên cứu so sánh

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này nghiên cứu những đặc điểm chính của bốn tính từ chỉ nhiệt độ *nóng, ấm, mát, và lạnh* trong tiếng Việt với bốn tính từ chỉ nhiệt độ tương ứng *hot, warm, cool, and cold* trong tiếng Anh và đối chiếu một số cách sử dụng chính của chúng để làm sáng tỏ một miền trải nghiệm quan trọng của ngôn ngữ gắn gũi với đời sống sinh hoạt của con người, nhưng dường như chưa được quan tâm đầy đủ trong ngôn ngữ học đối chiếu Việt-Anh, trong nghiên cứu dịch thuật, và trong dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ/ngôn ngữ thứ hai ở Việt Nam.

*Từ khoá:* Tính từ chỉ nhiệt độ, đặc điểm dễ chịu, đặc điểm không dễ chịu, ngôn phổ, trình tự.