

## Gemstone nomination in Vietnamese

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the nomination characteristics of gemstones in Vietnamese and explores how naming practices reflect Vietnamese cognitive and cultural perspectives. The research analyzed a corpus of 2,617 gemstone names collected from dictionaries and social communication sources. Using descriptive, semantic, statistical, and classification methods, the study categorized gemstone nominations into one-feature, two-feature, and three-feature models. The findings reveal that one-feature nomination is the most dominant pattern, particularly the model “type name + color,” indicating that visual perception plays a central role in gemstone identification. Two-feature nomination models occupy the second largest proportion and mainly emphasize color and origin, while three-feature models appear least frequently due to their structural complexity and limited practicality in daily communication. The study also demonstrates that Vietnamese gemstone naming practices are strongly influenced by cognitive simplicity, cultural symbolism, and commercial value. Furthermore, the incorporation of Sino-Vietnamese and Indo-European lexical elements reflects linguistic interaction and globalization within the gemstone trade. Overall, the findings contribute to understanding Vietnamese lexical semantics, cultural cognition, and nomination theory in linguistic studies.

**Keyword:** gemstone; gemstone names; nominate; nomination; nomination models

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nomination constitutes one of the central issues in linguistics and plays a particularly significant role in human life; consequently, it has attracted scholarly attention since very early periods. Research on nomination not only enables scholars to identify and explain the origins of names assigned to objects and phenomena, but also reveals the richness and diversity of the Vietnamese lexical system.

Over the past two decades, the number of gemstones discovered and exploited in Vietnam has increased considerably and has contributed substantially to the national economy. Through the craftsmanship of artisans, rough and angular stones are transformed into refined and delicately shaped products that satisfy aesthetic and decorative demands. Gemstones also symbolize human intelligence, beauty, power, and wealth; therefore, they are commonly associated with prosperity and affluence. In addition, according to researchers and practitioners of feng shui, gemstones are believed to bring luck and fortune, symbolize favorable natural conditions, and provide positive energy to their owners.

At present, based on the materials collected, relatively few studies on gemstones remain available. Existing studies mainly focus on classification, description, and symbolic meanings, whereas no research has thoroughly investigated the nomination of gemstones. Through examining gemstone nomination in Vietnamese, this study aims to identify the ways in which Vietnamese speakers select salient features of gemstones for naming purposes. Nomination may also be viewed as a process of returning to the past in order to rediscover Vietnamese cognitive patterns and cultural characteristics. This constitutes the primary reason for choosing the topic “Nomination Characteristics of Gemstones in Vietnamese.” Within the framework of this study, we seek to clarify the role of nomination in social life as well as its contribution to understanding the natural environment, social development, and the distinctive features of Vietnamese culture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nomination can be understood, in simple terms, as the naming function of linguistic units, primarily words, in relation to objects and phenomena. It represents the outcome of the naming process and constitutes one of the core functions of meaningful linguistic units. Nomination refers to the designation of concrete objects, properties, or actions such as *chair*, *go*, *low*, and *high*. It also denotes abstract phenomena that lack concrete form, properties, or actions but possess objective existence, such as *already*, *will*, and *in progress*. In addition, it may refer to subjective expressions such as *yes*, *right?*, and *please*. Nomination is considered one of the criteria for defining a word. “Names make objects and phenomena become ‘individualized’ in human cognition. Therefore, an object or phenomenon truly becomes an object of perception and thought only when it is nominated. It is also names that make thinking clearer and more structured” [1, p. 99]. Accordingly, nominative units include not only words but also phrases and sentences; however, the referential objects of these units differ. While the function of words is to nominate objects and phenomena, the function of sentences is latent, as sentences primarily serve the function of nominating a context.

According to G. V. Kosanski, nomination is “the fixing (or attachment) of a linguistic sign to a concept (signified) that reflects the characteristics of a referent—its properties, qualities, and relations of objects and processes belonging to both the material and spiritual domains. Through this process, linguistic units become the content elements of verbal communication” [14]. The basis of nomination originates from the relationship between reality, concept, and name. The correlation between meaning and reference, together with tendencies in specific nominative acts, forms the structural foundation of nomination. In other words, objective reality is conceptualized as the referent of a name, encompassing all properties identified through nominative acts across different classes of objects denoted by that name. Meanwhile, the name is perceived as a sequence of phonetic symbols segmented according to the structural system of a given language.

Nomination, or the naming of objects, must also satisfy certain requirements. First, it must function as a generalized and abstract name, no longer evoking isolated and individual characteristics of an object, since it is a product of abstract thinking. Semantically, such a name must be detached from traces of the sensory stage of cognition. Second, the name must be capable of distinguishing one object from another within the same category, or distinguishing subcategories within a larger category. This differentiation must be clear; once a name is assigned, each subcategory becomes an independent entity in cognition. “Names make objects exist independently in thought” [1, p. 190]. In other words, nomination requires the selection of salient features with high discriminatory value. However, in some cases, even objects without prominent features may still be effectively distinguished through naming.

Nomination plays a crucial role in human life. The ability to name objects and phenomena reflects the cognitive and perceptual processes through which humans understand the world. Once an object is named, humans are able to cognitively appropriate it in its entirety, and only humans are capable of assigning names to objective reality. Nomination also helps people better understand and systematize the language of their own nation. At the same time, through naming practices, each linguistic community forms its own unique cultural, historical, and cognitive system. Therefore, through the linguistic layers embedded in naming, people are able to preserve the thought patterns, ways of life, and cultural identity of their community.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper employs a descriptive method to present the surveyed data on gemstones, describe gemstone nomination patterns in Vietnamese, and identify the cognitive and cultural characteristics reflected in gemstone naming practices. In addition, the study applies semantic analysis to examine how Vietnamese speakers select salient features of gemstones for naming purposes, as well as to analyze the semantic components that constitute gemstone names in Vietnamese. Furthermore, statistical and classification methods are used to collect gemstone names, categorize them, and calculate the distribution and proportions of different nomination models, together with the frequency of selected salient features within each nomination model.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Gemstone Names Nominated by One Feature

The statistical results indicate that a total of 2,617 Vietnamese gemstone names were collected, of which 1,787 gemstone names were nominated based on one feature. These linguistic data were classified into nomination models as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Survey Results of Gemstone Names Nominated by One Feature

No.	Nomination Models	Quantity	Percentage
1	Type name + color	750	41.96
2	Type name + origin	508	28.42
3	Type name + shape	384	21.48
4	Type name + property	145	8.11
<b>Total</b>		<b>1787</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on the survey data, it can be observed that the most productive nomination model is “type name + color.” The practice of naming gemstones according to color can be explained by the reliance on external perception to distinguish one type from another. Among the four features mentioned above, color is the easiest criterion for humans to perceive and identify because it depends primarily on visual perception. A closer examination of the “type name + color” model reveals examples such as *green quartz* and *yellow quartz*. These expressions are constructed around dominant colors, namely green and yellow, which emphasize the stones’ brilliance and elegance.

Furthermore, color-based naming may also be interpreted from a psychological perspective, as it enables sellers to appeal to different groups of customers. For instance, *rose quartz* is often introduced as a gemstone that activates romantic energy due to its pleasant pink color, while *red quartz* is considered a symbol of vitality and good fortune.

Regarding the nomination model based on origin, it can be argued that this category accounts for a lower percentage because not all gemstones possess clearly identifiable origins. A similar explanation applies to shape-based nomination. Classification according to shape is less common because only a limited number of gemstones display distinctive appearances, such as *cat’s eye stone* or *rutilated quartz*. Most gemstones are cut and polished, thereby losing their original forms.

Finally, the nomination model based on properties accounts for only approximately 8.11%. This can be explained by the fact that ordinary people often find it difficult to distinguish gemstones according to their intrinsic properties. Only gemstone experts, equipped with specialized knowledge and supporting instruments, are capable of naming gemstones based on such criteria. For example, in the gemstone name *jadeite jade* (*ngọc phi thúy*), the lexical elements *phi* and *thúy* both denote chromatic characteristics. More specifically, *phi* refers to the reddish layer found in the second layer of jadeite, whereas *thúy* refers to the green core, considered the most valuable part of the jadeite block. The distinctive feature of this subtype lies in its color transformation between red and green.

**B. Gemstone Names Nominated by Two Features**

Within the complex nomination models, gemstone names were classified into two-feature and three-feature nomination patterns. The following table summarizes the survey results for two-feature complex nomination models.

Table 2. Two-Feature Nomination Models

No.	Nomination Models	Quantity	Percentage
1	Generic category + type + color	270	37.39
2	Generic category + type + origin	115	15.92
3	Generic category + type + shape	45	6.23
4	Generic category + shape + color	38	5.26
5	Generic category + property + origin	15	2.07
6	Generic category + shape + origin	12	1.66
7	Type name + shape + color	58	8.03
8	Type name + color 1 + color 2	65	9.00
9	Type name + color + property	20	2.77
10	Type name + color + shape	10	1.38
11	Type name + origin + color	10	1.38
12	Type name + origin + property	10	1.38
13	Type name + shape + property	25	3.46
14	Color + type + origin	29	4.01
<b>Total</b>		<b>722</b>	<b>100</b>

The survey results indicate that the model “generic category + type + color” predominates, with 270 names. This model consists of three components: the generic category, the specific type, and the color designation. Representative examples include *purple quartz stone*, *blue ruby stone*, *yellow topaz stone*, and *green jadeite stone*. In the expression *purple quartz stone*, the first component is *stone*, the second is *quartz*, and the third is *purple*.

The second most productive model is “generic category + type + origin,” accounting for 115 expressions or 15.92%. Examples include *Burmese sapphire stone*, composed of the elements *stone*, *sapphire*, and *Burma/Myanmar*.

Three models appear least frequently: “type name + color + shape,” “type name + color + origin,” and “type name + origin + property.” For example, the expression *purple pyramid quartz* consists of three components: *quartz*, *purple*, and *pyramid-shaped*. Another example is *green Burmese jade*. In addition, the model “type name + origin + property” can be illustrated by *blue sapphire stone*, in which *stone* serves as the generic category, *sapphire* refers to the gemstone type, and *blue* denotes the color property.

The coexistence of Vietnamese and English lexical elements within these models demonstrates that naming practices are no longer confined to the linguistic boundaries of a single nation, but also reflect Vietnamese speakers’ increasing familiarity with global languages.

The predominance of the first two models may be explained by several factors. The model “generic category + type + color,” accounting for nearly 40% of the data, reflects a logical hierarchical structure because human cognition commonly organizes concepts in a tree-like manner. Moreover, color constitutes the most immediate and visually salient feature. Consequently, this model provides a highly intuitive and accurate means of identification.

Similarly, the model “generic category + type + origin,” representing 15.92%, can be explained in terms of commercial value and product identification. Origin serves as an important criterion for pricing and distinguishing gemstones in the marketplace. By contrast, models with lower frequencies are generally characterized by greater abstraction and excessive informational complexity. Properties such as durability or hardness are difficult to verify through ordinary visual observation, while combinations involving multiple specialized features tend to produce lengthy and less practical names for everyday use.

### C. Gemstone Names Nominated by Three Features

The following table summarizes the three-feature nomination models identified in the study.

Table 3. Three-Feature Nomination Models

No.	Three-Feature Nomination Models	Quantity	Percentage
1	Generic category + type + color + origin	25	23.14
2	Generic category + type + color + state	21	19.44
3	Generic category + type + color 1 + color 2	19	17.59
4	Generic category + species part + species + color	15	13.88
5	Type name + color + type name + origin	11	9.25
6	Generic category + type name + possessive adjective + title	9	8.33
7	Type name + origin + possessive adjective + property	8	7.40
<b>Total</b>		<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

The most productive model in this category is “generic category + type + color + origin,” with 25 names, accounting for 23.14%. A representative example is *Dong Linh green quartz stone*. The expression *quartz stone* appears in both simple and complex nomination models. However, in order to distinguish among different quartz varieties, Vietnamese speakers incorporate additional components such as color and origin. The color *green* symbolizes vegetation, vitality, and permanence, whereas *Dong Linh* indicates the place of origin of the gemstone.

The least frequent model is “type name + origin + possessive adjective + property,” with only eight names. An illustrative example is *the Mountain of Light diamond*. The generic category *diamond* is followed by the phrase *Mountain of Light*. This gemstone is widely known as the *Koh-i-Noor diamond*, one of the most valuable diamonds in the world, originally mined from the Kollur Mine near the southern bank of the Krishna River in Golconda, India. Unlike the model “generic category + type name + possessive adjective + title,” this model employs the possessive marker *of* without implying personal ownership.

The predominance of the first model can be attributed to its comprehensive representation of three salient characteristics of gemstones. Furthermore, the inclusion of origin enhances the prestige and value associated with the gemstone, thereby increasing its frequency of use. By contrast, Models 6 and 7 occur less frequently because their names are excessively long and impractical for commercial communication.

Among the three nomination patterns examined in this study, simple nomination models account for the largest number of gemstone names because they are concise and easy to use. In other words, they constitute the most common naming patterns employed in everyday discourse. Two-feature nomination models rank second, as they involve a greater degree of specialization and require more knowledge about gemstones. Such models are typically used by specialists and jewelers. Finally, three-feature nomination models occur least

frequently due to their complexity and length, making them suitable primarily for scientists and gemstone appraisers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through the investigation entitled “Nomination Characteristics of Gemstones in Vietnamese,” involving the statistical analysis and examination of gemstone names, this study found that during the cognitive process of perceiving objects and phenomena, humans consistently demonstrate a need to assign names to entities in everyday life. In some cases, people may simply be unaware of the names of certain objects or phenomena; nevertheless, truly nameless entities do not exist.

A total of 2,617 gemstone-related linguistic units were collected from various sources, including dictionaries and social communication. The data indicate two principal nomination methods: simple nomination and complex nomination. The simple nomination method comprises 1,787 linguistic units, while the two-feature nomination model includes 722 units and the three-feature nomination model includes 108 units. Statistical results show that one-feature nomination is used approximately twice as frequently as complex nomination types involving two or three features.

The study also demonstrates that the nomination characteristics employed by Vietnamese speakers are generally grounded in familiar and easily perceptible features. Consequently, characteristics such as color, shape, and material occur frequently and dominate gemstone naming practices. In addition, the broad linguistic scope of the naming system is reflected in the incorporation of Indo-European and Sino-Vietnamese lexical elements. Through identifying and analyzing gemstone nomination characteristics, the study further reveals important aspects of Vietnamese linguistic cognition and cultural thought.

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