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# Z in company names: trendy clothing for a typical Vietnamese sound<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The letter Z is not part of the Vietnamese alphabet, any more than F, J and W. But it is far from uncommon in language use. It appears in the names of companies that target a popular audience, e.g. Zing for a local competitor to Yahoo. Why is Z, the least used letter of the English alphabet, so trendy in present-day Vietnamese? The evidence reported here suggests that the letter Z constitutes foreign-looking clothing for a typical Vietnamese sound. In Hanoi Vietnamese, historical /ð/, /ʒ/ and /r/ (orthographic D, GI and R) merged to /z/, making the voiced alveolar fricative a highly frequent sound – and a potential identity marker for Hanoian speakers, with Z as a unified written rendering. The results of an automated search through a large corpus of contemporary texts support the conclusions drawn from the qualitative analysis of examples.

**Keywords:** onomastics, graphophonemics, orthography, sociolinguistics, stylistics

**ISO 639-3 language code:** vic

## 1. Introduction

The letter Z is not part of the Vietnamese alphabet, any more than F, J and W. But it is far from uncommon in language use. It appears in the names of companies that target a popular audience, e.g. Zing for a local competitor to Yahoo. Why does Z, the least used letter of the English alphabet, have a trendy ring in present-day Vietnamese?

It would seem that the letter Z constitutes foreign-looking clothing for a typical Northern Vietnamese sound. Alexandre de Rhodes (1651) justified the choice to write Vietnamese sounds by means of the Roman alphabet by its almost perfect phonetic fit – with the exception of the letter Z. Rhodes explained that Chinese characters were unnecessarily numerous; he evaluated their number at 80,000, which was an exaggeration at the time (17th-century dictionaries contain on the order of 33,000: see Yong & Peng 2008:295), but not an absurd figure given the open-ended nature of the system, which allows for new coinages. “Therefore, we use our own letters, which are fewer and much easier, since in their language the Tonkinese pronounce them all except one – Z” (translation from Gregerson 1969:181). Northern Vietnamese (including Hanoi Vietnamese, the official standard) now makes up for it with a vengeance: historical /ð/, /ʒ/ and /r/ (orthographic D, GI and R) merged to /z/ (Thompson 1984:18; Kirby 2011). This makes the voiced alveolar fricative a highly frequent sound – and a potential sociophonetic identity marker for speakers of Northern Vietnamese. The letter Z provides a unified written rendering, as opposed to its three orthographic representations – a purely orthographic distinction with which non-bookish language users struggle, since they must learn the spellings word by word, and bear the stigma of making spelling mistakes when following their phonological conscience.

In Central and Southern dialects, Z is also occasionally found instead of orthographic D or GI, whose pronunciations have merged to /j/. This use of Z is likely to be an influence from Hanoi: there is no obvious reason why a speaker of a Central or Southern dialect would spontaneously adopt the letter Z to write a consonant pronounced /j/; in European languages, the letter Z typically stands for a voiced coronal fricative /z/, as in English, Dutch, French and Polish. (This is a time-

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honoured association: /z/ is thought to have been the value of the seventh letter of the Phoenician alphabet, *Zayin*, from which the letter Z derives.) The second most common interpretation is a coronal affricate, as in German and Italian. In Central/Southern Vietnamese, there is also less motivation to use the phoneme /j/ as an identity marker, as it represents the historical merger of two phonemes, not three (/r/ remains contrastive), so that the frequency of /j/ in Central/Southern Vietnamese is not as high as that of /z/ in Northern Vietnamese. Under the hypothesis that use of Z began as a Hanoian innovation, a reason for its propagation elsewhere in the country may be its iconoclastic appeal: Z constitutes a distinctly foreign letter – a flag-raiser in the eyes of supercilious purists.

## 2. The view from high culture: Z as an alien letter confined to scientific vocabulary

In the orthography, the sound /z/ of Hanoi Vietnamese is written D, GI, or R depending on its Middle Vietnamese etymology. In the learned rendering of the written language, there is a one-to-one (bijective) relationship between the letter D and the voiced coronal fricative: the correct pronunciation of the letter D is [z], and the sound [z] is to be transcribed as D. Students get to learn that the correct rendering of the graphemes GI and R are /ʒ/ and /r/, respectively. While this does not go so far as to affect their usual pronunciation, they are thus able to distinguish D, GI and R orally, and to pronounce them when they appear in foreign words. To take the example of the name of the city of *Paris*: r-sounds (IPA r, ʀ...) are absent in Hanoi Vietnamese, and /p/ does not exist in Vietnamese, so that the truly local rendering of *Paris* is /bazi/, using the only bilabial stop available in Hanoi Vietnamese (a voiced implosive) and interpreting orthographic R as /z/. Educated Vietnamese pronunciation is /pari/, with a /p/ (found only in recent loanwords from foreign languages) and the /r/ trill learnt at school as the correct reading of orthographic R in Vietnamese.

Replacement of orthographic D and GI by Z was advocated by none less than Hồ Chí Minh, who consistently used this transcription (as explained by Lê 2013:157; facsimile reproductions of manuscripts and typed documents can be found in Phạm 2010:33, 101, 113, 127). This choice brought the orthography closer to Hanoian phonology. But copy-editors systematically corrected Hồ Chí Minh's "spelling mistakes" before the texts went to print – a seemingly anecdotal but not insignificant aspect of the careful monitoring to which the author's public communications were subjected.

In learned circles, the official orthography tends to be seen as encapsulating the language's sound system in a fuller form than the spoken vernacular. Orthographic reform would amount to severing one's roots and turning one's back on cultural heritage. Such is the stand taken by Cao Xuân Hạo (2007), who, looking back on the intense debates on orthographic reform in the 1950s, lists the proposal to rewrite *gia* 'family' (phonemically /za/) as *za* among examples of "profound errors of a class of people steeped in ignorance, or else who despise the scores of generations of their forebears."<sup>2</sup> The shallow time depth of use of romanized Vietnamese orthography, which only became widespread in the course of the 20th century (Bianco 2001), is no obstacle to purists' perception of its timeless patrimonial value. Knowledge of orthographic forms is an indicator of social status (literacy in the highest sense); orthography is a means of selecting conformists, since the ability to conform in detail to a set of orthographic rules to be learnt by rote is a good predictor of conformism in other respects (Tarde 1890:214).

Accordingly, the letter Z tends to be avoided in formal contexts. Among the five hundred top companies in Vietnam as listed in the (2014) annual survey of the VietnamNet journal (<http://www.vnr500.com.vn/>), only one has a Z in its official name: Totalgaz Vietnam, i.e. a foreign name, not a company name tailored for Vietnam. The orthodox transcription of the sound /z/ in the name of a Vietnamese company is D: for instance, the leatherware manufacturer *Làm đồ da* ('make'+ 'objects'+ 'leather') adopted the name LADODA, by simplifying each syllable to a CV structure and removing all diacritics. The intended pronunciation is [ladoza], retaining the pronunciation of initial Đ and D. But in the process of conversion to ASCII characters, the phonemic distinction between /d/ and /z/ is lost: the name LADODA is not intelligible to Vietnamese speakers without prior acquaintance with the original full form (*Làm đồ da*). Someone

<sup>2</sup> Original text: "...những lỗi của một lớp người thiếu hiểu biết, nếu không là một lớp người coi khinh hàng chục thế hệ đi trước (...)" (p. 160).

confronted with the form LADODA for the first time would have to choose between interpretation as [lazoza], using the usual value of D in Vietnamese orthography, or [ladoda], interpreting the word as a foreign name and taking D with its English value: a coronal stop. (Vietnamese text-to-speech processing tools confronted with the form LADODA run into the same difficulties; technically, the word needs to be stored in a pronunciation lexicon.) The decision was to favour D in spite of the loss in phonemic transparency. An obvious candidate to maintain the consonant distinction when converting to ASCII would have been the letter Z: LADOZA would have been unambiguous to Vietnamese readers. But the Z in LADOZA would have carried a suggestion of disregard for tradition, youthful insolence, and abandonment to foreign influence. The interpretation that comes to mind is that the choice to retain D amounts to avoidance of Z: the name LADODA testifies to unflinching commitment to upholding orthodoxy, and bearing the consequential burden of reduced intelligibility.

Members of the establishment are no less aware of the pronunciation of Z than nonconformist youths. But their choice is to confine the letter Z to highly specific spheres, such as scientific vocabulary. This is reflected in statements such as the following: “Use of the letter Z is by no means uncommon. At school, the set X-Y-Z is often used in arithmetics. In physics, the units KHz and MHz are used, and in chemistry the element Zinc is referred to as Zn. Vietnamized terms in chemistry include *bazơ* (‘base’, in ‘acid-base’), *saccarozơ* (‘saccharose’), *glucozơ* (‘glucose’), *benzene...*”<sup>3</sup> The list is limited to borrowings, avoiding mention of Vietnamese coinages containing Z.

But if one adopts a descriptive rather than prescriptive point of view, it quickly appears that slang and “substandard” uses often gain entry into mainstream use, gradually losing their illicit appeal in the process. The conservative (prescriptive) choice to perpetuate the association of the sound /z/ to orthographic D is not without problems, and the attempt to impose it on new coinages is unlikely to succeed.

First, concerning the spelling of words of Vietic stock, there is hesitation as to the correct orthography for some words (Mai, Vū & Hoàng 2005:123). For instance, in present-day Vietnamese texts, two spellings for ‘amaranth’, /zen/, are found: *dên* and *giên*. Finding out which one is correct would require a reliable Middle Vietnamese source, but the word ‘amaranth’ is not found in Rhodes’s dictionary. The linguistic evidence comes from dialects that preserve the three-way consonantal contrast of Middle Vietnamese, e.g. ‘Haut Annam’ dialects such as Vinh (Ferlus 1991) and Phong Nha (Michaud, Ferlus & Nguyễn 2015:133): the palatal initial found in Phong Nha constitutes strong evidence that the earlier forms had an initial palatal, not a dental, and that the spelling *giên* is etymologically appropriate. But how many prescriptivists have enough knowledge of comparative-historical phonology to become acquainted with such pieces of evidence? Even supposing that those who set the standard spelling agreed to promote a given form (chosen either on the basis of linguistic evidence, or through an arbitrary decision), attempts to enforce this standard would require the elimination of variants that are widely attested in extant texts. For instance, for the word ‘awl’, /zuj/, there is unambiguous evidence from the 1651 dictionary that the correct spelling is *giùi* (de Rhodes 1651:292), yet the spelling *dùi* is about as common in present-day writings.

Secondly, it does not seem likely that Vietnamese speakers who introduce loanwords and create new words will perpetuate the use of orthographic D for the sound /z/, ignoring that the ‘foreign’ reading of D is as a coronal stop. For instance, the name of the hero of *Zazie in the Metro* translates as *Zazie*, not *Da-di*. A reason for this choice may be that the letter Z, as an outlier in Vietnamese orthography, befits the impertinent character of Queneau’s book. Another reason is that if the name were vietnamized as *Dadi* or *Da-di*, it might be misinterpreted as /dadi/ in the context of a translation from a foreign language. Likewise, proper names newly minted in Vietnam,

<sup>3</sup> Original text: “Chữ Z cũng được dùng không phải ít. Ở nhà trường, bộ ba x-y-z thường đi với nhau trong những bài toán tìm ẩn số; các đơn vị KHz, MHz hay ký hiệu Zn luôn xuất hiện trong các bài học về lý, hóa. Tiếp đó là một loạt thuật ngữ hóa học đã được Việt hóa, như: bazơ, saccarozơ, glucozơ, benzene...” ([http://www.bentre.edu.vn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1011:b-sung-f-j-w-z-va-o-bng-ch-cai&catid=69:i-mi-phng-phap-dy-hc&Itemid=96](http://www.bentre.edu.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1011:b-sung-f-j-w-z-va-o-bng-ch-cai&catid=69:i-mi-phng-phap-dy-hc&Itemid=96), consulted 24/03/2015).

such as company names, have no really viable option apart from Z to stand for the sound /z/, as D, G and R could be interpreted as referring to sounds other than /z/.

### 3. The view from trendy culture: attraction and access

Culturally, aspiration to ‘the good life’ in the USA runs deep in East Asia. The page presenting Chairman Xi Jinping on Baidu, the (non-editable) Chinese equivalent of Wikipedia, does not mention that his daughter enrolled at Harvard.<sup>4</sup> Details of individual stories are a topic for (stout-hearted) journalists to investigate and report, but evidence of fascination for the USA is not hard to come by: America’s “soft power” (Nye 2004) still holds dominion. To Vietnam’s “urban elites with insatiable consumerist and cosmopolitan aspirations” (Fortier & Tran 2013:94), America is the world’s leading economic power, land of Opportunity, and a congenial environment for students and young professionals, free from the trammels of Tonkinese society and its tightly-knit networks of alliances (see a presentation of Tonkinese culture to Westerners: Phạm 1930; observations about village organization and customs in the early 20th century: Phạm 2015; and an introduction to present-day society: Papin & Passicouset 2010).

As for the ways in which American prestige translates into linguistic influence, it would be worth investigating (by means of psychophonetic methods) to what extent certain sounds tend to be associated with English as perceived through Vietnamese ears. It could be that the sound /z/ has a special association with English-accentedness in Hanoians’ perception. To venture an impressionistic remark: the coronal fricatives [s] and [z] in final position tend to be perceived as characteristic of the English language by foreigners in whose native language these sounds have different compositional (phonotactic) properties. In France, a popular magazine about cars is named *Top’s Cars* (ISSN: 0984-9068): to a French ear the addition of the possessive to *Top* contributes to the desired result of *sounding* extremely American. Lapel badges were all the rage in France in the late 1980s and early 1990s; they were called *pin’s* [pinz] in French; the proposed replacement *épinglette*, lacking foreign glamour, was never a popular success. In Asia, Michel Ferlus (p.c. 2000) reports hearing non-native speakers add a /z/ at places where it is superfluous, e.g. saying *Very goods* [gudz] instead of *Very good* (without any intended plural). The addition of /z/ constitutes a hyper-correction: an (incorrect) addition made with a view to approaching what one feels must be the right pronunciation. (On the far-reaching consequences of hypercorrections, see e.g. Ferlus 2001.) Admittedly, these observations only concern final /z/; they nonetheless suggest that, in addition to being a typical Northern sound, /z/ may simultaneously be perceived in Vietnam as a typical English sound.

### 4. Qualitative analysis of examples

This section presents qualitative results, discussing examples of words containing a Z that are encountered in Vietnam. (Section 5 will report quantitative results from a corpus search.) Our choice is to focus on brand names, because they constitute cases where the user makes a strong public statement, choosing to propose the creation of a full-fledged entity, going through the administrative procedure of name registration, and showcasing the name on street signs. In our view, these examples, even though they are limited in number, constitute evidence of a deliberate, meaningful choice of the letter Z.

As an introduction, Table 1 lists websites whose address contains the letter Z, also showing their logos and slogans, which provide hints about these companies’ identity.

<sup>4</sup> <http://baike.baidu.com/view/27362.htm>; consulted March 2015.

**Table 1:** A list (in alphabetical order) of popular websites whose address contains the letter Z.

Name	Website	Slogan and translation	Logo
Baza	Baza.vn		
Dịch vụ SeoZ	dichvuseoz.com	Không thay đổi là bị đào thải :: Adapt or be eliminated.	
Lazada	lazada.vn	Thành thời mua sắm :: Carefree shopping	
Loza	loza.vn		
Lozi	lozi.vn		
TechZ	techz.vn		
Totalgaz	total.com.vn		
VN-Zoom	vn-zoom.com		
VozForum	vozforum.org	Diễn đàn công nghệ Việt Nam :: Vietnam Technology Forum	
Z	z.com	Z là đột phá. :: Z is a breakthrough.	
Zalo	zaloapp.com	Nhắn gửi yêu thương :: Sending a message of love	
Zalora	zalora.vn		
Zanado	zanado.com		
ZazaShop	zazashop.vn		
Zenda	thoitrangxuatkchau.com	Thời trang xuất khẩu :: Fashion Export	
ZigZag	zigzag.com.vn		
Zikon	zikon.com.vn	Xúng tằm đẳng cấp – Công nghệ Nhật Bản :: Top class – Japanese technology	
Zinca	zinca.com.vn	Dẫn đầu chất lượng trần thạch cao, vách thạch cao :: Leading-quality ceiling plaster and drywalls	
Zing	zing.vn	Tri thức trực tuyến :: Knowledge Online	
Zpizza	zpizza.com.vn	<i>The pure one</i> [in English]	
zShop	zshop.vn	<i>Digitals for life</i> [in English]	

A special case is that of companies named “Z”. The company *Z Pizza*, boasting no less than three Zs in its name, (<http://zpizza.com.vn/>) has a supersize announcement – an eye-catcher in a cityscape where ads remain few – on the walls of the shopping mall Vincom Center Ba Trieu. At its opening in 2004, this high-notch shopping mall was the tallest building in Hanoi; as a Vietnamese-owned private company, it is a symbol for aspiring entrepreneurs and young professionals. The message displayed on the advertisement is “Thương hiệu đến từ Mỹ” (*An American trademark*), emphasizing that the company delivers the real thing, as if straight from the USA.

This name may have provided the inspiration for the (Vietnamese) creation of “Z Urban Coffee” (<http://www.zurbancoffee.com/>). The choice of the letter Z as a quasi-standalone allows its connotations to surface with exceptional clarity.

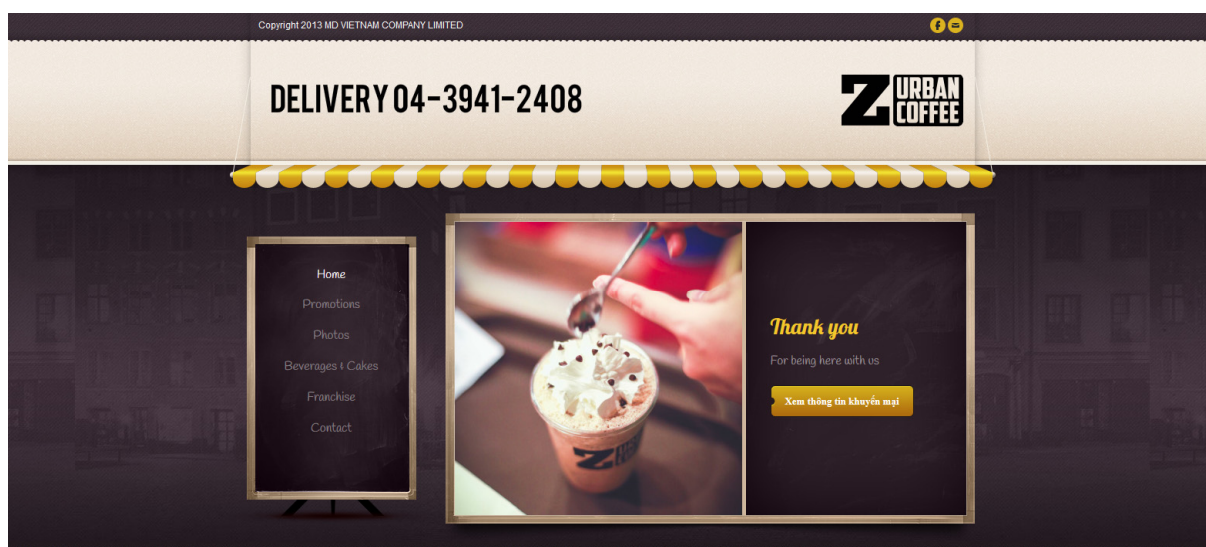


Figure 1: web homepage of Z Urban Coffee (2014)

The café’s presentation is the following: “Unlike the majority of coffee shops, with their soothing, romantic decor, Z Urban Coffee reflects its founder’s strong personality. We want Z Urban Coffee to be an exciting place for urban young people, always full of laughter and life!” The presentation concludes on a sense of closeness between the café’s founder and his clients: “You and us, we are always active and never rest!”<sup>5</sup> The café’s website is monolingual (there is no choice between a Vietnamese and an English version): the main contents are in Vietnamese. But the outlook is international, witness the mostly English homepage, shown in Figure 1. The target audience is one of Vietnamese clients who think of themselves as young, bursting with energy, and open to the outside world.

Beyond the special case of companies called Z, examples are grouped below into three subsets: names using foreign words; Vietnamese words with adapted spelling; and Vietnamese coinages containing the letter Z.

#### 4.1. Names using foreign words

A number of foreign companies operate in Vietnam under their original name, including *Amazon*, *Mozilla*, *Zara*, and *Zamil Steel* (an Indian steel company). There also exist Vietnamese companies using entire foreign words in their name, e.g. *Zéphyr Café* (abbreviated to “Z” in the restaurant’s logo), *Zéphyr Hotel*, *Café Zest*, or *Ozone Café*; a trendy entertainment site for young Hanoians is called *Zone 9*.<sup>6</sup> Use of the letter Z to stand for the sound /z/ is not uncommon in English, e.g. in the abbreviation of *show business* to *showbiz*; this is a source of borrowings into Vietnamese, witness the internet domain names *stockbiz.vn* (stock market), *bizlive.vn* and *cafebiz.vn* (investment), and *8showbiz.com* (entertainment).

<sup>5</sup> Original text: “**Không gian:** Khác với đại đa số quán cà phê với cách bài trí nhẹ nhàng, lãng mạn, **Z Urban Coffee** thể hiện cá tính mạnh của những người sáng lập. Chúng tôi muốn **Z Urban Coffee** trở thành một nơi luôn sôi động, đầy tiếng cười nói và sức sống dành cho những người trẻ đô thị! **Z Urban Coffee** được lên ý tưởng và thiết kế để trở thành một không gian thoáng đãng, với các gam màu mạnh và đường nét cứng cáp, tạo hưng phấn cho khách hàng. Kết hợp giữa các sắc màu tường đỏ/xanh tím/vàng và bàn ghế có nét góc cạnh tạo không khí năng động của đô thị cho những khách hàng có cá tính. Bạn và chúng tôi, chúng ta luôn luôn hoạt động và không bao giờ ngơi nghỉ!”

<sup>6</sup> <http://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/suc-hap-dan-cua-zone-9-voi-gioi-tre-2912992.html>, consulted in July 2015.

Another type that can be distinguished is the adoption of foreign words with Vietnamization of their spelling in view of Vietnamese pronunciation. For instance, *ninja* is pronounced /**nin.za**/ in Vietnam, for want of a /**ɲ**/ sound in Vietnamese. A company accordingly uses the orthography *Ninza* (<http://byninza.com/>); it imports equipment for video games, for users who are (supposed to be) familiar with ninjas – icons of Japanese culture as seen through foreign eyes. A wholesaler of children’s clothes (at 25 Nguyễn Chí Thanh, Hanoi) carries the name *Bông Zô*, a calque of French *bonjour* (‘hello’). The shop’s sign aims to be playful, attractive and Western-looking: instead of the letter Ô, it has flowers, whose petals provide a distant equivalent to the missing circumflex accent; the name is supplemented by an English motto “Children’s Fashion”. Again, there is no hesitation, for young Hanoians, as to the phonetic rendering: the intended vowel is /**o**/ (orthographic Ô), in compliance with the semi-stable graphophonemic rules of “Hanoian English”. The fashion shop *Zami* (in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City) may have drawn inspiration from *Ami* (Thời trang Ami, 76 Nguyễn Lương Bằng, Đống Đa, Hanoi), a shop which deals in (costly) imported fashion items and has the French word for ‘friend’ (*ami*) as its name. The English feminine given name *Susie* is adapted as *Suzi*, used as the name of several clothes stores, and of a photographer specialized in wedding photographs. Final E could cause confusion with the Vietnamese diphthong /**iə**/ (spelt *iê*, but remember that Vietnamese diacritics tend to be removed in coining foreign-looking names), and medial S could be read at its Vietnamese value (an unvoiced fricative), hence its replacement by Z, which is phonetically unambiguous and has the added bonus of being foreign-looking.

#### 4.2. Vietnamese words with adapted spelling

A second type of names are built from Vietnamese words with an adapted spelling, substituting Z for G or D. For instance, the name of the website *Lozi* ([lozi.vn](http://lozi.vn)), presenting restaurants, comes from *lo gì* ‘What’s the worry? / Don’t worry!’; a review emphasizes the name’s youthful, trendy connotations.<sup>7</sup> A men’s clothing shop in Hanoi sports the name *Xinh zai* ‘handsome’, instead of orthographic *xinh giai*. A company manufacturing a traditional type of paper containing *Thymelaeaceae* bark, called *giấy dó* in Vietnamese, adopted the name *Zó Project* (<http://zoproject.com/>). The choice of Z in the project’s name corresponds to the company’s anchorage in contemporary international discourse (marketing the company as “socially responsible” and “environmentally responsible”), while the tone mark on the vowel preserves a Vietnamese touch.

#### 4.3. Vietnamese coinages containing the letter Z

This section presents Vietnamese coinages containing the letter Z without direct reference to a particular foreign word.

*Zoka* is the name of a spicy sandwiches shop in the same street (152C Triệu Việt Vương): comments seen on the Internet represent it as a youthful, trendy place, “whose style perfectly fits the taste of young people”.<sup>8</sup> The name is an acronym for *giòn cay* /**zɔn.kăj**/ “crispy and spicy”, adopting two “non-conformist” consonants: Z instead of orthographic *GI*; and K, instead of orthographic C. The latter is easily intelligible, as the letter K has the value /**k**/ in Vietnamese orthography, but not in all syllables. The syllable /**ka**/ is spelt *ca* in Vietnamese. Vietnamese spelling has CA, CÔ, CU for /**ka**/, /**ko**/, /**ku**/, but KÊ, KI for /**ke**/, /**ki**/ because the use of *ce* and *ci* for /**ke**/ and /**ki**/ would have conflicted with orthographic habits in the Romance languages with which the authors of the transcription were most familiar: C is used for the consonant /**ts**/ in various European languages since the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. (For more information see Haudricourt 2010.)

Most of the connotations of *Zoka* are also associated with *Zodi Cafe* (at 156 Triệu Việt Vương, Bùi Thị Xuân, Hai Bà Trưng). Reviews of the coffee shop emphasize that it is “young”, “western”, and reasonably priced: “Our young readers are certainly not unfamiliar with Zodi Cafe,

<sup>7</sup> Source : <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/nhip-song-tre/20141202/lo-gi-co-lozi/678936.html>, consulted in July 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Original text: “Phong cách thú vị này hẳn là rất hợp gu giới trẻ.”



one of Hanoi's top 5 coffee shops...";<sup>9</sup> "Zodi, famous for its 'leggy café' style, now has a fresh design, even younger and more Western than before! (...) the ideal place for young people to hold parties with friends and family."<sup>10</sup> The cafe is located inside a 9-floor edifice by the same name (*Zodi building*); the name was chosen by the entrepreneur who had it built to host his home and his offices as well as *Zodi Cafe* and luxury apartments for rent. Seen in this light, it does not appear inappropriate to hypothesize that the name *Zodi* bears a strong association to the personality of the owner, a young, wealthy and self-confident Hanoian.

In the name *Zodi*, the initial Z has a straightforward [z] reading; it also disambiguates the following D, which in contrast to the preceding Z can safely be interpreted as having its /d/ reading (which in "orthodox" orthography should be written Đ), not its orthographic value /z/. The infractions to Vietnamese orthographic conventions thus support one another: the sound /z/, which should be written D, is spelt Z, prompting an interpretation of the following D as /d/ instead of /z/. This amounts to a parallel code, transcribing Vietnamese sounds in a nonstandard yet unambiguous way. Similar cases include the company name *SONADEZI* ([sonadezi.com.vn](http://sonadezi.com.vn)), where the presence of Z disambiguates the reading of D; users of the name are unlikely to know that *SONADEZI*, unlike *Zodi*, is the acronym of a foreign name, "Société Nationale pour le Développement des Zones Industrielles" (National Company for the Development of Industrial Areas).

There also exist coffee brands that use the letter Z, such as *Bazanca* and *Rozano*. To our knowledge, these are Vietnamese coinages intended to sound foreign; these names may reflect an influence of Italian names such as *Lavazza*. *Zaza Shop*, a company selling trendy and reasonably priced design items at several shops and online (<http://www.zazashop.vn/>), may well be an allusion to the Spanish brand *Zara*, playing on the fact that, if reduced to Hanoian phonology (i.e. treated as a local word), *Zara* would come out as /zaza/, since words with orthographic R are now pronounced with /z/. The name *Zaza* can thus be read as tongue-in-cheek plagiarism of the name of... a Spanish clothes company itself known for plagiarism. The name *Zenda*, for a company that sells ready-to-wear clothing, may also be influenced by foreign names, though less directly.

The familiar, information connotations of Z may have played a role in its adoption of the name *Bezut* for a cough syrup, and of the name *Meizan* as one of the Vietnamese brands of Wilmar (<http://www.wilmar-international.com>), the largest producer of consumer pack edible oils in the world. *Meizan* products include blended oils, soybean oil, sesame oil, flour, and rice; the message that the products are of good quality is conveyed not only by the logo – a smiling Caucasian-looking chef with his thumb up – but also by the mildly foreign-looking name.

The paint name *Zikon* is apparently a Vietnamese coinage, again using Z and K in phonetically transparent (but non-orthodox) ways; in *Zikon*, and in the phonetically unfriendly name of the lubricant *ZIC-Xq*, the scientific connotations of Z (which appears in some scientific terms, as mentioned in section 1) are activated, but its "Western" connotations are not fully absent: the mention of "Japanese technology" ("công nghệ Nhật Bản") on the product is compatible with the hypothesis that the product's designers aimed for a tinge of foreign glamour – in contrast to a paint brand name such as ĐAI BÀNG, "Eagle", which looks fully local, and accordingly makes no mention of foreign technology. *Zinca* is a manufacturer of construction materials for ceilings and partitions (<http://zinca.com.vn/>).

Among "Z" websites, the most popular<sup>11</sup> is *Zing* ([zing.vn](http://zing.vn)), a competitor to Yahoo, also offering music for download. 'Zing' is the name of irony punctuation in English, but this fact known to few users of English may not have been known to the creator of the Vietnamese site name; the name sounds like a selection of a phonetic combination that sounds typically English to a

<sup>9</sup> Original text: "Chắc hẳn các bạn trẻ không còn xa lạ gì với Zodi cafe – top 5 quán cafe trên cao đẹp nhất Hà Nội..." <http://kenh14.vn/xem-an-choi/sang-chanh-voi-gia-hop-ly-tai-zodi-cafe-20131219090216354.chn> Posted 19/03/2013, consulted 25/03/2015.

<sup>10</sup> Original text: "Nổi tiếng vì thuộc style "Cafe chân dài", không gian mới được tút tát của Zodi hiện giờ còn trẻ trung hơn, tây hơn! (...) nơi lý tưởng ưa thích của các bạn trẻ chọn để tổ chức các buổi sinh nhật, liên hoan cùng bạn bè và gia đình" <http://www.nhommua.com/ha-noi/cafe-kem/zodi-cafe-7F040408037C.html> Consulted 25/03/2015.

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/VN>, consulted in November 2014.

foreign ear, combining the (highly frequent) *-ing* ending with the (highly frequent) sound /z/. In turn, Zing launched the IP telephone application *Zalo* (zaloapp.com), whose name combines the initial of the name *Zing* with *Alô*, the greeting used on the 'phone in Vietnam; the choice to retain an initial *Z* can be seen as confirmation of the special value of this letter. The list also includes *Lazada* and *Zalora* (shopping), *Vozforums*, *Techz.vn* and *Vn-zoom* (technology forums), *Ziddu*, *Sozi*, and *Zshop.vn*.

### 5. Statistics on the use of the letter Z in Vietnamese: examining a corpus of 100 million words

As a complement to the qualitative observations presented above, statistics on the use of the letter *Z* in Vietnamese were calculated by the third author, to obtain quantitative evidence on the contexts of appearance of the letter *Z* in Vietnamese texts. Frequencies and collocations were computed from a general corpus of contemporary written Vietnamese which comprises 106,464,835 words. As an example, Figure 2 shows concordance lines for the word 'Zalo'.

**Figure 2:** Concordance lines excerpted from the search results

873	màn hình máy tính. Sau khi hoàn thành xong thao tác này, tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên máy tính của bạn sẽ được kết nối với tài khoản Zalo trên
874	và lúc này bạn mới có thể sử dụng Zalo trên PC. Thông tin thêm về <b>Zalo</b> Đánh giá về phần mềm gửi tin nhắn miễn phí Zalo trên máy tính
875	với tài khoản Zalo trên di động và lúc này bạn mới có thể sử dụng <b>Zalo</b> trên PC. Thông tin thêm về Zalo Đánh giá về phần mềm gửi tin
876	, tài khoản Zalo trên máy tính của bạn sẽ được kết nối với tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên di động và lúc này bạn mới có thể sử dụng Zalo trên PC.
877	nửa bạn nên đăng xuất tài khoản Zalo. Cách xóa vĩnh viễn tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> rất dễ dàng với vài thao tác đơn giản, nhưng có thể bạn không
878	nhắc của bạn thì khi không sử dụng nữa bạn nên đăng xuất tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> . Cách xóa vĩnh viễn tài khoản Zalo rất dễ dàng với vài thao tác
879	khởi động lại máy tính, mở Zalo và thử lại. Thủ thuật và hướng <b>dẫn Zalo</b> vừa tung tính năng "Án tượng 2015" cho phép người dùng xem
880	, nhưng có thể bạn không để ý tới chức năng này trong ứng dụng <b>Zalo</b> chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài khoản Zalo
881	chỉ là quảng cáo... tất cả đều có thể làm được nếu bạn có tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> . Nhưng nếu một ngày, bỗng nhiên bạn mất, quên mật khẩu
882	viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài khoản Zalo trên điện <b>thoại</b> . <b>Zalo</b> là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ biến ở Việt Nam. Kết
883	dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
884	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
885	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
886	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
887	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
888	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
889	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
890	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
891	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
892	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
893	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
894	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
895	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
896	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
897	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
898	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
899	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
900	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
901	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
902	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ
903	biến ở Việt Nam. Kết dung Zalo chat. Bài viết này sẽ giúp bạn nhanh chóng xóa tài <b>khoản Zalo</b> trên điện thoại. Zalo là một trong những OTT đang cực kỳ phổ

The contextual information exemplified in Figure 2 provides the basis for finding collocation patterns, which constitute one of the staples of corpus linguistics. A collocation is a sequence of words that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. Some information concerning the method used to arrive at the statistics in Table 2 are provided below; readers with limited interest in these technical matters may want to go straight to Table 2.

The semantic spaces of the words and concepts related to words containing the letter *Z* were estimated on the basis of Mutual Information (MI) scores (Church & Hanks 1990; Lin 1998). These scores were measured using the formulae in (1) and (2) (Rychlý 2008; Kilgarriff et al. 2014).

$$(1) \text{ T-score: } \log_2 \frac{f_{AB}N}{f_A f_B}$$

(2) Association score:

$$AScore(w_1, R, w_2) = \log \frac{\|w_1, R, w_2\| \cdot \|*, *, *\|}{\|w_1, R, *\| \cdot \|*, *, w_2\|} \cdot \log(\|w_1, R, w_2\| + 1)$$

The variables in (1) and (2) are the following:

$N$  – corpus size,

$f_A$  – number of occurrences of the keyword in the whole corpus (the size of the concordance),

$f_B$  – number of occurrences of the collocate in the whole corpus,

$f_{AB}$  – number of occurrences of the collocate in the concordance (number of co-occurrences)

We count frequencies for triples of a first word connected by a specific grammatical relation to a second word, written (word1; gramrel; word2).

$\|w1;R; w2\|$  – number of occurrences of the triple

$\|w1;R; *\|$  – number of occurrences of the first word in the grammatical relation with any second word

$\|*; *, w2\|$  – number of occurrences of the second word in any grammatical relation with any first word

$\|*; *, *\|$  – number of occurrences of any first word in any grammatical relation with any second word: that is, the total number of triples found in the corpus.

Table 2 shows the results. Words with capitalized and noncapitalized initials are not merged, hence the separate appearance of *shop* plus *Shop* (English loanword) and *người mẫu* plus *Người mẫu* (‘model/runway model’). These first-pass corpus search results provide striking confirmation of the association of Z words with glamour and razzle-dazzle.

**Table 2:** Association scores of keywords to words containing the letter Z

Word	English translation	Frequency $xy$	Association score
điện thoại	telephone	77	8.90
trình diễn	show	45	8.79
nhà thiết kế	designer	10	8.29
sưu tập	collection	24	7.84
biểu diễn	performance	38	7.77
Di động	mobile	3	7.62
Người mẫu	model (person)	3	7.59
Tư vấn	advising	9	7.56
shop	<i>ditto</i>	4	7.38
Người đẹp	beauty	3	7.28
phụ kiện	accessory	3	7.27
Xu hướng	tendency, trend	3	7.26
Shop	<i>ditto</i>	2	7.01
Biểu diễn	performance, show	2	7.00
người mẫu	model (person)	6	6.95
Thiết kế	design	3	6.89
Show	<i>ditto</i>	2	6.63
Ngôi sao	star	2	6.57
ăn mặc	dress	9	6.35
nhíp ảnh	photography	4	6.30
sành điệu	stylish	2	6.27
ca nhạc	music	3	6.19
cửa hiệu	shop	2	5.95
yêu thích	favorite	8	5.63

Word	English translation	Frequency <i>xy</i>	Association score
UltraTOUCH	<i>brand name</i>	3	8.33
Minh Hạnh	<i>company name</i>	3	8.30
may sẵn	ready	3	8.22
Ted Lapidus	<i>brand name</i>	2	7.76
Shape Korea	<i>(false positive?)</i>	2	7.76
Blumarine	<i>brand name</i>	2	7.75
Casio Exilim	<i>camera name</i>	2	7.74
Polo	<i>ditto</i>	2	7.67
Văn Hóa	culture	2	7.31
may mặc	garments	2	7.25
Victoria	<i>ditto</i>	2	6.81
quyến rũ	seductive	6	6.14
thịnh hành	popular	2	5.42
áp đặt	imposed	4	5.31
trị giá	value	3	4.53
hứa hẹn	promise	2	4.17
dành	name	10	3.33
thu	Autumn	8	2.94
kết hợp	combined	2	2.77
mang	to bring	9	1.46
diễn	to perform, to act	2	1.24
thành công	success	2	1.13

## 6. Conclusion

The letter Z is absent from the Vietnamese alphabet. But it is easy for Hanoians to pronounce, at its phonetic face value /z/. The present inquiry into the use of this letter in shop and brand names aimed to illustrate some of its connotations.

The fashion may not last. Today's mildly unconventional youths may become tomorrow's conservative elders. However, in a multilingual environment it does not seem likely that D (or GI) can gain the status of default representation of /z/ in the new Vietnamese coinages that will continue to appear. The popularity of Z seems set to continue, and could lead to a temptation to introduce it into the domain of given names. It already serves, in Vietnamese-American use, to rewrite the name *Dung* (with Vietnamese diacritics: *Dũng*) as *Dzung*, precluding the offensive reading 'dung'; the 20th-century poet Hồ Dzếnh likewise adopted *Dz-* for /z/ in his pen-name. It remains to be seen to what extent conservative forces will prevent this development.<sup>12</sup> A fictional character created by the poet and novelist Nguyễn Đình Chính is called *Zê* (phonemically /ze/); when pressed to explain this choice, the author explained that he had no explanation: that this is the sort of apparent nonsense that fiction is made of.<sup>13</sup> An independent rap singer chose the name *Thangzet*, which can be read as *Thằng Zét* or *Thắng Zét*, where *Zét* is the Vietnamese pronunciation of the letter Z, and *Thằng* is a masculine pronoun expressing disrespect (removing the tone mark

<sup>12</sup> In 1986, i.e. during China's "Reforms and Opening up" decade (Zhu 2014), a Chinese lawyer called his son "C" (赵 C). Use of one character fits the Chinese practice of having one or two characters as given name. This name led to protracted legal difficulties, however. As a settlement out of court, in 2009 the bearer of this name adopted a Chinese character as his given name. The stringency of these rules does not directly depend on the type of alphabet used: a few decades ago, some European countries would refuse to register newly born children under names considered unsuitable in view of the child's nationality.

<sup>13</sup> *Văn hóa – Nghệ thuật [Culture and Art]* magazine, issue 217, 2009, page 60.

makes it possible to defuse criticism of this slang word by pretending that the intended meaning is *Thắng*, meaning ‘victory’).

The present study only offered a quick overview of the topic of the use of the letter Z; this pilot study was intended as a modest contribution to the study of the present-day cultural dynamics of the *Quốc Ngữ* writing system – dynamics that tend to be veiled by the enduring illusion that the system was fixed once and for all in de Rhodes’s (1651) *Dictionarivm*.

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