A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE METAPHORS DENOTING THE CONCEPT OF "LIFE" IN LYRIC SONGS IN ENGLISH VERSUS VIETNAMESE

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Abstract - In the field of Cognitive Linguistics, cognitive metaphor (CM) is a popular language tool reflecting human cognition and thought. It plays a vital role in the conceptualization of abstract notions. This article presents a contrastive analysis of conceptual metaphors (CMs) denoting the concept of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyric songs. Based on the theoretical background of many linguists, especially Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lee (2001), Kovêcses (2005, 2010), as well as the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews, the study investigates and explores the similarities and differences in CMs of "Life" between the two languages from the cognitive perspective. The findings of the study prove that CMs of "Life" in both languages have many characteristics in common; however, those which are different are actually the unique features to be found in this kind of language device. The study is expected to contribute a significant part to the areas of English language teaching and learning (ELT/ELL), Translation studies and Cross-cultural communication.

Key words - cognitive metaphor(s) (CMs); lyric songs; English language teaching and learning (ELT/ELL); Translation studies; Cross-cultural communication.

1. Overview

Cognitive metaphors (CMs) used in daily language shape not only human communication but also human though and action. In their work - *Metaphors We Live By* - (1980), Lakoff and Johnson stated how everyday language is full of metaphors that people always use to imply something that they expect to be understood by others. In this sense, CM functions and links people together. This kind of language device is frequently used not only in daily conversations but also in various forms of works of art such as literature or music. Let's listen to the following lyrics:

Chiều nay em ra phố về

Thấy đời mình là những chuyến xe

Nghe Những Tàn Phai - Trịnh Công Sơn

(I'm back home from downtown

Feeling my life's like a journey)

Feeling Being on the Wane -Trinh Cong Son

I have wandered all my life

Rambling out of the Wild West

Leaving the towns I love best

Thought I'd seen some ups and down

'Till I come into New York town

Talkin' New York - Bob Dylan

As shown in the above mentioned examples, we can figure out that life is similar to a journey that can be realized through (i) words denoting a journey such as life, chuyến xe, and (ii) motion verbs such as wander, ramble, leave, come into. The journey itself may include a traveler, obstacles on the way and/or at its destination. We came to

recognize that the CMs helped these words make sense to us. We really appreciated the transference of meaning between the journey and the concept of "life" as it manifested from the source domain (SD) into the target domain (TD) in these lyric songs. And this was why this research was born.

2. Focus of the study

This research aims (i) to identify the CMs denoting "Life" in English versus Vietnamese lyric songs, (ii) to investigate how CMs express the notion of "Life" conceptualized in English versus Vietnamese lyric songs in terms of CL, and (iii) to find out the similarities and differences of CMs relating to the concept of "Life" in English versus Vietnamese lyric songs.

In order to reach the final aims, the objectives in the study are (i) to identify the CMs of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyrics songs in terms of CL, (ii) to categorize the CMs of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyrics songs in light of CMs as well as to analyze and discuss CMs of "Life" in terms of meaning, structure, mapping, (iii) to discover the similarities and differences of CMs denoting the concept of "Life" in lyric songs in English versus Vietnamese, and (iv) to suggest some implications for foreign language teaching and learning (FLT/FLL), translation studies and cross-culture communication.

3. Questions to be investigated

The research attempts to give answers to the following questions:

- How are the CMs of "Life" conceptualized in English and Vietnamese lyric songs?

- What are the similarities and differences of CMs denoting the concept of "Life" in lyric songs in English versus Vietnamese?

- What are the implications for the use of CMs of "Life" in foreign language teaching and learning, in translation studies and cross-culture communication?

4. Theoretical Background

4.1. Metaphor

4.1.1. Traditional Metaphor

The most comprehensive literature in the field of metaphor in terms of rhetoric may be accomplished by scholars from Aristotle to Richards (Aristotle, 2000). The rhetorical viewpoint sees metaphor as a part of verbal persuasion. A metaphor is considered as a substitution of words, or means of an analogy between the substitution

word and the word being substituted. Therefore, it is assumed to be an ornament of language which conveys no new information.

To criticize this rhetorical way of the metaphors, there are different points of view in dividing the transference of meaning of metaphors into the word-centered approach and sentence-centered one. The former one, word-centered approach, contributes to the clarification of the semantic structure of metaphors. The latter indicates that the essence of metaphor lies in the interaction between metaphorical expression and its context. It explicates the mechanism of creating meaning. What is common to both approaches is that the scholars at this time hold that metaphor is merely a rhetoric phenomenon, transference from one word to another and a device to enhance forcefulness and ornateness of expressions. They dealt with metaphor like a problem concerning meaning in the language system without paying much attention to the influence of metaphor on extra linguistic reality.

4.1.2. Cognitive Metaphor

a. Classification of CMs

According to Kovecses (2010), there are three kinds of cognitive metaphors which are structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. In structural metaphors, the source domain (SD) provides a relatively rich knowledge structure for the target domain (TD). In other words, the cognitive function of structural metaphors is to enable speakers to understand target A by means of the structure metaphor of source B. Ontological metaphors enable us to see more sharply delineated structure. Orientational metaphors relate to basic human spatial orientations such as up-down, center-periphery, and the like.

b. Metaphorical Mappings

- Mapping Principles

There are two main roles for the conceptual domains posited in CMs which are (i) SD or the conceptual domain supplies structure and relationships to the TD, and (ii) TD is the conceptual domain requiring structure or being given structure from the other domain.

A mapping is the systematic set of correspondences that exist between constituent elements of SD and TD. Many elements of target concepts come from SDs and are not preexisting. To know a CM is to know the set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing. The same idea of mapping between source and target is used to describe analogical reasoning and inferences.

- Image Schemas

Image schemas include container schemas, part-whole schemas, the source-path-goal schema, and link schema.

4.1.3. Definition of "Life"

According to Oxford Learners Dictionaries, "lyric song" is defined as (i) the ability to breathe, grow, reproduce, etc. which people, animals and plants have before they die, (ii) the state of being alive as human, (iii) living things, (iv) the period between somebody's birth and their death.

4.1.4. Definition of "Lyric songs"

According to Oxford Learners Dictionary, a lyric song is defined as (i) a song having a singing voice of light volume and modest range, or (ii) a song having a pleasing succession of sounds or a melodious song.

5. Methodology

The present study is quantitative and qualitative by nature, in which the quantitative characteristic of the study can be seen through the percentages taken from the questionnaire for candidates and the qualitative characteristic through the data collected from the candidates' interview responses.

In addition, the researcher also used the analytic and synthetic methods to measure the values of the data collected in the study. The analytic method helped point out factors that need to be examined in details, and the synthetic method was used to synthesize the collected data. Besides, the descriptive method was employed to give information about CMs in English and Vietnamese during the process of analyzing the collected data.

5.1. Sampling

In this study, a population of nearly 250 EFL candidates was available for inclusion in this study. However, not all of them were chosen to conduct the investigation. In fact, only 100 out of them who were MA candidates at Danang College of Foreign Languages filled in the questionnaire, and five ones were invited to participate in the interviews which lasted about 15 minutes each. Both the questionnaire and interviews consist of 35 question items in order to ensure the internal validity of the study.

5.2. Instrumentation

In this study, both the questionnaire and the interviews with candidates at the research site were the main instruments for data collection. Both forms of instruments focused on (i) the candidates' general opinions on CMs; (ii) the recognizability of CMs; and (iii) the advantages of comprehending CMs. There were two kinds of questions in use which are Yes-No questions and Multiple Choice questions. Most of the interview questions were similar to the ones used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not contain any free answer question items whereas some in the interviews were in extended form. This was done to ensure the qualitative characteristic of the study.

6. Findings and Discussion

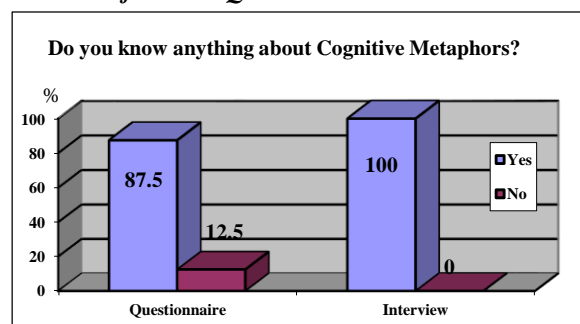### 6.1. Results from the Questionnaire and Interviews
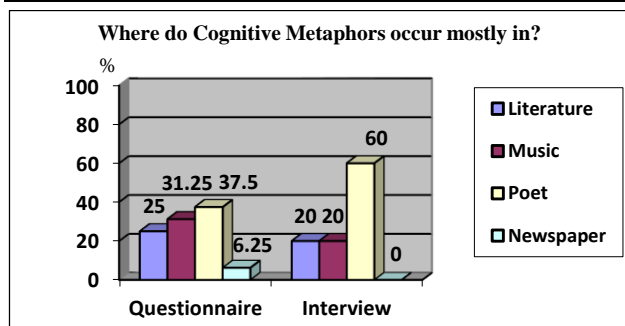

Figure 1. Student's attitude towards studying CMs

Where do Cognitive Metaphors occur mostly in?

Figure 2. Student's views on the frequent occurrence of CMs

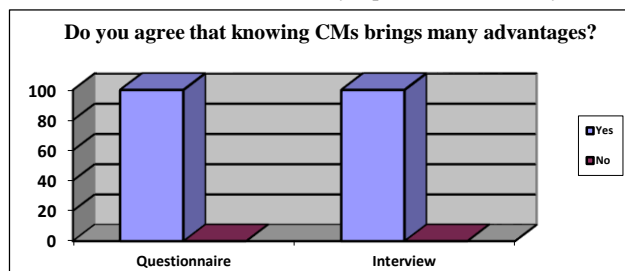**Do you agree that knowing CMs brings many advantages?**

Figure 3. Student's view on the advantages of CMs

6.2. Semantic Features of Words Denoting "Life"

In this paper, "Life" is a noun having both singular and plural form. Morphologically, it has one root morpheme, that is, "Life". In terms of semantics, "Life" is specific and is a polysemous word, having at least eight semantic features of meanings. The following Table presents a brief description of the semantic features of "Life" in the study.

Table 1. Brief Description of the Semantic Features of "Life" in the study

Noun	English Meanings	Vietnamese Meanings
LIFE	1. The ability to breathe, grow, reproduce, etc… which people, animals and plants have before they die and which objects do not have	1. Sống, sức sống
	2. The state of being alive as human, the existence of an individual human being	2. Sinh mệnh, tính mệnh
	3. Living things	3. Vật sống, sự sống
	4. The period between somebody's birth and their death, a part of this period	4. Tuổi thọ, thời gian tồn tại
	5. The punishment of being sent to prison for life, life imprisonment	5. Chung thân, suốt đời
	6. The quality of being active and exciting, energy or enthusiasm	6. Sinh khí, sinh lực, sức sống
	7. One of a set number of chances before a player is out of a game	7. Mạng

6.3. CMs of "Life"

Generally speaking, it is clear that there are many kinds of CMs denoting the concept of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyric songs. Each variation of CM provides a different perspective on life. In this paper, many expressions of CMs such as *Life is a journey, Life is a plant*, and *Life is fire* are available in both languages. Sharing the same expression of *Life is a plant*, both English and Vietnamese composers use a series of images of plant to portray life. However, earning their living in a country where farming is

the main career, Vietnamese composers get accustomed to the image of rice fields, flowers, fruits and plants. With vivid imagination, they do not consider plant lifeless things; conversely, to them, plants are the embodiment of life.

There are also some different CMs of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyric songs. CMs of *Life is a game, Life is a play, and Life is love* only occur in English lyric songs whereas CMs of *Lifetime is passing of time, Life is philosophy, Life is natural phenomena and Life is emotion* occur only in Vietnamese lyric songs. Besides, CM *Lifetime is passing of time* are used in Vietnamese lyric songs in which Vietnamese composers refer to day and season to imply lifetime. They also use CMs *Life is emotion* basing on the recognition that although life has its pleasures, it is fraught with sadness and *Life is philosophy* on the philosophy that nothing lasts forever, everything is impermanent. Vietnamese people are affected by Buddhist ideas and conceptualize life as suffering or impermanence. Possibly these are the reasons why Vietnamese composers use these kinds of CMs so often. The same thing happens to CM *Life is natural phenomena* which occurs so densely in Vietnamese lyric songs. Since earning their living mainly by farming, Vietnamese people are fully aware of the significant influence of nature phenomena on physical and mental life. Their life depends partly on nature and they expect to live in harmony with nature. These aspects in life are similar to the phenomena of nature like sunny or rainy days and even stormy days in English lyric songs.

Table 2. CMs of "Life" found in the study

COGNITIVE METAPHORS	
LIFE	EXAMPLES
Life is a journey	And the only pleasure he gets out of **life** Is **rambling** from town to town *House Of The Rising Sun* Chiều nay em ra phố **về** Thấy **đời** mình là những **chuyến xe** *Nghe Những Tàn Phai* (I'm back home from downtown *Feeling my **life**'s like a **journey***) *Feeling Being on the Wane*
Life is a plant	I believe for every drop of rain that falls A **flower** grows, a new **life** starts *I Believe* Khi **hoa** héo khô im lặng **nụ** tàn Tôi đang lắng nghe im lặng **đời** mình *Tôi Đang Lắng Nghe* (When flowers dried, **buds** are faded in silence I'm listening to **my life** in silence) *I'm Listening*
Life is fire	Oh, you have a **flame** Feel it in your heart Your **life** is **burning** *The Core* **Đời** ta có khi là **đốm lửa** Một hôm **nhóm** trong vườn khuya *Đêm Thấy Ta Là Thác Đổ* (My life is sometimes like **a blaze of fire burning** in the garden at midnight} *At Night I Feel Like a Waterfall*
Life is a game	Every damn day I'm **taking chances** ... I'm addicted to **this gambling**

	... **I'm gambling** with my **life**	
		Chances
Life is a play	**Life** was a **play** and the world a **stage** I thought I had to **play** each part	
		Life Was A Play
Life is love	That **love** could be the only way, Everlasting **life**, For **life** is **love**, and **love** is life.	
		Life
Life time is passing of time	**Bốn mùa** thay lá thay hoa thay mãi **đời** ta Bên trời xanh mãi những nụ mầm mới	
		Bốn Mùa Thay Lá
	(Four seasons change leaves, flowers and ever change my life In the sky new buds are as green as ever...)	
		Four Seasons Change Leaves
Life is philosophy	Ta nghe **đời như có như không**	
		Còn Có Bao Ngày?
	(I feel **life sometimes available, sometimes not**)	
		How Many Days Left?
Life is natural phenomena	Đi về đâu hỡi em khi trong lòng không chút **nắng?** Giấc mơ **đời** xa vắng	
		Đời Gọi Em Biết Bao Lần
	(Where would you go when there is no **sunshine** in your heart, my dear? Your dream in **life** sounds so deserted and distant)	
		Life Has Called For You So ManyTimes
Life is emotion	Còn lại mình, đời bồng bềnh, **đời buồn tênh**	
		Còn Có Bao Ngày?
	(I am left alone, life's so floating, life's so sad	
		How Many Days Left?

7. Similarities and Differences in CMs of Life in English and Vietnamese Lyric Songs

As mentioned earlier, CM provides a means for comprehending abstract concepts in terms of concrete concepts. "Life" supposed to be abstract and difficult to grasp has turned into more familiar, more comprehensive thanks to concrete concepts related to a journey, a plant, a game, a fire, a play, etc. With the theory of CM as the framework, this paper attempts to analyze the CMs of "Life" in English and Vietnamese lyric songs. Table 3. below presents the similarities and differences of CMs of "Life" and provides some explanation of the cognitive universality and cultural specificity in the conceptualization of the concept in English and Vietnamese.

***Table 3.** A comparison of CMs of Life in English and Vietnamese Lyric Songs*

Source Domain	CMs of Life	
	English	**Vietnamese**
1. a journey	+	+
2. a plant	+	+
3. fire	+	+
4. a game	+	−
5. a play	+	−
6. love	+	−
7. passing of time	−	+
8. philosophy	−	+
9. natural phenomena	−	+
10. emotion	−	+

8. Conclusions

As shown in Table 3. , CMs such as *Life is a journey, Life is a plant* and *Life is fire* are available both in English and Vietnamese lyric songs. However, the differences found out are numerous. Whilst CMs *Life is a game, Life is a play* and *Life is love* are utilized quite popularly in English lyric songs, Vietnamese composers do not use this type of CM at all. Instead, they thoroughly exploited CMs of *Lifetime is passing of time, Life is philosophy, Life is natural phenomena* and *Life is emotion.*

CMs are a part of culture; they are used to bridge the gap between and among cultures. Metaphorical mappings are thus not the unique creation of individual music composer but a way that members of a culture share in conceptualizing abstract notions. Songwriters in each country, as members of their country's culture, naturally can make use of these basic metaphorical expressions to communicate with members and/or audience of other cultures.

9. Implications

9.1. For Language Teachers and Language Learners

CMs provide a means for comprehending abstract concepts in terms of concrete concepts. As a perceptual and conceptualizing tool, CMs of life help us receive the world we live in, conceptualize our experience and form our new ideas from different perspectives. In this sense, taking advantage of CMs of life can help Asian and western language learners not only enjoy the artistic works but also understand other cultures and improve their communication skills.

9.2. For Translators and Interpreters

Many approaches to translation and traditional metaphors do not take into account the culture aspect. The outcome of this study can contribute new insights into translation studies since the cultural element in CMs of life might help translators and interpreters broaden their viewpoints, accept other cultures and improve their translation skills.

9.3. For Music Fans

CMs of life are popularly implied in songs, thus listeners could enjoy not only words or phrases but also images and/or beauties of language and music. Comprehending CMs of life also helps listeners appreciate works of art better and grasp the hidden message that composers want to communicate. That can be their experience or philosophy of life which contributes significantly to listeners' critical thinking and ability to perceive music.

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