

A STUDY ON CONCEPTUAL METONYMY IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE NEWS DISCOURSE

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ HOÁN DỤ Ý NIỆM TRONG ĐIỂN NGÔN BÁO CHÍ TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

Luu Quy Khuong¹, Luu Ngoc Bao Trang^{2*}

¹The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

²Monash University, Australia

*Corresponding author: trangluungocbao@gmail.com

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Abstract - Metonymy is not only a stylistic device but a way of human thinking. It exists in various kinds of discourse, news included. Once understanding metonymy used in news discourse readers can discover the diversity of language and use it effectively in communication. This study examines conceptual metonymy in English and Vietnamese online news discourse. Adopting a qualitative approach supplemented with descriptive quantitative analysis, it analysed 400 sentences containing metonymic expressions extracted from English and Vietnamese news websites. The results reveal three main types of metonymies, namely referential, predicational, and propositional, highlighting common metonymic relationships such as part for whole, place for institution, and producer for product. The study also finds that English metonymy tends to display meaning extension, whereas Vietnamese favours meaning reduction.

Key words - Conceptual metonymy; news discourse; metonymic relationships; meaning extension; meaning reduction

1. Introduction

In written discourse, metonymy functions as a powerful means of expressing implicit thoughts and emotions. It may appear either explicitly or implicitly, reflecting the cognitive processes that underlie meaning construction in language [1]. With the development of Cognitive Linguistics, metonymy has increasingly been understood as a conceptual phenomenon rather than merely a linguistic ornament. In this perspective, Lakoff and Johnson [2], later elaborated by Kövecses and Radden [3], conceptualize it as a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity provides mental access to another within the same cognitive domain.

Conceptual metonymy plays a particularly important role in media discourse, where complex socio-political realities are often condensed into concise and accessible expressions. News reports frequently employ metonymic expressions to represent complex socio-political realities in a concise and accessible manner. These patterns are common in both English and Vietnamese news reporting, suggesting shared cognitive strategies for representing actors and events [4]. Through such usage, conceptual metonymy enriches media texts by making them more vivid and cognitively economical, thereby enhancing their communicative impact on readers.

Tóm tắt - Hoán dụ không chỉ là một biện pháp tu từ mà còn phản ánh cách tư duy của con người và xuất hiện trong nhiều loại diễn ngôn, bao gồm cả diễn ngôn báo chí. Việc hiểu hoán dụ trong báo chí giúp người đọc nhận ra sự đa dạng của ngôn ngữ và sử dụng ngôn ngữ hiệu quả trong giao tiếp. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát hoán dụ ý niệm trong diễn ngôn báo chí trực tuyến bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Bằng phương pháp định tính kết hợp phân tích định lượng mô tả, nghiên cứu phân tích 400 câu chứa biểu thức hoán dụ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt được trích từ các trang báo trực tuyến. Kết quả cho thấy ba loại hoán dụ chính gồm hoán dụ quy chiếu (referential), hoán dụ vị ngữ (predicational) và hoán dụ mệnh đề (propositional), với các quan hệ phổ biến như bộ phận thay cho toàn thể, địa điểm thay cho tổ chức và người sản xuất thay cho sản phẩm. Ngoài ra, hoán dụ trong tiếng Anh có xu hướng mở rộng nghĩa, trong khi tiếng Việt thiên về thu hẹp nghĩa.

Từ khóa - Hoán dụ ý niệm; diễn ngôn báo chí; quan hệ hoán dụ; mở rộng nghĩa; thu hẹp nghĩa

However, the cognitive complexity of conceptual metonymy may also pose interpretative challenges. Because metonymic meanings are often implicit, readers must rely on contextual knowledge and cultural models to interpret them accurately. This issue becomes particularly significant in cross-linguistic contexts, where differences in cultural knowledge and discourse conventions may influence how metonymy is used and understood. Although conceptual metonymy has been extensively examined in English (e.g., [5], [6]), and several studies have explored metonymy in Vietnamese from cognitive perspectives (e.g., [4], [7]) in recent years, systematic comparative research on conceptual metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse remains limited. In particular, little attention has been paid to the semantic features underlying different types of conceptual metonymy across the two languages within the specific genre of news reporting.

Against this background, this study aims to investigate and compare the types and semantic features of conceptual metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse. By adopting a contrastive perspective, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how metonymic expressions function in journalistic language across languages and cultural contexts. The findings are also expected to provide useful insights for language learners,

translators, and teachers in interpreting figurative language in media discourse. To achieve this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What types of metonymies are used in English and Vietnamese news discourse?
- What are the semantic features of metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse?
- What are the similarities and differences of metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse?

2. Theoretical framework

Warren [8] and Panther and Thornburg [9] classify conceptual metonymy into three types according to how the metonymic mapping operates:

(i) Referential metonymy

This type of metonymy involves using one entity to refer to another, typically within the same conceptual domain [8]. Its primary function is to refer to something indirectly but clearly, based on a close, often contextually salient relationship. Example: “People are hungry for Shakespeare in America.” [8, p.43]. The word *Shakespeare* is a conceptual metonymy which refers to plays written by Shakespeare. In referential metonymy, entities are expressed by a noun or a noun phrase.

(ii) Propositional metonymy

This type of metonymy does not just refer to an entity but conveys a whole proposition or idea via a related concept [8]. It encapsulates broader meaning, often involving inference, where the hearer/reader must infer the intended full idea. Example: “It won’t happen while I still breathe.” [10, p.340]. The proposition *I still breathe* gives rise to the proposition I am alive. The metonymic expression is the former, and the notion intended to be conveyed is the latter. One of the prerequisites for a proposition to imply another is that we have had similar experiences with both propositions.

(iii) Predicational metonymy

Predicational metonymy is a type of conceptual metonymy in which a potential action (such as ability, possibility, obligation, or permission) is used to stand for the actual occurrence of that action. It typically involves verbs or verb phrases and relies on the listener or reader inferring that the event not only could happen but did happen [9]. Example: “He was able to tell me that it had merely gone into spasm” [9, p.47]. The phrase *was able to tell me* in this sentence metonymically expresses that he did tell me. Predicational metonymies are normally restricted to verbs or verb phrases. Predicational metonymy states that a potential event (such as the ability, possibility, permission, or obligation to undertake any action) is metonymically linked to its actual occurrence.

These categories provide a useful analytical framework for examining how metonymy functions in journalistic discourse in this study, as they allow metonymic expressions to be systematically identified and analysed according to the type of meaning relationship involved.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research methods

This study used a qualitative approach supplemented with descriptive quantitative analysis. The qualitative approach helped collect data and analysed metonymic expressions in terms of semantics and syntax. The quantitative information was utilized to categorise the data and put it in statistical tables. In addition, the descriptive method and contrastive analysis were employed in the data analysis process to figure out the similarities and differences in metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse.

3.2. Sampling

This study examines conceptual metonymy in English and Vietnamese online news discourse that reflects language commonly encountered by general readers. News articles were collected from widely circulated and reputable newspapers to ensure the representativeness of mainstream journalistic usage. The English data were drawn from The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/>), USA Today (<https://www.usatoday.com/>), The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/international>), and The Independent (<https://www.independent.co.uk/>), while the Vietnamese data were collected from The Thanh Nien (<https://thanhvien.vn/>), The Nhan Dan (<https://nhandan.vn/>), The Lao Dong (<https://laodong.vn/>), The Dan Tri (<https://dantri.com.vn/>), and The Tien Phong (<https://tienphong.vn/>). Articles published between 2017 and 2025 were included to capture a wide range of naturally occurring metonymic usages across contexts. The study focuses on identifying recurrent conceptual patterns rather than examining temporal variation.

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to identify texts containing instances of conceptual metonymy, following the characteristics outlined by Warren [8]. The unit of analysis is a complete sentence in which a metonymic expression can be clearly identified. 200 sentences were collected for each language to allow for in-depth qualitative analysis while ensuring sufficient variation for cross-linguistic comparison.

3.3. Data Collection

The data collection process was carried out manually. For each selected news website, the researcher browsed the main news sections aimed at general readers (e.g., national news, international news, and opinion sections) and identified articles likely to contain metonymic expressions based on topic. Within these articles, sentences were screened to locate complete, contextually interpretable metonymic expressions. Only sentences containing metonymic expressions were included. An expression was identified as conceptual metonymy if it involved a non-literal, context-dependent mapping in which one entity provides mental access to another within the same conceptual domain [2], [3]. This identification was further supported by examining whether the expression exhibited the characteristic features of referential, propositional, or predicational metonymy, following Warren [8] and Panther and Thornburg [9]. Duplicates and ambiguous or

unclassifiable cases were excluded. The final corpus of 200 English sentences and 200 Vietnamese sentences was thus formed through this filtering process.

3.4. Data Analysis

The study first identified and categorised metonymic expressions in the collected samples. It then analysed the metonymic relationships and the semantic features underlying these expressions. Next, it examined the frequency of metonymy use in English and Vietnamese online newspapers. Finally, it identified the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and English metonymic expressions in news discourse.

3.5. Research Procedure

The steps involved in the research process include:

Analyzing news articles collected from widely circulated and reputable English newspapers mentioned above to identify and collect 200 English sentences that contain metonymic expressions, categorising them into different kinds of metonymy, finding out the metonymic relationships and analysing metonymic features semantically. Similar procedures were conducted for the Vietnamese data.

Discussing and contrastively analysing the data collected, then finding out the similarities and differences between Vietnamese metonymic expressions and English ones in news discourse.

Suggesting some solutions to improve the efficiency of using metonymy in the newspaper, as well as in the English teaching and learning process.

3.6. Reliability and Validity

Reliability was enhanced by identifying instances of conceptual metonymy based on the criteria proposed by Warren [8] and through careful, repeated examination of the data. Consistent sampling procedures were applied to ensure comparability across the two corpora. Validity is supported by using authentic news discourse from widely circulated newspapers and by grounding the analysis in established cognitive linguistic frameworks.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Types of Metonymies in English and Vietnamese News Discourse

4.1.1. Referential Metonymy

The analysis shows that both English and Vietnamese news discourse employ similar referential metonymic patterns. The most common relationships include part for whole, material for object, object for material, place for people, place for institution, place for event, producer for product, instrument for agent, sub-event for whole event, instrument for action, and action for agent. These patterns allow journalists to represent complex realities in a concise and cognitively efficient manner.

For example, in English news discourse, the sentence “She’d flick through the vast catalogue of *faces* she kept in her head...” [11] illustrates part-for-whole metonymy, where *faces* refers to the people the girl has encountered. Similarly, Vietnamese news discourse employs comparable patterns. In the phrase “Huyền thoại bóng đá

người Iran đang là *chân sút* vĩ đại nhất...” (The Iranian football legend is the greatest shooting leg...), the expression *chân sút* (literally shooting leg) metonymically refers to the football player as a whole [12].

The examples illustrate that referential metonymy in English and Vietnamese news discourse relies on similar conceptual mechanisms rooted in shared cognitive models. These metonymic patterns allow journalists to compress complex meanings into concise expressions while maintaining clarity and rhetorical effectiveness. The prevalence of these relationships across the two languages suggests that referential metonymy constitutes a fundamental strategy in news discourse for representing social actors, institutions, and events.

4.1.2. Propositional Metonymy

Unlike referential metonymy, which mainly involves noun phrases referring to entities, propositional metonymy operates at the level of events or logical relations. In news discourse, this type of metonymy allows writers to present complex causal relationships succinctly, which relies on readers to infer the underlying actions or circumstances from the explicitly stated result.

A recurrent pattern observed in both English and Vietnamese news discourse is result-for-action metonymy, in which the outcome of an event implicitly presupposes the action that produced it. For instance, the English headline: “Canadian couple *win lottery for third time*” [13] reports the final outcome of winning the lottery, while implicitly suggesting the prior act of purchasing lottery tickets. The reported result thus stands for the broader sequence of events that led to it. A similar metonymy can be found in Vietnamese news discourse. Consider the sentence: “Kết quả xổ số hôm 8.7, nhóm khách này *đã trúng tổng cộng 3 tỉ đồng*” (In the lottery results on July 8, this group of customers won a total of 3 billion VND) [14]. Here, the explicit statement about winning the lottery implies the preceding action of buying the lottery ticket. As in the English example, the outcome functions metonymically to represent the full event structure that made the result possible.

The findings illustrate how propositional metonymy enables journalists to report events economically by leaving portions of the meaning implicit. By highlighting a salient outcome or reaction, the discourse invites readers to infer the underlying actions through contextual reasoning.

4.1.3. Predicational Metonymy

Predicational metonymy involves a relationship between potentiality and actuality, where an expressed potential action implies that the action actually occurred. This type of metonymy typically appears in verbs or verb phrases expressing ability, possibility, or obligation, which are interpreted as referring to real events. In news discourse, such expressions allow writers to present actions indirectly while maintaining conciseness and narrative flow.

In English news discourse, predicational metonymy often appears in the form of potentiality-for-actuality mappings, where a verb expressing ability or obligation implies that the action took place. For example, in the sentence: “The pet *can hear* the heartbeat of its owner”

[15], the expression *can hear* describes the pet's ability but also implies the actual event of hearing the heartbeat. A similar pattern can be observed in Vietnamese news discourse. Predicational metonymy also occurs when expressions of possibility or capacity imply the realisation of the action. For instance, in the phrase: “người dân quận 7, TP.HCM đã có thể đến một số siêu thị trên địa bàn...” (residents of District 7, HCM City have been able to go to some local supermarkets...) [16], the phrase *đã có thể đến* (have been able to go) metonymically indicates that people actually went shopping, rather than merely having the ability to do so. In this case, the expression of possibility stands for the actual occurrence of the event.

Results indicate that predicational metonymy draws on shared cognitive mechanisms in both English and Vietnamese news discourse. By framing events through the lens of ability, possibility, or obligation, journalists can metonymically signal that an action has been completed. This strategy allows for a more indirect approach to reporting, enabling a style that is both concise and naturally paced without losing factual depth.

4.2. Semantic Features of Metonymy in English and Vietnamese News Discourse

4.2.1. Metonymic Transference Based on Idealised Cognitive Models (ICMs)

Metonymy activates whenever there are ICMs. Unlike conceptual relationships in metaphor, which involve two ICMs, metonymic relationships involve only one. Two general conceptual configurations can be used to categorise metonymy-producing relationships: whole ICM and its part(s), and parts of an ICM.

Considering most of the metonymies that operate in the Thing-and-Part ICM, the Constitution ICM and the Event ICM in English online news discourse, we realise that one part of the ICM can be accessed via its whole, or a whole ICM can be accessed via one of its parts.

Take this phrase as an example: “*New faces of tech*” [17]. This metonymy is based on the configuration of the whole ICM and its parts. The noun *faces* has two meanings that are metonymically linked. First, there is a signifier-signified relation between the form and the source meaning: “the front of the head, where the eyes, nose and mouth are”. Second, when the noun is put in context, the target meaning - “the new and potential people in the field of technology”, has become conventionalised. The metonymy relationship is expressed in Figure 1 below:

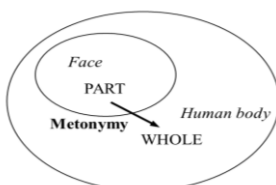


Figure 1. The whole ICM and its part relationship

A similar metonymic transference can also be observed in Vietnamese news discourse. The following example illustrates a metonymic transference involving a whole-part configuration: “*Cánh tay phải* của ông Kim Jong-un đến

Bắc Kinh...” (The right hand of Mr. Kim Jong-un arrived in Beijing...) [18]. In this case, the whole ICM is the human body, and *cánh tay phải* (the right hand) is a physical part of it. It metonymically refers to a trusted assistant of President Kim Jong-un, thus representing a whole person. It has two meanings that are metonymically linked. The source meaning is the anatomical arm, while the target meaning, implied via metonymy, is a dependable assistant.

In terms of part-part configuration, the results point out that we can access one part of a conceptual ICM through one of its other parts. The phrase “*trước khi Nga tiến hành chiến dịch quân sự...*” (Before Russia launched its military campaign...) [19] demonstrates this. The metonymy applied relates to the Location ICM, more specifically, it is the place for institution metonymy. The metonymic relationship comprises the governmental institution, which is closely linked with a particular place.

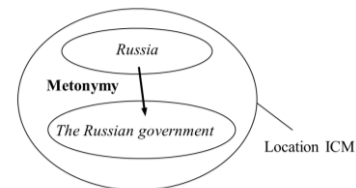


Figure 2. Parts of an ICM relationship in Vietnamese news discourse

4.2.2. Metonymy as Means of Meaning Extension and Reduction

Metonymy also plays a role in semantic operations such as meaning extension and reduction in both English and Vietnamese news discourse.

In English, metonymy can extend the meaning of lexical items. For example, the sentence “After a lot of *Googling*, I eventually found a dentist” [20] illustrates how a noun referring to an instrument can be extended to denote the action associated with it. In this case, *Google*, originally a noun referring to an instrument, is converted into a verb meaning searching online. This instance of instrument-for-action metonymy shows how metonymy contributes to lexical innovation in news discourse.

This extension similarly occurs in Vietnamese news discourse. In the sentence “Đại diện Việt Nam... cũng đang là một trong những *cái tên* được đánh giá cao...” (Vietnamese representative... is also one of the highly rated names...) [21], the expression *cái tên* (name) refers not merely to the literal name but to the contestant herself. In this case, the meaning is extended through a metonymic relationship from the possessed entity to the possessor.

Conversely, metonymy may also reduce lexical meaning by narrowing the scope of reference. In the English sentence “*Hollywood*, it appears, is stuck on repeat, sucked into a death cycle of creative bankruptcy...” [22], *Hollywood*, originally a geographical location, is used to signify the American film industry. Similarly, in Vietnamese news discourse, “*Cả trường đội mũ cối* trong ngày khai giảng” (The whole school wore *mũ cối* (military-style helmets) on the opening day of the school year) [23] uses the phrase *cả trường* (the whole school) to refer specifically to the students in the school. These examples reveal that metonymy can both broaden and narrow lexical meanings depending on the discourse context.

4.2.3. Metonymy as a Polysemous Phenomenon

Another semantic feature observed in both English and Vietnamese news discourse is the relationship between metonymy and polysemy. A lexical item is considered polysemous when a single phonological form maps onto multiple conceptually related meanings. Because metonymy reuses existing lexical forms in different contexts, it often contributes to polysemy. For example, in the sentence “Google explained that third-party developers are able to both access and share data” [24], *Google* refers to the organisation or its staff, illustrating organisation-for-people metonymy. In contrast, in “Google Personal will make people use *Google* even more than they already do” [25], the same lexical item refers to the search engine produced by the company, representing producer-for-product metonymy. In Vietnamese news example: “Hà Nội cũng đã làm tốt biện pháp bảo vệ “vùng xanh”, tạo ra tổ tự quản bảo vệ xóm nhỏ, ngõ nhỏ” (Hanoi has also done a good job protecting 'green zones' by forming self-managed teams to safeguard neighbourhoods) [26], *Ha Noi* metonymically stands for the local government of Ha Noi. *Ha Noi* as the capital of Viet Nam also refers to the central government of the country. Ha Noi just analyzed is an instance of place-for-institution metonymy. These instances suggest that metonymy not only structures meaning within discourse but also contributes to the development of multiple related meanings for the same lexical form in both languages.

4.3. Contrastive Analysis of Metonymy used in English and Vietnamese News Discourse

4.3.1. Similarities

In terms of metonymic types, both Vietnamese and English metonymies in news discourse can be divided into referential metonymy, predicational metonymy and propositional metonymy. The metonymic activation involves the following conceptual relationships. In terms of semantic features, both English and Vietnamese types of metonymy-producing relationships can be classified under two main conceptual configurations: Whole ICM and its part(s) and Parts of an ICM. The most common ICMs in which metonymy operates are Thing-and-Part ICM, Constitution ICM, Event ICM, Production ICM, Action ICM and Location ICM. English metonymy and Vietnamese metonymy both can extend and reduce the lexical meaning.

4.3.2. Differences

The findings analysis shows that there is almost no difference between Vietnamese and English news discourse in terms of types of conceptual metonymies used. However, regarding semantic features, although the metonymy in both English and Vietnamese operates within the ICMs, the frequency in each language is slightly different. The comparison is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1 shows that most English and Vietnamese metonymies operate within the Thing-and-Part ICM. The Thing-and-part ICM occurrence in English accounts for 33.0%, which is 6% smaller than that of the Vietnamese Thing-and-Part ICM. In addition, the number of metonymies occurring within the Location ICM in English news discourse is 39.0%, which is only 1% smaller than

that in Vietnamese news discourse. While the Event ICM gives rise to the smallest number of English metonymy operations, Vietnamese metonymies activate the least in the Production ICM, according to our data analysis. In short, Table 1 shows that Thing-and-Part metonymy is the most frequent type in both English and Vietnamese news discourse, while other ICMs display varying frequencies, suggesting language-specific discourse preferences rather than differences in conceptual resources.

Table 1. Comparison of metonymic ICMs in English and Vietnamese

English (200)			Vietnamese (200)		
ICM	Occurrence	%	ICM	Occurrence	%
Thing-and-Part	66	33.0%	Thing-and-Part	78	39.0%
Constitution	10	5.0%	Constitution	8	4.0%
Event	6	3.0%	Event	12	6.0%
Production	15	7.5%	Production	9	4.5%
Action	25	12.5%	Action	13	6.5%
Location	78	39.0%	Location	80	40.0%

Table 2. Comparison of meaning shift via metonymy in English and Vietnamese

	English		Vietnamese	
	Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
Meaning extension	112	56.0%	96	48.0%
Meaning reduction	88	44.0%	104	52.0%

Table 2 indicate that in English news discourse, the meaning extension occurs more frequently than the meaning reduction (46.0% over 44.0%), whereas in Vietnamese, this phenomenon occurs reversely. More meaning reduction can be seen when applying metonymy in Vietnamese news discourse than meaning extension (52.0% over 48.0%). This matches with Luu and Nguyen's findings [4].

The results also reveal a shared metonymic repertoire across the two languages, with differences emerging primarily in distribution rather than type. The findings support the view that conceptual metonymy is largely universal across languages, while language-specific discourse conventions shape distributional preferences.

5. Conclusion and implications

5.1. Conclusion

The study aims to examine conceptual metonymy used in English and Vietnamese news discourse from a cognitive view. From the result analysis, we would like to draw the following conclusions:

There are three types of metonymies employed in English and Vietnamese news language which are referential metonymy, predicational metonymy and propositional metonymy. The most common metonymic relationships are the part for the whole, material constituting an object for the object, object for material constituting the object, place for people, place for institution, place for event, producer for product, instrument for agent, sub-event for whole event, instrument for action, action for agent and potentiality for actuality, and action for agent metonymy.

English metonymy and Vietnamese metonymy are both

means of lexical meaning extension and reduction. However, in English, the meaning extension occurs more often than the meaning reduction, which contrasts with that in Vietnamese. In addition, both Vietnamese and English metonymic expressions give rise to the phenomenon of polysemy. Besides, the two primary conceptual configurations for metonymy-producing relationships in English and Vietnamese are Whole ICM and its part(s) and Parts of an ICM. What is more, the meaning conveyed through English and Vietnamese metonymy is closely associated with the cultural background knowledge.

5.2. Implications

From the results, several implications for teaching and learning emerge. Students should learn metonymy not only as a figure of speech but also as a cognitive tool to enhance discourse comprehension. Understanding cross-linguistic differences, especially between English and Vietnamese, can help avoid negative transfer, which could be useful in courses like Translation and Contrastive Linguistics. For teachers, it is important to introduce metonymic expressions, guide identification, and offer practice to deepen conceptual understanding. In the context of global integration, such pedagogical practices can also support learners in interpreting and conveying socio-political and cultural meanings in international media discourse. This, in turn, contributes to the development of communicative competence in intercultural contexts.

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