

COGNITIVE METONYMY IN EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION: SHAPING VIETNAM'S IDENTITY IN THE ERA OF INTEGRATION

HOÁN DỤ TRI NHẬN TRONG TRUYỀN THÔNG ĐỐI NGOẠI: ĐỊNH VỊ BẢN SẮC VIỆT NAM TRONG THỜI KỲ HỘI NHẬP

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Abstract - In the context of Vietnam's deepening international integration, external communication plays a crucial role in positioning national identity globally. This study applies Radden and Kövecses's (1999) cognitive metonymy theory to analyze linguistic mechanisms in diplomatic statements, press releases, and cultural promotion texts from 2020 to 2025. Using discourse analysis and the Metonymy Identification Procedure (MIP), the study identifies three prominent metonymic models: (i) iconic part for cultural whole, (ii) place for event or value, and (iii) contiguity-based narratives linking traditional values with global responsibility. Findings indicate that cultural promotion texts outperform purely diplomatic discourse in positioning national identity thanks to their stronger capacity to activate national images through salient mental access points. The study proposes integrating metonymic awareness into diplomatic training and international communication strategies to enhance national soft power.

Key words - Cognitive metonymy; discourse analysis; external communication; soft power; Vietnamese identity

Tóm tắt - Trong bối cảnh Việt Nam hội nhập quốc tế, truyền thông đối ngoại giữ vai trò quan trọng trong việc định vị bản sắc quốc gia. Nghiên cứu này áp dụng lý thuyết hoán dụ tri nhận của Radden và Kövecses (1999) để phân tích ngôn ngữ trong phát ngôn ngoại giao, thông cáo báo chí và văn bản quảng bá văn hóa giai đoạn 2020–2025. Kết hợp phân tích diễn ngôn với Quy trình Nhận diện Hoán dụ (MIP), nghiên cứu xác định ba mô hình chính: (i) bộ phận biểu tượng đại diện cho tổng thể, (ii) địa điểm đại diện cho sự kiện hoặc giá trị, và (iii) tự sự liên kết giá trị truyền thống với trách nhiệm toàn cầu. Kết quả cho thấy văn bản quảng bá văn hóa hiệu quả hơn diễn ngôn ngoại giao thuần túy nhờ khả năng kích hoạt hình ảnh quốc gia qua các điểm truy cập nhận thức. Nghiên cứu đề xuất tích hợp nhận thức hoán dụ vào đào tạo ngoại giao và chiến lược truyền thông nhằm tăng cường sức mạnh mềm quốc gia.

Từ khóa - Hoán dụ tri nhận; phân tích diễn ngôn; truyền thông đối ngoại; sức mạnh mềm; bản sắc Việt Nam

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The era of international integration imposes new demands on diplomatic affairs and national communication. Vietnam, with its foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, and multilateralization-diversification, is actively participating in international forums and promoting comprehensive cooperation. In this context, constructing and positioning national identity on the international stage becomes a strategic task, manifested not only through foreign policies but also through communication language - the most direct tool connecting Vietnam with the world.

External communication, encompassing diplomatic speeches, press releases, cultural publications, and national branding campaigns, serves as a crucial channel for conveying messages about Vietnam's land and people to international audiences. However, the effectiveness of these communication channels depends not only on informational content but also on the organization of language - the subtle mechanisms that enable messages to be naturally received and leave lasting impressions.

1.2. Research Problems

Although numerous studies have examined external

communication and national image construction, a gap remains in understanding the specific linguistic mechanisms, particularly cognitive mechanisms that operate within communication texts. Existing research often focuses on message content or communication effectiveness without delving into the linguistic means and how they activate cognitive representations in the minds of international audiences.

Metonymy, a fundamental cognitive mechanism in language, has been demonstrated to play a significant role in political discourse and communication[1], [2]. However, the application of cognitive metonymy theory to analyze Vietnam's external communication in the integration context remains an underexplored research area.

1.3. Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze how cognitive metonymy operates as a linguistic tool in positioning Vietnamese identity through external communication texts from 2020-2025. Specifically, the research addresses three questions: (1) What cognitive metonymy models appear frequently in Vietnam's external communication? (2) How do these models function in constructing national image? (3) What pedagogical and policy implications can be drawn to enhance external communication effectiveness?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. External Communication and National Identity

External communication refers to communication activities directed outward, aiming to introduce a nation's land, people, culture, policies, and development achievements to international audiences. In the globalization context, external communication is not merely information provision but a process of constructing and positioning national identity - the “story” a nation wishes to tell the world.

National identity is a complex social construct, continually constructed and reconstructed through discourse as discussed in [3]. In external communication, national identity is manifested not only through message content but also through the selection of language, symbols, and frames of reference. Recent studies demonstrate that political and communication discourse extensively employs cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy to influence public perception.

2.2. Cognitive Metonymy Theory

Contrary to traditional views treating metonymy as a rhetorical figure, modern cognitive theory regards metonymy as a fundamental thought mechanism wherein one entity (the vehicle) is used to provide mental access to another entity (the target) within the same cognitive frame or model [4], [5].

Radden and Kövecses [5] developed a comprehensive taxonomy of cognitive metonymy, prominently featuring models such as *PART FOR WHOLE*, *WHOLE FOR PART*, and models based on correlations within the same cognitive frame. Particularly in political and communication discourse, the *PLACE FOR INSTITUTION* and *PLACE FOR EVENT* models appear frequently [6].

A significant contribution of cognitive metonymy theory is the concept of “mental access points”. Accordingly, metonymy enables speakers or writers to use a cognitively salient, easily recognizable vehicle to guide listeners or readers toward accessing a broader, more abstract target concept. This characteristic makes metonymy particularly effective in communication contexts requiring concise yet impressive transmission of complex messages.

2.3. Metonymy as a Tool for Cultural Identity Positioning

In the context of nation branding and soft power construction, metonymy plays a crucial role in conveying cultural identity. Studies on national discourse reveal that country names, place names, and cultural symbols are frequently employed metonymically to activate complex cognitive frames concerning history, culture, and values [7], [8].

For instance, the use of “Hanoi” in international communication texts does not merely denote an administrative location but typically activates cognitive frames concerning the thousand-year-old capital, political-cultural center, or peace spirit (when associated with Hanoi as “City for Peace”). Similarly, symbols such as “Pho”, “ao

dai”, and “Halong Bay” function as “iconic parts” representing the diverse and rich whole of Vietnamese culture.

Thus, cognitive metonymy provides an effective theoretical framework for explaining how external communication language constructs and positions national identity through the selection of “salient vehicles” capable of activating positive cognitive frames in international audiences' minds.

Several studies published in The University of Danang-Journal of Science and Technology (UD- JST) have explored cognitive linguistic and discourse-oriented approaches in English and Vietnamese communication contexts. Previous research has investigated metaphor and metonymy in Vietnamese lexical formation [9], grammatical metaphor in media discourse [10], and embodiment-oriented metaphors in newspaper discourse [11]. These studies demonstrate the growing application of cognitive linguistic frameworks in discourse analysis and communication studies within the Vietnamese context. However, limited attention has been paid to the role of cognitive metonymy in Vietnam's external communication and national identity positioning. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining how metonymic models function in diplomatic and cultural communication during the period of international integration.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The study utilizes data from three primary sources during 2020-2025 (The period 2020–2025 was selected due to its significance as a phase of intensified global communication shifts following COVID-19 and increasing digital diplomacy practices):

Diplomatic speeches: Addresses by Vietnamese Party and State leaders at multilateral forums (United Nations, ASEAN, APEC) and bilateral visits (approximately 25 texts).

Press releases: Announcements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Vietnamese representative agencies abroad (approximately 40 texts).

Cultural publications: Tourism and culture promotion materials, publications from Vietnamese cultural centers abroad (approximately 20 texts).

The total corpus comprises approximately 85 texts, ensuring genre diversity and representation of major external communication channels.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The research combines two approaches:

Critical Discourse Analysis: Employing van Dijk's [3] socio-cognitive approach to analyze relationships between linguistic structures and social structures in identity construction.

Metonymy Identification Procedure (MIP): Adapted from the Metaphor Identification Procedure [12] and modified for metonymy specificity, focusing on

identifying linguistic units with metonymic meaning based on criteria: (i) meaning shift within the same cognitive frame, (ii) “vehicle-target” relationship between entities, (iii) vehicle salience in target activation.

3.3. Data Processing Procedure

- Data processing follows three steps:
- Step 1 - Coding: Identifying and classifying metonymic expressions according to Radden & Kövecses' [5] models.
- Step 2 - Contextual analysis: Examining the role of metonymic expressions in constructing national identity within specific texts.
- Step 3 - Comparison: Comparing frequency and functions of metonymic models across three text groups (diplomatic speeches, press releases, cultural publications).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Three Prominent Metonymic Models in Vietnam's External Communication

Corpus analysis reveals three metonymic models prevalent in Vietnam's external communication texts during the period 2020-2025:

4.1.1. The “Iconic Part for Cultural Whole” Model

- This model appears most frequently in cultural publications and tourism promotion materials. Distinctive cultural symbols are employed as “vehicles” to activate comprehensive images of Vietnam's land and people.
- Representative examples:
- “Enjoying Pho Hanoi, feeling the essence of Vietnam”. Here, “Pho” refers not merely to a specific dish but metonymically represents the entirety of Vietnamese culinary sophistication. “Essence” operates as metaphonymy combined with metonymy to emphasize cultural depth.
- “Halong Bay - natural wonder, heritage of humanity”. “Halong Bay” metonymically represents Vietnam's natural beauty and the nation's responsibility for heritage preservation.

This model's operational mechanism relies on the “salient vehicle” principle; cultural symbols such as Pho, ao dai, conical hats, and Halong Bay are easily recognizable images with high symbolic value, capable of rapidly activating cognitive frames about Vietnam in international audiences' minds. This aligns with previous research on metonymy's role in creating “cognitive shortcuts” for message recipients [13], [14].

4.1.2. The “Place for Event or Value” Model

- This model appears primarily in diplomatic speeches and press releases concerning international events. Place names are used not merely with geographical reference but activate values and events associated with them.
- Examples: “Hanoi - city for peace”. “Hanoi” metonymically represents the Vietnamese people's peace-loving spirit and aspiration for peace, recognized internationally through UNESCO recognition.
- Or “Vietnam - destination of peace and cooperation”. The word “destination” functions as spatial metonymy for

- cooperation and development opportunities.
- Analysis reveals that the *PLACE FOR VALUE* model appears more frequently in 2020-2025 texts compared to previous periods, reflecting the strategy of positioning Vietnam as a regional cooperation and dialogue hub. Salamurović's [15] study on “Macedonia” metonymy similarly demonstrates how country names become multi-functional “pragmatic tools”, activating multiple meaning layers across different contexts.

4.1.3. Narrative Structures of “Contiguity”

- This represents a complex metonymic model manifested through narrative structures connecting traditional values with global responsibility. This model relies on temporal and logical “contiguity” relations between events and values.
- Examples:
- “Promoting the Spirit of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam actively participates in United Nations peacekeeping”. The phrase “Spirit of Dien Bien Phu” (historical victory) metonymically represents independence will and peace aspiration, “continued” in contemporary global peacekeeping missions.
- “From wet rice civilization to world's leading rice exporter”. Metonymy of continuity between ancient agricultural traditions and modern achievements.
- This “contiguity” structure creates a unified narrative, affirming consistency and continuity in Vietnamese identity: a nation rich in cultural traditions while simultaneously being a responsible member of the international community. This aligns with “mental space” and “conceptual integration” theories in cognitive linguistics.

4.2. Comparative Effectiveness Across Text Types

A significant finding is the variation in identity positioning effectiveness across communication text types:

Table 1. Comparative Distribution of Metonymic Density and National Image Activation Across External Communication Text Types

Text Type	Metonymy Frequency	Model Diversity	National Image Activation Capacity
Cultural publications	High	High	Excellent
Press releases	Medium	Medium	Good
Diplomatic speeches	Low-Medium	Low	Moderate

Cultural publications exhibit the highest metonymy frequency and greatest model diversity. Metonymic expressions in this category often demonstrate creativity, rich imagery, and capacity for natural, profound national image activation. This likely stems from genre characteristics, cultural publications are designed to attract and engage international audiences, thus prioritizing image-rich and symbolic language. The findings regarding textual variation align with Mattiello's [16] investigation of language in Tuscan tourism promotion, which demonstrates that cultural publications tend to employ

diverse metaphorical and metonymic expressions to enhance persuasive effectiveness: “This chapter studies figurative language in Italian promotional tourism websites and their translations into English. It analyses figures of speech, such as metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, and personification, within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. Results show the importance of figuration across languages and cultures, both for promoters and for translators”.

Press releases employ metonymy at moderate levels, primarily concentrating on the *PLACE FOR EVENT* model and institution-related models. Identity positioning effectiveness is relatively good but typically short-term, associated with specific events. Shie's study of news headlines confirms that metonymy plays a crucial role in creating coherence and appeal in news texts: “The results of the textual survey show that non-lexicalized metaphors and metonymies occur in more NYT headlines than TS headlines... The stylistic analysis demonstrates that non-lexicalized metaphors and metonymies have some notable functions to fulfill in the headlines. Chief among them are: (i) metaphors and metonymies foreground a pragmatically relevant or stylistically interesting aspect of the story, (ii) metaphors and metonymies guide pragmatic inferencing in text interpretation, and (iii) metonymies create referential variety and enhance cohesion and coherence” [17].

Diplomatic speeches show the lowest metonymy frequency, reflecting the genre's formal, precise nature. However, when employed, metonymic expressions in diplomatic speeches often generate strong impact due to their official status. Shokati Mogharab et al.'s [2] study on Iranian presidents' UN discourse similarly reveals how leaders employ metonymy to construct identity and delineate “us” versus “others” with subtlety. Regarding diplomatic discourse, Kanté's [7] research on the discourse of African leaders and US-Russian foreign ministers reveals that metaphor and metonymy are deployed as subtle ideological strategies for positioning international relations: “This corpus-based study investigates discourses of conflict delivered by political leaders in six West and Central African countries. It focuses on how metaphor and metonymy interact with syntax, lexicalisation and ideologies of glorification in such discourses to handle ‘new’ forms of conflicts”.

The observed disparity in metonymic frequency where cultural publications exhibit high density compared to the relatively sparse usage in diplomatic speeches can be attributed to the divergent communicative goals and generic constraints of these domains. Diplomatic discourse is traditionally governed by a logic of precision and formal neutrality, often prioritizing literal clarity to avoid geopolitical misinterpretation. However, this high level of institutionalization may inadvertently limit the national image activation capacity by failing to provide the intuitive mental access points that metonymy affords. To enhance the effectiveness of diplomatic utterances, this study recommends that practitioners move beyond dry

administrative language by strategically integrating salient vehicles. By incorporating nuanced metonymic models such as the Place for Value framework, official speeches can transition from mere announcements to resonant narratives, thereby bridging the gap between formal policy and the emotional engagement necessary for robust soft power projection.

4.3. Discussion: Metonymy as a Soft Power Enhancement Tool

Research findings indicate that cognitive metonymy operates as an effective linguistic tool for enhancing national soft power through three primary mechanisms:

First, metonymy creates “cognitive shortcuts” enabling international audiences to easily access and remember Vietnam's image. In today's information-saturated environment, the capacity for rapid impression formation is crucial for ensuring national messages are not overwhelmed. Metonymic symbols such as “Halong Bay”, “Pho”, and “ao dai” function as cognitive “anchors”, facilitating natural recall and association with Vietnam's image.

Second, metonymy enables multiple meaning layers integration within concise linguistic expressions. A place name like “Hanoi” can simultaneously activate cognitive frames concerning thousand-year history, Thang Long culture, revolutionary spirit, and contemporary political-diplomatic centrality. This polysemy creates depth for communication messages, aligning with modern audiences' capacity for simultaneous multi-layered information processing.

Third, metonymy generates familiarity and empathy at the cognitive level. When messages employ metonymic vehicles familiar to or resonant with recipients' culture, they create feelings of affinity and facilitate acceptance. This forms the basis for building trust and goodwill - core elements of soft power as defined by Joseph Nye [18].

The study also reveals that cultural promotion texts demonstrate superior identity positioning effectiveness compared to purely diplomatic utterances. This suggests that external communication strategy should harmoniously combine political messages with cultural values, wherein culture serves as the “salient vehicle” for transmitting national identity most naturally and persuasively.

5. Pedagogical and Policy Implications

5.1. Integrating “Metonymic Awareness” into Diplomatic Training

Based on research findings, we propose integrating “metonymic awareness” into diplomatic personnel training curricula, particularly at language and international relations institutions. Metonymic awareness refers to the capacity to recognize, analyze, and effectively employ metonymic expressions in external communication.

Specifically, training curricula could include:

Theoretical module: Introduction to cognitive metonymy and its role in political discourse and

international communication, drawing on case studies from diverse cultural contexts represented in a corpus (e.g., Vietnam, ASEAN, and international organizations).

Practical module: Analysis of authentic external communication texts from Vietnam and other nations, identifying metonymic models and evaluating communication effectiveness.

Application module: Development of communication strategies based on selecting “salient vehicles” appropriate for specific audiences and cultural contexts.

Integrating metonymic awareness into training will enable diplomatic personnel not only to master surface-level language skills but also to understand underlying cognitive mechanisms, thereby proactively constructing persuasive and impactful messages.

5.2. Strategies for Selecting “Salient Vehicles” in International Communication

Based on analysis of effective metonymic models, the study proposes strategies for selecting “salient vehicles” in international communication following three principles:

Principle 1 - Audience Appropriateness: Select metonymic vehicles appropriate to the target audience's background knowledge and cultural experience. For Asian audiences, symbols such as “bamboo” and “lotus” may readily activate cognitive frames concerning resilience and purity; for Western audiences, symbols of peace and developmental cooperation may prove more effective.

Principle 2 - Consistency and Continuity: Maintain consistency in metonymic vehicle usage across time and communication channels, forming a coherent symbol system for national image. Consistency reinforces impressions and builds strong national brand recognition.

Principle 3 - Multi-layered Combination: Employ multiple metonymic models in coordination within single communication campaigns to generate synergistic effects. For example, combining the ICONIC PART model (ao dai imagery) with the PLACE FOR VALUE model (Hanoi - peace city) within a single message about Vietnamese culture.

5.3. Recommendations for External Communication Message Development

From a practical perspective, the study proposes several orientations for external communication message development:

Prioritize “storytelling” over “announcement”: Rather than merely presenting dry political statements, external communication texts should be crafted as “stories” employing metonymic symbols to create emotional connections with audiences.

Invest in linguistic creativity for cultural publications: Given that cultural publications demonstrate the highest identity positioning effectiveness, adequate investment should be directed toward linguistic creativity in these materials, particularly flexible employment of metonymic models for profound impression creation.

Develop a “salient vehicles” repository: Establish a repository of symbols, place names, and images with high metonymic potential, researched and evaluated for effectiveness through practice, serving as a resource for communication strategy planners.

These recommendations aim to enhance external communication effectiveness, contributing to proactive and strategic positioning of Vietnamese identity in the integration era.

6. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the role of cognitive metonymy in Vietnam's external communication during 2020-2025, focusing on the operational mechanisms of three prominent metonymic models: “Iconic Part for Cultural Whole”, “Place for Event/Value”, and narrative structures of “contiguity”. Findings demonstrate that metonymy is not merely a rhetorical device but a profound cognitive mechanism enabling communicators to construct national identity through selecting “salient vehicles” capable of activating positive cognitive frames in international audiences' minds.

Comparison across text types reveals that cultural publications achieve the highest identity positioning effectiveness due to their frequency and diversity in metonymy employment. This confirms the importance of culture as a “salient vehicle” for transmitting external communication messages naturally and persuasively.

Regarding theoretical contributions, the study extends cognitive metonymy theory applications to external communication - a relatively novel approach in the Vietnamese context. Practically, the study proposes integrating “metonymic awareness” into diplomatic training curricula and strategies for selecting “salient vehicles” in international communication message development.

In the context of deepening integration, understanding and effectively employing cognitive mechanisms in language will significantly contribute to positioning Vietnamese identity, enhancing soft power, and affirming the nation's role in the globalization era. Future research could extend investigation to new communication channels such as social media, or conduct cross-cultural comparisons of metonymy usage across different nations, thereby enriching understanding of relationships between language, cognition, and international communication.

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