

RULES OF SWITCHING MEANINGS TO FORM NEW WORDS WITH TWO METHODS OF METAPHOR AND METONYMY IN THE SYSTEM OF MODERN VIETNAMESE

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Abstract - There always exist new things, phenomena, concepts in our society, which creates the introduction of new words. Therefore, the emergence of new word is a regular process of linguistics for the enrichment of Vietnamese. However, there are not many scientific studies of this issue. Meanwhile, two methods of changing metaphor and metonymy to create new words are very popular and play an important role in forming structure of new words. After carrying out the research, we find that the majority of new words which are formed by switching meaning use existing units, not potential units. In order to identify the object, show the features, characteristics, and states or operation of new things, Vietnamese people have used existing word units for combination based on associative relations. In addition, studying methods of word formation with metaphor and metonymy not only helps us exploit the depth of creating new word but also contributes to better understanding cognitive process as well as Vietnamese culture.

Key words - switch meaning; metaphor; metonymy; new words

1. Introduction

Within ten recent years, together with the development in economy, society, science, technology and international contact, there has been a change in thinking and accordingly, there has been a considerable increase in Vietnamese words. It can be said that the appearance of new words is an usual growth of languages in general and of Vietnamese in particular to enrich languages. However, there has not been much research on this issue. It was not until in 2008 that there was “A dictionary of new Vietnamese words” compiled by Vietnam Language Institute.

The birth of the dictionary should have been an opportunity for language researchers to discuss and investigate new words but it was not the case. Therefore, discussion about the formation of new words is of great scientific value.

In Vietnam, much research on terminology always mentions the concept of new words and their formation but there has not been a thorough study of new words. Meanwhile, two methods of switching meanings to form new words, namely metaphor and metonymy, are very popular and play a key role in forming new words. In addition, understanding the two above-mentioned methods not only helps to exploit the depth of word formation but also enhances the understanding of cognition process and Vietnamese culture.

For the above reasons, we research on the rules to switch meanings to form new words with metaphor and metonymy in the system of modern Vietnamese new words. The data we focus on is the vocabulary in “A dictionary of new Vietnamese words” compiled by Vietnam language Institute in 2008 and published by Ho Chi Minh city publisher.

2. Rules to switch meanings to form new words with metaphor and metonymy

After survey and investigation, we find out 4 rules to switch basic meanings to form new words with metaphor and metonymy. They are Metaphor- a popular and diversified method to switch meaning; metaphor to form new meanings- a base to form new words; metonymy- a popular method to switch meanings in context, and forming new words by combining metaphor with metonymy.

2.1. Metaphor - a popular and diversified method to switch meaning

By examining the system of modern Vietnamese new word in “A dictionary of new Vietnamese words” compiled by Vietnam language Institute in 2008, we see that most new words are formed by switching the metaphoric meaning. The number of new words by switching the metaphoric meaning is 275 words, accounting for 78.2% while the number of new words by switching the meaning with metonymy is 78 words, making up 21.8%. This is usual with any vocabulary system. In Vietnamese as well as in other languages, metaphor and metonymy are two popular methods to switch the meaning. Metaphor plays an important role in forming new modern Vietnamese words, accounting for a number 3.5 times larger than metonymy..

Based on the similar relationship among objects and phenomena, metaphor forms a large number of words, enriching Vietnamese vocabulary. We have analyzed in detail subtypes of metaphor which base on the similarity in form, color, function, characteristics, action... Most people think that metaphor only exists as nouns and noun groups but this is no longer true.

In the system of new words of modern Vietnamese, we have examined and found 173 words as metaphors based on the similarity in characteristics, features, actions and action ways. Of 173 words, 103 are metaphors of actions and action ways, making up 36.9%. Considering some examples, we can see the abundance and diversity of the method of switching the metaphoric meaning to form new words.

Metaphors based on the similarity in characteristics are metaphors of characteristics. This type of metaphor is popular in noun groups, verb groups such as a golden goal, a golden hand, red spot, fair play, unfair play... [8]. This type of metaphor accounts for 25.1%. Metaphors of actions are ones based on the similarity in actions, action ways. This type of metaphor makes up 36.9%.

Apart from the abundance in sub types, metaphor can

switch the meaning within the word. It means that only the meaning of one or two words, not of all the words, are switched. For example, pillow cake, petrol tree, credit card, market goods... [8].

In the noun group *Market goods*, only the meaning of the word *market* is switched to mean *cheap or low quality goods*. (Nowadays, some artists claim to paint market pictures but when their pictures are sent to the gallery, they are still copied and made fake) [8, p.101]. In the group *industrial concrete*, only the meaning of *industrial* is switched to mean *available, professional or fresh* as in *fresh concrete* [8, p.14].

There are cases when the meanings of the whole group are switched. For example, the group *the plan fails* to mean *unwanted pregnancy* in (She knows well all the women in her charge and detect in time those whose plan has failed to encourage them to get rid of pregnancy early to keep their health safe) [8, p.272]. This type of metaphor occupies a small number).

There are cases when the meanings of the new word are switched with metaphor and the word belongs to two subtypes. For example, the word *áo phông* (*jumper*), *a kind of T-shirt made of cotton, with picture or word at the front or at the back* [8, p.2] can be metaphor based on the similarity in form (*phông*) or based on the similarity in function (*áo*). Another example is the word *bán hoa* (*selling flowers: a prostitute*) can be a metaphor of feature (*hoa*: flower) or one of actions (*bán*: selling). Why the word *bán hoa* belongs to two sub types of metaphor is that the meaning of *bán* is switched as an action while the meaning of *hoa* is switched as a feature.

Thus, it can be said that in the new word system of modern Vietnamese, metaphor is a key and popular method to switch the meaning with different sub types. The number of words whose meanings are switched with metaphor in the new word system of modern Vietnamese is very large and belongs to different sub types. Sometimes, the same word, the same group belongs to different sub types.

2.2. Metaphor makes new meanings- a base to form new words

“Metaphor goes through our life. It exists not only in language but also in thinking and actions. The concept system based on which we think and act is metaphor in nature”. Actually, metaphor plays a very important role in forming words. Together with examining new words whose meanings are switched with metaphor and metonymy, we also find a large number of words whose meanings are switched without being new words. They only have new meanings and are also called multi-meaning words. We think that these words will become new words through change and meaning switching. Of the two methods of switching meanings with metaphor and metonymy. Nearly 100% words have their meanings switched with metaphor.

For this reason, a part of our study is for understanding the meaning switching with metaphor to form new meanings without forming new words.

Through examination, we find 75 words whose

meanings are switched to form new meanings as shown in table 1

Table 1. Words with meanings switched to form new meanings

Parts of Speech	Number	Percentage (%)
Noun	33	44
Verb	25	33.3
Adjectively	17	22.7
Total	75	100

Considering some examples with the data taken from new word system of modern Vietnamese, we can see their meaning switching better:

“Bèo” means a plant living in the water which can be used as feed for animals or as manure (cutting water-fern, cutting potato). “Bèo” also means low price, very cheap as in (I didn’t sell the thing because it is paid at a very low price) [8, p.13].

Another example is the word *mềm* which has 6 meanings, one of which is new. The word is often used in spoken language to mean at a reasonable price as in good quality things at reasonable prices [8, p.151].

These words, whose meanings if switched another time or combined with other words may become new words, for example, “harvest success” (harvest); “lose some shots in row” (shots); (miss being on duty) (miss); father of Romeo and Juliet play (father) [8].

It can be affirmed that the birth of “A dictionary of new Vietnamese words” is very necessary to explain enquiries and make clear these new words. In the future, with the continual change to meet the demand for communication, Vietnamese will become richer, more diversified because of the switched, changed and added meanings to make new words.

2.3. Metonymy- a method to switch meaning in context

Through survey and statistics, we see that the number of words whose meanings are switched with metonymy is much smaller than that with metaphor. In practical usage, the number of words whose meanings are switched with metonymy is very large but through the survey with the new word system, the number is very small, of 78 words, making up 21.8%. What is the reason for this? The question attracts the attention of many language researchers who study the method of switching word meanings with metonymy.

Let us consider the following examples: “*lái*” means “drive” “*lơ*” means “sub-drive”. The meanings of these two words are not switched; they are only used in brief forms. However, when we say “*một lái*”, “*một lơ*”, the same way as in “*một đen*” “*một sữa*” (a cup of black coffee, a cup of brown coffee), then the meanings of “*lái*” “*lơ*” “*đen*” “*sữa*” are switched with metonymy based on the logic relations between “job and job doer” “container and thing contained”. Similarly, the word “*bảo kê*” whose old meaning is to insure, protect, used negatively, now means the people who do the work of protecting. Thus, the meaning of “*lái*”, “*lơ*”, “*đen*”, “*sữa*”, “*bảo kê*” in a particular context is switched with metonymy. However,

when these words stand alone, out of context, they do not have switched meaning with metonymy any more. Therefore, when these words appear in the dictionary, they only have their original meaning.

From the above analysis, we can reach the conclusion that the process of switching meaning never stops, it always continues and develops in different ways. Metonymy never stops in a fixed position in vocabulary, it continues in its own way in the language world. And it can be denied that metonymy becomes more vivid in context and more diversified when it is put in different contexts. Our study of this issue has taken initial steps. We hope that there will be further research on this issue.

In the article “Metonymy from the perspective of cognition” the writer Ta Thanh Nhan discussed: “Metaphor is related with the principle of selection and replacement on the basis of similarity. Metonymy is related with the principle of combination and continuity on the basis of continuity. According to structuralism, metaphor is related with the change axis while metonymy is related with the combination axis of language” [7, p.47]. Now, we have realized the reason why the number of new words whose meanings are switched with metonymy is smaller than that with metaphor. If a word is put in context in the combination axis, its switched meanings with metonymy will be richer and more diversified.

2.4. Forming new words with the combination of metaphor and metonymy

New words can be formed not only with their meanings switched with metaphor or metonymy separately but also with the combination of the two methods.

Let us consider the example, “*bàn tay vàng*” in “*The contest has selected 54 contestants with golden hand.*” means “a people who is skillful at a labour or technical operation”. Thus in the above group, the word “hand” is switched with metonymy to denote a people and “gold” is switched with metaphor to denote a good and rare skill. Thus, metaphor is the key basis to switch the meaning of the group “*bàn tay vàng*” to make it become a new word. Previously, this change appears only in poetry, when the meaning of a word depends on context. Now the change appears in common vocabulary”. *Hoa khuê các (flowers of nobility), bướm giang hồ (errant butterflies)* is an example.

There has been a change in word formation in Vietnamese. It is influenced not only by language change, word borrowing, language interference (Chinese, English, French ...) but also by western culture. It is this that leads to the appearance of a series of sentence structures of the language. “*More than one flower have fallen*” [6, p.30] or “*fresh concrete*”, “*golden score*”, “*high technology*”,

“*clean technology*” [8] are examples of new structures.

Besides the influence of languages, western culture in the way of thinking, translating, writing, new words are also affected by the internal change of Vietnamese. In poetry, there appear new words whose meanings are switched with the two methods to create an imagery and figurative way of speaking, then the birth of new words is obvious. It is the natural development of language.

3. Conclusion

Vietnamese is developing incessantly and identifying its development is very complicated. However, it can be affirmed that formation of new words cannot be without meaning switching. In the study, we see that most new words which are formed through meaning switching use existing word units, not new ones. To name objects, denote features or characteristics, states or activity of new objects, Vietnamese people always use existing words for combination based on the relationship of connection.

Apart from the above-mentioned rules in new word formation, there are other rules of switching meaning in Vietnamese new word system. However, they are not popular, so, they are not mentioned in our study. Together with the development of language with the timeline, we can affirm that the appearance of new rules of meaning switching is obvious. Together with the methods of forming new words, switching meaning will become the key method to increase Vietnamese vocabulary. Through the study, we believe that word metaphor and metonymy will make language develop more. They not only enrich the language but also express the way of thinking, way of living and culture of a community, a people.

We hope that there will be further research on new word system in other aspects such as semantics, phonology and grammar.

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