

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR OF MOON AND TRĂNG IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IN THE 19th AND 20th POETRY

KHẢO SÁT ẪN DỤ Ý NIỆM VỀ “MOON” VÀ “TRĂNG” TRONG THƠ CA TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT THẾ KỶ 19 VÀ 20

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Abstract - This is an attempt to find out the similarities and differences of conceptual metaphors of “moon” and “trăng” used in the 19th and 20th century poems in English and Vietnamese. To achieve the purposes, this paper chooses the descriptive, quantitative and qualitative approaches throughout the study. There are 449 metaphorical expressions of “moon” and “trăng” collected from English and Vietnamese poems in books, journals and on the Internet. The result shows that there are ten interesting source domains occurring in conceptual metaphors of “moon” (“trăng”) in English, Vietnamese, or both. They are A PERSON, A CONTAINER, AN OBJECT, A PLANT, AN ANIMAL, FOOD AND DRINK, A DESTINATION, WATER, A COVER and TIME. Besides, there were also findings about similarities and differences between conceptual metaphors of “moon” and “trăng” used in poetry in the two languages. The differences are detected through the language use, the frequency of occurrence and through some source domains found in one language but not in the other one. The research also suggests some implications for teaching, learning and translating conceptual metaphors, which is useful for Vietnamese learners of English to be successful in cross-cultural communication.

Key words - conceptual metaphor; moon; trăng; poetry; domain.

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, the moon (“trăng” in Vietnamese) has become an endless inspiration of most poets. In the poets’ view, the “moon” is not merely the source of light in the night; it has become a unique artistic image. The “moon” is the center point for them to exploit, to excavate in various aspects. However, to understand the poets’ intentions and find the beauty of moon in poems is not a simple thing. One of the most useful devices to fully discover the concept of “moon” in poetry is conceptual metaphor. It brings poetry freshness and creativity in the perception world and opens to people the ability to explore, to discover the relationships between things and phenomena. It creates more abundant imagination, which is beyond the structured reflection of events in a common language.

For examples:

(1.a) *Bóng Hằng* trong chén *ngã nghiêng*/ Là lời tâm mát, làm duyên gợi tình/ Gió lùa mặt nước rung rinh/Lòng ta khát tiếng chung tình từ lâu. (Hàn Mặc Tử, *Uống Trăng*) [3, p.44]

(1.b) “Is the moon tired?/She looks so pale/Within her misty veil/She scales the sky from east to west,/and takes no rest. (Christina Rossetti, *Is the moon tired*) [14]

In example (1.a), the moon (*Bóng Hằng*) is described as a fascinated lady using her charm to attract someone (*lời, làm duyên, gợi tình*). Her image (the moon) makes the man in the poem desire to love and to be loved.

Tóm tắt - Bài báo nhằm tìm ra điểm tương đồng và khác biệt của ẩn dụ ý niệm về “moon” và “trăng” trong thơ ca tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt thế kỷ 19 và 20. Các tác giả đã chọn cách tiếp cận mô tả, định lượng và định tính. Khối liệu bao gồm 449 biểu thức ẩn dụ về “moon” và “trăng” trong các bài thơ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt được thu thập từ sách, tạp chí và internet. Kết quả cho thấy rằng có 10 miền nguồn xuất hiện trong các ẩn dụ ý niệm “trăng” (moon) trong tiếng Anh, tiếng Việt hoặc cả hai ngôn ngữ. Những miền đó là một con người, vật chứa, vật thể, cây cỏ, động vật, thức ăn và đồ uống, điểm đến, nước, vật che và thời gian. Bên cạnh, nghiên cứu cũng phát hiện ra những điểm giống và khác nhau trong ẩn dụ ý niệm về “moon và “trăng” trong thơ ca giữa hai ngôn ngữ. Sự khác nhau được phát hiện qua các cách dụng ngôn, tần số xuất hiện và một số miền nguồn. Bài viết cũng đưa ra một số gợi ý hữu ích cho việc giảng dạy, học tập và dịch ẩn dụ ý niệm, giúp người Việt học tiếng Anh thuận lợi hơn trong giao tiếp liên văn hóa.

Từ khóa - ẩn dụ ý niệm; trăng; thơ ca; miền; giao tiếp.

In example (1.b), “moon” (trăng) is also considered as a lady, who is tired of moving around the earth without taking rest. The speaker asks the moon if she tired like asking him or herself.

The speakers in the above two examples talk about moon (trăng), but actually they talk about man, especially a woman. In other words, the author is using the conceptual metaphors of the moon (trăng) to refer to man’s thoughts and feelings. We can call this the “MOON/TRĂNG AS A PERSON” metaphor.

However, many students of English, including Vietnamese students find it hard to deeply analyze and realize what actually exist behind the conceptual metaphor of “moon” and “trăng” in the poems they read. Therefore, the research is carried out to facilitate the readers’ understanding of the conceptual metaphor of “moon” in English poetry and “trăng” in Vietnamese one, then we can apply them to teaching and learning English language poetry. This is hoped to be a practical job and can be a good reference for further studies about conceptual metaphors.

2. Previous studies related to the study

So far, conceptual metaphor has been taken into consideration by a lot of linguists.

Halliday [2, p.319] gave the definition of metaphors and thinks that metaphor is a verbal transference, a variation in the expression of meanings which involves a non-literal use of a word. Galperin [1] shared the same idea

with Halliday. Lakoff and Johnson [5] examined metaphor in the view of cognitive linguistics. Kövecses [4] proposed a new theory of metaphor variation.

In Vietnam, Phan Thế Hưng [10] reviewed the theory of conceptual metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson. Nguyễn Đức Tồn [8] pointed out the conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese in the light of cognitive semantics. Phan Văn Hòa [11] pointed out the conceptual metaphor in “Love is a journey” in English and Vietnamese.

In addition, there are some Vietnamese researchers did the investigation of “moon” in different aspects. For example, Lê Thị Lan Anh [7] studied the word “moon” in Han’s poetry under the view of valency theory, Nguyễn Thị Chân Quỳnh [9] compared the image “moon” between Han’s poetry and Xuân Diệu’s poetry.

3. Research methods

This paper chooses the descriptive, quantitative and qualitative approaches throughout the study.

To meet the demands of the research, 449 (195 in English and 254 in Vietnamese) samples of metaphors of “moon” and “trăng” are collected from 425 poems in English and Vietnamese on different websites and books.

4. Definition of conceptual metaphor

According to Lakoff and Johnson [5], metaphor is pervasive in our everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

Conceptual metaphor is defined as conceptualizing one domain in terms of another conceptual domain. To Lakoff [6, p.1]: “the word metaphor has come to mean a cross domain mapping in the conceptual system”. Mapping is a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target in the sense that constituent conceptual element of B correspondences to constituent elements of A. To know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing. Lakoff and Johnson [5] stated that there are four types of metaphor: structural metaphor, orientation metaphor, ontological metaphor and conduit metaphor.

4.1. Conceptual Metaphor of “Moon” in English and “Trăng” in Vietnamese

4.1.1. Concept of “moon” (trăng)

In “Từ điển Tiếng Việt” [12], the Moon is defined as the largest glowing object that people can see at night, especially on full moon day. In Vietnamese, “Trăng” is also called by the other names such as *ông trăng, ông giăng, giếng, nguyệt, chị Hằng, etc.* In English, “moon” is also called *Mrs. Moon, Lady Moon, O- Queen, etc.* In Vietnamese people’s minds, the moon is associated with gentleness and brightness, expressing the beautiful yearnings of the Vietnamese. On the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar, the moon is full and it is time to mark the Moon Festival, or the Mid-Autumn Festival. According to traditional Vietnamese culture, the moon is a carrier of human emotions.

5. Findings and discussion

5.1. Conceptual metaphors of “moon” and “trăng” in English and Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th century poetry

With the effort of finding some metaphorical source domains mapping with the target domains MOON and TRĂNG, the author has found out 10 source domains after collecting and analyzing corpus. They are: A PERSON, A CONTAINER, AN OBJECT, A PLANT, AN ANIMAL, FOOD AND DRINK, A DESTINATION, WATER, A COVER and TIME. Let us quote a few examples to prove:

a. Moon as a person

According to the medieval literature views, it was believed that “human” was a small universe in the heart of the big universe; human and the nature (the earth, the sun, and the moon) can blend together. Accordingly, moon is neither mystery nor immutable thing to people; moon in the medieval literature is close to them. Moon in poetry has become a truly iconic art, described quite uniquely and sharply. In here, moon is used by the poets subtly and creatively. Sometimes, it is youth, happiness, beauty, joyfulness, sadness, and loneliness; sometimes it is a friend, a beloved lover, a woman, etc. Hence, moon is related to the image of a person, which we can find out in these examples:

(5.1) *Mrs Moon/Sitting up in the sky/Little old lady/ Rock-a-bye/With a ball of fading light/ And silver needles/Knitting the night.* (Roger McGough, *Mrs Moon*) [14].

(5.2) *Trăng nằm sóng soãi trên cành liễu/ Đợi gió đông về để lả lơi/ Hoa lá ngây tình không muốn động/ Lòng em hồi hộp chị Hằng ơi.* (Hàn Mặc Tử, *Bên Lề*) [3, p.37].

In English and Vietnamese poems, the Moon is a person metaphor which is expressed through the way poets call it such as: *Mrs Moon, she, nàng trăng, chị Hằng...* and through verbs which describe activities of a person in daily life: *think, sit, move, speak, hear, come, nằm, đợi, ngắm, ngắm, nhòm, ngắm, leo...* Our statistics shows that, there are 68 metaphor expressions of MOON AS A PERSON in English and 62 in Vietnamese. In this metaphor, we divide it into several categories: Moon as a woman, Moon as a friend and moon as a lover.

b. Moon as an object

Object is a tangible and visible entity. We can catch, touch, hold, or measure it. Although we can see the moon in some ways, we cannot hold or catch it. Moon in our mind is both close and far, so attractive that we always want to hold it, touch it and use it. Therefore, we can see “moon” appear as an object in many metaphorical expressions. We find the moon described in English as:

(5.3) *The moon-A bright plate on the water* (R. A. Foss, *Moonlight*) [14],

Besides, the moon is also a concrete object that people can hold, can carry with, can count, can own, can buy and can sell:

(5.4) *Since my full moon first broke from angel spheres!* (A. Crowley, *A Birthday*) [14],

(5.5) *I carry the sun in a golden cup- The moon in a silver*

bag (W. B. Yeats, *Those Dancing Days Are Gone*) [14].

Similarly in Vietnamese, we can see the way to express the moon as a concrete object as follows:

(5.6) *Ai mua trăng tôi bán trăng cho* (H. M. Tử, *Trăng vàng trăng ngọc*) [3, p.66]

(5.7) *Trong vườn đêm ấy nhiều trăng quá!... trăng sáng, trăng xa, trăng rộng quá!* (X. Diêu, *Trăng*) [3, p.193]

Thus, this mapping appears quite much in both English and Vietnamese, which shows interesting similarity between the two cultures.

c. Moon as a container

In metaphor, the concept of moon is understood as a container for soul and emotion.

We found 20 cases in English and 25 cases in Vietnamese. This is one of the most interesting cases in conceptual metaphors of “moon”. English poets describe the MOON IS A CONTAINER of a man while Vietnamese poets describe it as the container of woman, which is reflected in these verses:

(5.8) That the Man *in* the Moon himself came down/One night to drink his fill (Tolkien, *The Man in the Moon came down too soon*) [14]

(5.9) Tôi ráp lại xem. Ở sự lạ!/ *Một người thiếu nữ hiện trong trăng* (B.Khê, *Hiện hình*) [3, p.325]

We can find out the MOON AS A CONTAINER conceptual metaphors through some prepositions like: *in, into, out of, beyond, keep*, etc. or nouns refer to container like *a peck, a pot, store*, etc. as in these examples:

(5.10) O moon, do not *keep* her from me any longer. (Walt Whitman, *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*) [14]

Similarly, in Vietnamese we also can find them through prepositions: *ở trong, trong, lồng*, etc. For examples:

(5.11) *E ấp mà kiêu hãnh./ Hoa nghiêng trong trăng sao* (L. T. M. Dạ, *Hoa quỳnh*) [3, p.178]

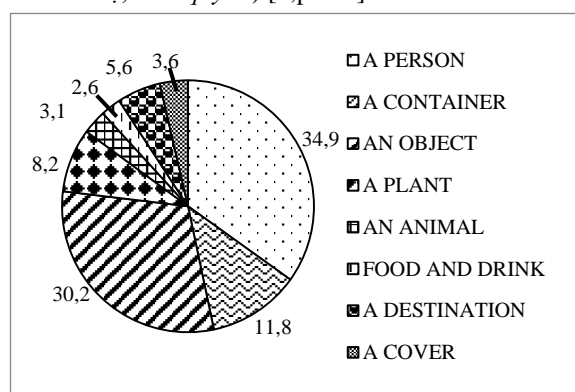


Figure 1. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors of “Moon” in English in the 19th and 20th Century Poetry

Figure 1 shows the frequency of conceptual metaphors of “moon” in English in the 19th and 20th century poetry. According to the pie chart, A PERSON metaphor has the largest number of the data collected (34.9%). It is followed by AN OBJECT with 30.2%. The frequency of the source domain A CONTAINER, A PLANT, A DESTINATION and AN ANIMAL are quite different, respectively from the

higher one to the lower one are 11.8%, 8.2%, 5.6% and 3.1%. The frequency of source domain A COVER accounts for 3.6% and at the last position is FOOD AND DRINK domains with the lowest percentage-2.6%. The source domain WATER and TIME have not been found in the English corpus

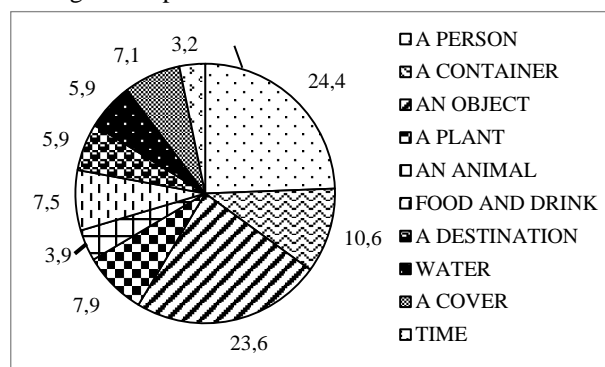


Figure 2. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors of “Trăng” in Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th Century Poetry

Figure 2 displays the frequency of conceptual metaphors of “trăng” in Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th century poetry. The chart has ten parts as ten source domains for conceptual metaphor of “trăng” (moon). Like the English corpus; the source domain A PERSON occupies the largest percentage with 24.4%. The second is AN OBJECT with 23.6%. A CONTAINER domain accounts for 10.6%. At the fourth, fifth and sixth positions are A PLANT as well as FOOD AND DRINK and A COVER with 7.9%, 7.5% and 7.1% respectively. The domains A DESTINATION and WATER share the same percentage with 5.9%. The two last positions belong to AN ANIMAL and TIME domains with the two smallest percentages: 3.9% (AN ANIMAL) and 3.2% (TIME) respectively.

5.2. Similarities in conceptual metaphor of “moon” in English and “trăng” in Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th century poetry

Among the ten source domains we have investigated in English and Vietnamese 19th and 20th century poetry, the two languages share a lot of common source domains for conceptual metaphors of “moon” and “trăng”. First of all, both English and Vietnamese use the MOON AS A PERSON metaphor in their poems. The domain A PERSON is mentioned in the terms of a woman, a friend, and a lover. All of these terms apply to conceptual metaphors of “moon” in the two languages. Besides, the MOON AS A PERSON metaphor is found with the largest number in both languages (68 occurrences in English and 62 occurrences in Vietnamese). It is because the moon to human is not just an ordinary natural beauty but a muse and an endless inspiration. The charm and the beauty of a woman can be compared perfectly with the gentle and mysterious features of the moon. When people are in lonely situations and they cannot share their thought with anybody, there is always a friend that they can trust and share with, that is the moon. No one but the moon makes them feel that life is still beautiful in some ways. Therefore, both English and Vietnamese poets have successfully used the MOON AS A PERSON conceptual metaphors in their

poems to convey what they want to talk to the world.

Besides, the desire to explore the world, to get the true love, to get the targets in life as well as the hope to explore, to own and to get the moon are people's thirst. The moon in the view of the poets is always a mysterious thing, which makes them unleash drop their imagination on. They suppose that MOON IS A PLANT, which has leaf, flower, fruit and scent; they also say that the MOON IS AN OBJECT which is valuable as silver, gold and gem. Also, according to them, MOON IS A DESTINATION where a better life exists, the fantastic place to store their love, their sound and their mind, and the moon is an unlimited source which covers all space in soul, in mind.

English poets and Vietnamese ones have the same ideas in using and creating these source domains of moon although the frequency of using these domains is not really equal in their poems.

5.3. Differences in conceptual metaphor of "moon" in English and "trăng" in Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th century poetry

Firstly, what is particularly interesting is that although English and Vietnamese share the MOON AS FOOD AND DRINK metaphor, the source domain FOOD AND DRINK expressed different styles and view of poets in life. While the Vietnamese poets used the concept of FOOD AND DRINK as their hopes, their goals and their faith in life by adding some exclamation components like: "*Trời hỡi làm sao khi đói khát. Gió trăng có sẵn làm sao ăn?*" (H. M. Tử) or "*Ai báocon tàu không mộng tưởng? Mỗi đêm khuya không uống một vàng trăng?*" (C. L. Viên) English poets used that concept to describe natural phenomenon and the endless of love more than expressed their desire: "*Now the moon is being swallowed by the toad and the light; Flickers out leaving darkness all around;*" or "*Till the stars had run away, And the shadows eaten the moon*", etc..

Besides, in the MOON AS A CONTAINER metaphor, English poets consider the moon as a container of a man while in Vietnamese the moon is a container of woman. This difference is due to the different experience between the two cultures. In Vietnamese culture in particular and Asian culture in general, there have been a fairy tales about the woman in the moon who is called Hằng Nga or chị Hằng. She accidentally drank immortality pill and became an angel flying to the sky. However, she loved her husband so much that she just flew up to the moon, which is the nearest place to the earth where she could see her husband. Therefore, in Vietnamese poetry, we can easily find that image ("*Một người thiếu nữ hiện trong trăng*" or "*Trăng còn giữ một chị Hằng*", etc). However, in Western cultures, perhaps the most familiar vision is "the man in the moon." There are various explanations for how the Man in the Moon come to be. A longstanding European tradition holds that the man was banished to the moon for some crime. Christian lore commonly held that he was the man caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath and was sentenced by God to death by stoning in the book of Numbers XV.32-36. Some Germanic cultures thought he was a man caught stealing from a neighbor's hedgerow to repair his own. There is a Roman legend that he is a sheep-

thief, that why we often see the image of "man in the moon" appear in English poets more than the image of woman does: "The Man in the Moon came down to soon" or "O the Man in the Moon has a crick in his back" [14], etc.

Furthermore, the differences regarding frequencies of difference source of domains are also accounted. In Vietnamese culture, "trăng" is very close to the human life, "trăng" appears everywhere in the daily life: "trăng" follows people on their way, "trăng" is above their house, their head; "trăng" in a river, "trăng" in a field. "Trăng" is up to the mountain. Especially in Mid-autumn Festival, people often prepare fruits and cakes to celebrate the fullest moon in a year. At that time, the children look at "trăng" and send their dream to "trăng" with a hope that "trăng" can bring them to somewhere; the lovers look at "trăng" and send their miss into "trăng" with the hope that "trăng" will deliver their wishes to the one they love. People also believe that "trăng" is the wonderful destination where exists a fantasy life and the best place to send their soul to. Besides, in Vietnamese poetry, the concept of trăng is also connected to plant, destination, food and drink, etc. as a result. In English, these source domains also occur in conceptual metaphor of "moon" but with the smaller number of data.

Surprisingly, the case of conceptual metaphors MOON AS WATER is collected in some Vietnamese poems. For example: "*Thuyền ai đậu bến sông trăng đó*" (H. M. Tử); "*Ngoài kia trăng sáng chảy bao la*" (C. L. Viên); however, none of this metaphor has been found in English ones. Water, stream, river are familiar images in Vietnamese culture. In the Vietnamese daily languages we can easily catch the image of water as: *chìm, trôi, nổi, chảy, ướt át, lênh đênh*, or *sông quê, suối mơ*, etc.; in fact, water, stream and river are ingrained in the consciousness of the Vietnamese people. Like moon, the water or stream or river is a place where people can swim in, a place where they feel the love, a place where they can wash all their troubles in life. We do not deny that the English people have the similar concept. However, MOON as WATER is used more commonly in Vietnamese poetry.

The metaphor MOON AS TIME also has not been found in English while it appears quite commonly in Vietnamese. For example: "*Thuyền người đi một tuần trăng*" (H. Cận); "*Tới trăng thu lại bắc cầu sang sông*" (Đ. T. Diễm). The use of source domain "Time" to conceptualize the moon such as: *tuần trăng, mùa trăng, trăng xuân, trăng hè, trăng thu* isthanks to the Vietnamese longstanding rice civilization. For Vietnamese people, especially farmers, "mùa trăng" is considered as one month or one season, and "trăng thu", "trăng xuân", "trăng hè" refer to the moon in autumn, spring and summer. "Trăng" (moon) plays an important role in farmer's life, according to them, water is up or down following the moon calendar. Mặt trăng (moon) is also the soul of Mid-Autumn Festival, which is close to Vietnamese field rice culture. That is the reason why we can find the same metaphor expressions in their poems.

In conclusion, we see that either reality or fiction can provide different meaning focuses on the concept of moon we use in metaphorical conceptualization. This seems to greatly enhance the possibility for our metaphors of moon to vary.

6. Conclusion and suggestions

In brief, we have presented our findings for conceptual metaphors of “moon” in English and “trăng” in Vietnamese in the 19th and 20th century poetry with ten source domains: A PERSON, A CONTAINER, AN OBJECT, A PLANT, AN ANIMAL, FOOD AND DRINK, A DESTINATION, WATER, A COVER and TIME.

Among them, we cannot find the domain WATER and TIME in English. This reflects the difference in culture and belief between the two languages. At the same time, however, we cannot deny that both languages share a large number of conceptual metaphors of “moon”, which is helpful for Vietnamese learners of English when they learn English poetry. Therefore, in teaching, teachers should find the way to help their students be aware of the universal characteristics of conceptual metaphors in our daily life, including conceptual metaphors of “moon”.

By studying conceptual metaphors, we can learn a lot of metaphorical expressions so that we can apply them in our everyday communication and then enrich our verbal skill. In the case of “moon” in English and “trăng” in Vietnamese, we have to deal with its conceptual metaphors related to various source domains in order to find out the messages behind the words. Thus, that is what exactly the theory of conceptual metaphors can bring to us.

In addition, with the help of conceptual metaphors of “moon”, many language phenomena that occur in literature or idioms about “moon” are understood much more easily.

In translation, in order to get the correct message from conceptual metaphors of “moon” in English to “trăng” in Vietnamese and vice versa, the translator should care about cultural elements that affect the use of metaphorical expressions as mentioned before.

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(The Board of Editors received the paper on 15/07/2016, its review was completed on 31/07/2016)