The Interrelationship Of Language, Thoughts And Metaphors In Vietnamese And British Cultures And The Implications In Language Teaching

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Abstract:

Background: *The conceptual metaphor is a natural part of human thinking, appearing very naturally in all communication activities. The nature of metaphor is to understand and experience this type of thing on the basis of other things.. Therefore, grasping the nature of metaphors, understanding the origin of the metaphor and the basis of the recipient will make the process of understanding the language in a more natural and more thorough way. In terms of teaching, if learners are clearly guided on metaphors in English, including comparison of cultural origin of English metaphors with metaphors in their native language, the ability to learn vocabulary, reading comprehension and memory ability of learners will be significantly improved.*

Methodology: *This article is the outcome of a comparative material cross analysis, looking into some major publications about distintive cultural traits of the two nations: Vietnam and the United Kingdom, in order to shed light on the root of metaphorical conceptualization. The purpose of the study is to help language teachers and learners in Vietnam be more aware of the origin of conceptual metaphors, and what causes the differences in the conceptualisation process of each domain, so as to learn the foreign language easily and more effectively.*

Result: *It is found that Vietnamese and British people conceptualize every aspect of life in a different way, because of the differencse in the way they think and view the world. The article thereby recommends some tips for teachers to improve the effecency of language teaching, by applying and explaining metaphors in language class.*

Date of Submission: 16-11-2024   Date of Acceptance: 26-11-2024

I.   Introduction

In the early stages of cognitive linguistics, many major researchers (typically Kövecses, Z.) strongly supported the universal viewpoint of conceptual metaphors. However, no long after that, it was Kövecses, Z. [4] acknowledging the important role of culture in conceptual metaphorical models. Since the 2000s, this issue has been extensively studied, with a series of comparative cross-cultural studies.

This essay, therefore, is expected to modestly contribute to that picture of cultures, by looking into some major factors affecting the way conceptual metaphors are viewed and analyzed in the two languages: Vietnamese in Vietnam, and English, in the UK.

II.   The Study And Findings

The relationship between language and thinking

The relationship between language and thinking has been acknowledged for a long time in linguistics. Karl Mark said: "The direct reality of thought is language." Language is the most important means of human communication. It is both a form of existence, a material means to express thinking and "tools of thinking activity. The language directly participates in the formation and development process of thinking "

Besides, there is an inseparable relationship between language and culture. There is a tight bond between them. Language is one of the elements that constitute a culture that spreads in social life because it is a frequent phenomenon of the inevitable human life. There is no field in social life from production and business to scientific research, socio -political struggle, artistic activities, spiritual emotions that are not related to language. So the language is one of the main roads to receive the culture of a nation.

In the view of Humbolt, the language is "the soul of a nation". The language determines the existence of a culture (in language) and is also an independent element of a culture. Gibbs (1998) [3] especially emphasized the importance of the cultural foundation of the metaphor. He pointed out that Embodied Metaphors not only arises from the physical experience of the body and then it is shown in the spirit of each individual, but actually it arises from the interactions. Body interactions have been shaped by cultural elements and when physical experiences have created the source of conceptual metaphors, they themselves are also

complex social structures. When cultural models shape people about beliefs, behaviors, how to talk about the world and about their experiences, it has created separate views from which "aspects of Embodied Experience (Embodied Experience) can become outstanding and meaningful in human life." This means that the cultural structures of the experience have shaped conceptual metaphorical mapping.

The relationship between thinking, culture and metaphor

Cognitive linguistics believes that our mindset and the way we think is expressed through the conceptual systems, depending on: (1) the properties of the human body, and (2) specific factors in physical and cultural environments around us [4]. Therefore, the conceptual metaphors are derived from the human body and the cultural environment. Firstly, despite the difference in race, people still have a basic body structure, sharing many similar physical experiences and body functions. Due to the general foundation of self - recognition, different languages will have equivalent conceptual metaphors. Second, on the contrary, some metaphors are not universal. We can explain that whether the metaphorical mapping is largely from physical experience, which physical experience choices depends on the knowledge and explanation of each culture. Thus, the common physical experiences have been "filtered" by culture before being able to generate and reflect metaphorical meaning on abstract concepts.

In short, the metaphor is grounded from physical experience but is shaped by cultural factors with the function of being a filter to select the sensory experience aspects and connect them to subjective experiences. At the same time, that cultural filter also works to choose the appropriate metaphorical mapping.

The differences in Vietnamese culture and British culture to interpret metaphors

In Vietnam today, researchers are doing many researches and studies to compare the differences and similaries of conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese and English, with the source domains and target domains in different aspects. On the theoretical basis about the close relationship between language- thinking-and culture, a firm belief to come is that, in order to understand the meaning of those conceptual metaphors, it is necessary to learn about the diffierent cultures of the two countries: Vietnam and England (Great Britain) to understand the value of metaphors, as a basis for explanations of the similarities and differences of metaphors.

Within the scope of this article, we choose to briefly present Vietnamese and English cultural characteristics according to two major researchers Tran Ngoc Them [9] and O'Driscoll J. (1995) [7]. At the same time, studies and documents of cultural researchers such as Le Quang Thiem [10], Nguyen Duc Ton [11], Ting-toomey S. and general L. C [8] .... are also referenced to further clarify the cultural basis.

According to Tran Ngoc Them, Vietnamese culture formed on wet rice growing economy is a negative culture, a typical type of agricultural culture, so Vietnamese people often take emotions as a conduct principle. Vietnamese people respect the harmony, compliance, and have a habit of careful consideration before articulating their words [9: p.158]

The outcome of emotional culture is an expressive language in Vietnamese, reflected in the fact that besides the original elements with neutral nuances, vocabulary in Vietnamese has many variations of expressive nuances, making Vietnamese become very rich in vocabulary.

In contrast, according to O'Driscoll J. (1995) [7,p.153], British culture is typical of nomadic civilization, their behaviors are based on the principles, assertiveness, objective and reasonable analysis thinking, not afraid of the difference compared to the crowd, they even take the difference to be proud of . British society is highly personal, the members do not care much about the big community, the concept of the family themselves is also limited to the nuclear family, privacy is appreciated and respected . In communication, collective society is more about the positive trend (wishing to have the agreement and favor of others) while the personal society is in an negative aspect (want to be free to act without being under the imposition of others).

In addition, the researchers also distinguish the Oriental and Western culture in the context, whereby Vietnam belongs to the High-Cultext Culture group and the UK belongs to the group of low context of Culture [7, p.161]). In High-Cultext Culture, semantic value of language in communication partly depends on the contextual elements while with in low context culture, the content and purpose of communication is shown directly in words. High-Cultext Culture promotes community orientation, and semantic values are understood through the knowledge about cultural context; In contrast, low context culture emphasizes personal orientation, straight logic, direct language interaction.

The implications of culture and metaphor relationship in language learning and teaching

The nature of metaphor is to understand and experience this category on the basis of another category [4, p.5]. Therefore, grasping the nature of metaphors, understanding the origin of metaphors and the basis of the recipient will make the process of understanding the language more natural and more thorough.

The critical reason why foreign language learners need to be aware of metaphors is because conceptual metaphor mappings have their own national cultural values and implications. In terms of teaching, if learners are

clearly guided on metaphors in English, including comparison of cultural origin of English metaphors with metaphors in their native language, the ability to learn vocabulary, reading comprehension and memory ability of learners will be significantly improved. Boers' works [1], Littlemore and the authors [5] have proven this perspective.

It is then suggested that, to help and encourage learners to think about the meaning of words based on cultural significance, teachers need to provide them with cultural knowledge and thinking diagrams. Thus, it is easy to make the conceptual mapping process in their mindset, which eases the conceptual interpretation. Specifically, students must be clear of the differences in the two cultures: Vietnamese one is highly agriculturally civilized, while British culture is nomadic and highly industrialized. These definitely generate different ways of thinking and metaphorical mapping processes.

Besides, language teachers can provide learners with pairs of English-Vietnamese sentences that contain metaphorical structures for learners to see similarities and differences in two languages and experience the meanings of the word. After that, the teacher help the learners to find the mapping path of the concept , so that they can remember the meaning of the word better.

Below are some examples to consider:
Many of the metaphors are universal, which show the similarity in the way of thinking among nations.
Ví dụ 2: The mapping diagram of metaphor CAREER IS A BUILDING;

BUILDING	MAPPING	CAREER
To be built	>>>>>>>>>	*Career to be*
Collapse	>>>>>>>>>	*Failure in career*
Expand	>>>>>>>>>	*Career to develop*
Foundation of the building	>>>>>>>>>	*Foundation of the career*
Ceiling	>>>>>>>>>	*Top of career*
English		**Vietnamese**
Her career was in **ruins**		Sự nghiệp của bà ấy đã **sụp đổ**
Government grants have enabled a number of the **top names** in British sport to **build up** successful careers		Những khoản trợ cấp của chính phủ đã cho phép những tên tuổi **đỉnh cao** trong làng thể thao nước Anh được **phát triển** sự nghiệp rực rỡ
His career suddenlly **collapsed** because of the corruption affair..		Sự nghiệp của anh ấy bỗng chốc **sụp đổ** vì vụ bê bối tham nhũng

However, there are many cases when national identities and ways of thinking are reflected in the different structure of metaphors.
Take the example the conceptual metaphor "BEAUTY IS A TASTE" in Vietnamese and English:

Along with "sweet", in Vietnamese culture, "salty" is a favorite taste of Vietnamse people. Vietnam is a agriculture country, most people live on farm and by the sea, the salty taste symbolizes the richness and roundness in the cuisine, the dish with rich, salty salt is considered delicious. Therefore, the salty taste is chosen as a source domain to describe the good and positive target domain, to understand the beautiful appearance of people. . Looking into the national corpus, we especially find that contemporary Vietnamese language is very keen on using **salty** source domain to describe the beauty of middle -aged women. The examples are as follows:

*(1) Bất ngờ xuất hiện tại một sự kiện ở TPHCM vào tối qua 18/10, cựu hoa hậu Việt Nam Diệu Hoa khiến nhiều người trầm trồ trước nhan sắc **mặn** mà và trẻ đẹp của mình dù đã bước sang tuổi 45. (Unexpectedly appearing at an event in Ho Chi Minh City on the evening of October 18, the former Miss Vietnam Dieu Hoa made many people surpise at her (**salty** and) bright beauty despite turning 45 years old) [16]*

*(2) "Người đàn bà đẹp" Củng Lợi quyến rũ, **mặn** mà ở tuổi U60 (The "Beautiful woman" Gong Li is charming, **attractive** at the age of under 60) [17]*

*(3) Chrissy Teigen là chân dài đình đám người Mỹ. Mang trong mình hai dòng máu Thái và Na Uy, vì thế Teigen có vẻ đẹp lai **mặn** mà, khỏe khoắn và đầy quyến rũ. [P.48] (Chrissy Teigen is a well-known American model. As a hybrid of Thailand and Norway, Teigen has a sexy, strong and **seductive** beauty) [18]*

According to the definition in the Vietnamese dictionary [154], "***mặn mà (salty)***" has three layers of meaning: 1/having the taste of salt; 2/ charming, graceful ;3/having affectionate relationship with someone or something. Thus, in the three meaning layers, the first meaning, the attribute of the "salty" position has been metaphorically switched into the second and third meanings. From there, this attribute "Having the Taste of Salt" is mapped onto the "beauty/ appearance" of the woman, clarifying a conceptual region with many layers of emotion: Beauty, naive, hidden and appealing to the viewer. Besides, in Vietnamese culture, the "salty" beauty is the beauty of life experience (associated with the salty taste of sweat and tears), so middle -aged women are often described with their "salty " beauty.

However, this metaphorical mapping is almost unseen in English language. This can be explained from culture. This can be explained by the fact that British people do not treasure the value of salt, so they do not consider

"**salty**" as an attribute of beauty. Instead, in most cases, British people describe a graceful, beautiful, sexy woman as " **sweet".** Due to climatic and cultural conditions, Westerners extremely love sweets (with the average sugar consumption rate, much higher than in Asian countries, double the average level as recommended by WHO. - World Health Organization (90gr/50gr) (www.Who.int). Therefore, naturally, the concept of sweetness is often conceptualization to map into the concept of "human beauty", which is a also a favorite domain.

*Guy caught his breath all over again, so captivated by the **sweet face** upturned to him that he missed the strangely puzzled wonderment in her wide-eyed gaze, his own eyes tracing features drawn with exquisite delicacy, though her gently flushed cheeks still retained the rounded curves of youth. (https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/)*

*He felt guilty as he thought of Maeve's **sweet face**, and embarrassed that he should be so powerfully attracted to a woman dedicated to God* (https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/)

III.   Conclusion

If the conceptual structure and cultural base behind the language structures are explained thoroughly, the learners will be able to think and remember the words, or idioms longer and deliberately. In addition, teaching methods based on the conceptual awareness not only help students learn vocabulary better but also make learning activities more interesting and more effective. On a broader level, the integration of metaphorical teaching into foreign language lessons will help enhance the ability to think metaphorically and improve students' communication competence.

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