Vietnamese Perception Verbs – The Transfer of Their Cognitive Metaphors into English

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Abstract: Fillmore stated that frame semantics offers a particular way of looking at word meanings, as well as a way of characterizing principles for creating new words and phrases, for adding new meanings to words, and for assembling the meanings of elements in a text into the total meaning of the text. [9, p.111] Besides, the semantics of Vietnamese perception verbs is very diverse, subtle, and complicated. Therefore, this article researches the cognitive metaphor semantics (meanings) of Vietnamese perception verbs and their semantic cognition transferred from Vietnamese into English. The researcher inspected and collected 3,946 sentences with perception verbs as research data from two sets of English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-English bilingual novels: The adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle (English version and Vietnamese version), and Love after war, Wayne Karlin, Ho Anh Thai (edited) (Vietnamese version and English version). Then, cases of specific semantic cognition transferred from Vietnamese into English were tracked down by using statistical analysis method. Simultaneously, the linguistic methods, such as descriptive, analysis, and contrastive methods have been used to analyze and investigate in order to find out the basic ways these verbs can convey cognitive metaphor meanings. There are totally 6 modes of the cognitive metaphors of the perception verbs. Those cognitive metaphors are formed due to the dominance of the cognitive object, the dominance of the cognitive perceiver, being in the same cognition phase, cognitive spaces switching, cognitive results conversion and perception organs conversion. This research results can help learners, language users, translators and interpreters of Vietnamese and English work effectively and comprehensively in their bilingual interactions.

Keywords: Perception Verbs, Cognitive Metaphor, Cognitive Semantics, Semantic Cognition Transferred

1. Introduction

Metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon. [8, p.14] Metaphor helps humans to try to understand new problems in terms of existing cognitive resources. [13, p.325] Metaphor is a major and indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience. [10, p.186] The widespread use of metaphorical language in our everyday lives has given rise to the idea that we do not only talk metaphorically much of the time, but that we may also think metaphorically much of the time. [5, p.68] And metaphors provide rich evidence about the ways in which some aspects of our lived experience are associated with others, for reasons that reflect basic aspects of perception, thought, and possibly neurological organization. [11, p.188]

In metaphor, the structure of a given domain (called the “source” domain) is mapped onto a different one (the “target” domain), which as a result is structured and understood in terms of the first one. [14, p.15] Besides, cognitive semantics sees linguistic meaning as a manifestation of conceptual structure: the nature and organization of mental representation in all its richness and diversity. [7, p.156] Verbalizations of non-verbal or conceptual metaphors may affect their possible interpretation. [12, p.10] In Vietnamese language, the semantics of the perception verbs is very interesting and deserves deep study and investigation. For instance, in Vietnamese, the verb thấy (see) can be used to express the information from all of the senses, not just the visual. The verb nghe (hear) also has a variety of meanings, which is only inferior to the verb thấy. Therefore, this article’s aim is to research and study the cognitive metaphor
semantics of Vietnamese perception verbs as well as their semantic cognition transfer between Vietnamese and English.

From the survey of the two sets of English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-English bilingual novels: The adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Love after war, the researcher collected 1950 units with Vietnamese perception verbs (nhìn, nghe, ngửi, nem, sờ and thấy) and 1996 units with English perception verbs (look, see, listen, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel). After having carefully processed, analyzed, and researched, the research data revealed that 6 reasons for the existence of cognitive metaphor meanings for those perception verbs. At the same time, the research has also tracked down all the possible semantic cognition transfers between Vietnamese and English.

2. The Cognitive Metaphor Mechanism

Basing the analysis of communicative interactions on mental states means, first and foremost, examining individual motivations, beliefs, goals, desires, and intentions. The next step in the analysis is to examine how these states are expressed. The definition of communication as a process implies that communicating linguistically or extralinguistically will involve two different ways of processing data. The same input may be analyzed from both a linguistic and an extralinguistic standpoint, and except in special cases, it will be processed in two parallel ways. [4, p. 1-2] Metaphor, understood traditionally, is an action of meaning transferring based on the similarity of objects in color, shape, nature of movement, etc. According to Croft, W. and Cruse, D., metaphor involves an interaction between two domains construed from two regions of purport, and the content of the vehicle domain is an ingredient of the construed target through processes of correspondence and blending. [6, p. 193] Broadly speaking, metaphor is a mechanism of speech. It is reflected in the way of using words of a certain class of objects or phenomena in order to define or identify the objects belonging to another class, or identify the other class, which has similarities with the default class in certain relationships.

Ex: “Tôi quoc ta như một con tầu Mũi thuyền ta đó – Mũi Cà Mau”.
(Xuân Diệu)
(Mũi Cà Mau: Ca Mau Nose = Ca Mau Cape)

Metaphor is a very popular way of meaning transfer in which the individual words or expressions are linked together due to their semantic similarities. It is formed by means of humanization, objectification, abstractionism, etc. It is used to enhance the expressiveness of the speech.

So, what is the cognitive metaphor mechanism of the perception verbs like?

3. The Cognitive Metaphor Mechanism of the Perception Verbs

Being a part of a linguistic system of a particular language the verb conveys national peculiarities of the conceptual system of its native speakers as well as the way a speaker visually perceives the environment. [3, p. 3] Based on meaning features, similarities, or similar elements in the same meaning category as well as the meaning proximity within each period of cognition or within the meaning group, these perception verbs can convey cognitive metaphors, which are distinctive, special, and diverse. These cognitive metaphor meanings enrich the semantic elements for the perception verbs.

For example, the verb thấy (see) is a verb belonging to the third period of the cognition process – the cognition result’s output phase. This verb is used to express experiences. Due to those two reasons, this verb has some meaning features that are relatively close to those of the verb biết (know). Therefore, we have a cognitive metaphor: thấy là đã biết (seeing is knowing).

Ex: Như quả có gai áy, tôi thấy yêu được ai quá là một điều vô cùng hạnh phúc. But looking at her, I knew that being love must be extremely joyous.

4. Cognitive Metaphors of the Vietnamese Perception Verbs

4.1. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Nhìn

-Nhìn is watching
Ex: Nhìn họ nói chuyện với Tà, nói Tà, nói Nhật mà khen. [15] It was satisfying to watch them speaking to Europeans, Chinese and Japanese. [16]
-Nhìn is judging
Ex: Đó là nhược điểm chính của hắn; còn nhìn chung thì hắn rất được việc. [1] That is his main fault, but on the whole he’s a good worker. [2]
-Nhìn is facing
Ex: Nhìn mặt nau suốt ngày ở phòng làm việc. [1] We faced each other at work in the office. [2]
-Nhìn is longing to a certain direction
Ex: Cái điếm nhỏ trống hoang, tường xây bị lở từng mảng
[Nhìn về phía bãi sông. [16]

Ex: Từ its doorway, where they sat, they could see down to the riverbank. [16]
-Nhìn is accepting
Ex: Cô người không lạy chồng cho thỏa nghị, cô người như đao Hồng có con rồi, vì mê hát, vì chiến tranh mà gởi con cho người ta, đến nay nó không thể nhin mình nữa. [15] She had remained true to her vow, and remained single. But looking at her, I knew that being love must be extremely joyous.

| Verb | Metaphor meanings | Units with metaphor | Percentage |
|------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| watch | 17              | 42.50%              |
| judging | 10           | 25.00%              |
| facing | 4              | 10.00%              |
| long | 5              | 12.50%              |
| direction | 4            | 10.00%              |
| Total | 40             | 100.00%             |
4.2. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Thấy

-Thấy is thinking
Ex: Ú, có cũng thấy nên đưa mà con toàn quyền! [15] I think we should give your mother complete authority here. [16]

-Thấy is finding
Ex: Như ngẫu nhiên Yến bỗng thấy mình hay soi gương. [15] But during these days, Yến suddenly found herself looking in the mirror. [16]

-Thấy is hearing
Ex: Từ khi sống bên nhau, lần đầu tiên, Ngoan thấy Mi raise her voice. [16]

-Thấy is understanding
Ex: Các ông thấy đây, cảnh sừng mà tôi vừa kể khiến chúng tôi không còn thích giao du với bất cứ ai cùng trạng lừa và địa vị, [1] You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. [2]

-Thấy is noticing
Ex: Minh có thấy cách chì tiêu của hanh không? [15] Have you noticed the ways he spends money? [16]

-Thấy is watching
Ex: Tôi lắng nghe Muôn hát, thấy giọng nước mắt lăn trên gò má của cô. [15] While she sang I listened in silence, watching the tears spill down her cheeks. [16]

-Thấy is catching
Ex: Thấy tôi nhìn bàn tay, Mi bỏ xuống cười xòa. [15] It was the first time since they had lived together that his ears are pierced for the earrings? [2]

-Thấy is meeting
Ex: Khi thấy tôi, cô nâng giọng. [15] It was the first time since they had lived together that my voice had been placed in. [2]

-Thấy is having
Ex: Trên dái tay hắn ông có hai lỗ đeo hoa tai không? [15] Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for the earrings? [2]

Thấy is observing
Ex: Từ khi sống bên nhau, lần đầu tiên, Ngoan thấy Mi raise her voice. [16]

-Thấy is noticing
Ex: Minh có thấy cách chì tiêu của hanh không? [15] Have you noticed the ways he spends money? [16]

-Thấy is watching
Ex: Tôi lắng nghe Muôn hát, thấy giọng nước mắt lăn trên gò má của cô. [15] While she sang I listened in silence, watching the tears spill down her cheeks. [16]

-Thấy is catching
Ex: Thấy tôi nhìn bàn tay, Mi bỏ xuống cười xòa. [15] It was the first time since they had lived together that his ears are pierced for the earrings? [2]

-Thấy is meeting
Ex: Khi thấy tôi, cô nâng giọng. [15] It was the first time since they had lived together that my voice had been placed in. [2]

4.3. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Nghe

-Nghe is obeying
Ex: Ông tôi không nghe. [1] My grandfather refused to obey. [2]

-Nghe is understanding
Ex: Đấy, thế đấy, chú nghe rõ chưa? [15] Do you understand? [16]

-Nghe is consulting
Ex: Tôi đi thẳng từ Praha đến đây để nghe lời khuyên của các ông. [1] I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you. [2]

-Nghe is knowing
Ex: Nghe nói, hỏi đó, nhà ông giàu có khét tiếng xứ Bạc Liêu. [15] It was well known that he came from a very rich family in Bạc Lieu. [16]

-Nghe is distinguishing
Ex: Mà vui thật, vui ra phết, bà nghe rõ tiếng từng con một, mỗi con một giọng, mỗi kiểu gáy. [15] And lift her spirit it did, it was downright humorous, she could distinguish
clearly the sound of each cock, each one had its own distinct
voice, its own way of crowing. [16]
-Nghẹ is feeling
Ex: Tôi bất chợt nghe lạnh suốt lưng. [15] I felt suddenly
chilled to the spine. [16]
-Nghẹ is catching
Ex: Đấy chính là từ mà người hấp hối thở ra, nhưng anh
còn trai chỉ kịp thấy hai âm tiết cuối cùng. [1] That was
the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught
the last two syllables. [2]
-Nghẹ is finding
Ex: Thầy chưa nghe nói gỗ đá thành Phật bao giờ. [15] I've
found a stone or a piece of wood that could become a
Buddha. [16]
-Nghẹ is thinking
Ex: Ông cũng như thế ư? [15] You think so, too? [16]
-Nghẹ is checking
Ex: Sáng hôm sau, nhà lại vắng như mọi hôm, bà lão Tứ
checked to make sure no one was around, and then
groped her way back to the kitchen. [16]
-Nghẹ is sounding
Ex: Nghe mùi mò mà hấp dẫn quá. [15] It sounded so
vague and yet so attractive. [16]

Table 3. Cognitive metaphors of the verb nghe.

| Verb   | Metaphor meanings | Units with metaphor | Percentage |
|--------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| nghe   | obeying           | 11                  | 30.55%     |
|        | understanding     | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | consulting        | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | knowing           | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | distinguishing    | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | feeling           | 4                   | 11.10%     |
|        | catching          | 3                   | 8.33%      |
|        | finding           | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | thinking          | 2                   | 5.56%      |
|        | checking          | 1                   | 2.78%      |
|        | sounding          | 5                   | 13.88%     |
| Total  |                   | 36                  | 100.00%    |

4.4. Cognitive Metaphors of the Verb Nghẹ Thấy

-Nghẹ thảy is receiving
Ex: Thành tích này của ông cũng tới dài từ khắp nơi nghẹ
thảy. [15] This account of you we have from all quarters
received. [16]
-Nghẹ thảy is seeing
Ex: Về phần cô ta, tôi không nghẹ thảy gì. [1] Of her, I
could see nothing. [2]
-Nghẹ thảy is catching
Ex: Cha tôi có lập bập may tieng không rõ, tôi chỉ nghẹ
thảy một từ hình như là “A rat”. [1] He mumbled a few
words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat. [2]
Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. [2]  
- Sờ is feeling  
Ex: Tôi bó quăn mải, chỉ sờ mờ thời chút có thấy gì nưa đâu! [1] I crawled all over, feeling the ground, unable to see anything. [2]

| Verb | Metaphor meanings | Units with metaphor | Percentage |
|------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| nhìn | reaching          | 1                   | 20.00%     |
| thấy | focusing attention| 1                   | 20.00%     |
| nghe | feeling           | 3                   | 60.00%     |
| Total |                   | 5                   | 100.00%    |

5. Modes of the Cognitive Metaphors of the Perception Verbs

5.1. Due to the Dominance of the Cognitive Object

These are the metaphors formed owing to the dominance of the semantic requirements and properties of the cognitive object. For example:
Ex: Mi nhìn tôi ăn chăm chú nhưng tôi biết rõ cô không nên để má con toàn quyền! [15]  
In this example, the cognitive object of nhìn (look) is tôi ăn. (I eat). This cognitive object is a process. Therefore, the verb nhìn in this example convey the metaphor meaning of theo dõi (watching). As a result, we have the English version of this sentence: Mi watched me eating attentively, but I knew clearly that she was not seeing anything. [16]

| Verb | Metaphor meanings | Units with metaphor | Percentage |
|------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| nhìn | watching          | 12                  | 69.93%     |
| thấy | seeing            | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | capturing         | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe thấy | 1 | 0.35% |
| nghe | perceiving        | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | realizing         | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | noticing          | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | finding           | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | obeying           | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | distinguishing    | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | consulting        | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | knowing           | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | discerning        | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | experiencing      | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | focusing attention| 1                   | 0.35%      |
| nghe | feeling           | 1                   | 0.35%      |
| Total |                   | 282                 | 1.05%      |

5.2. Due to the Dominance of the Cognitive Perceiver

These are the metaphors formed owing to the dominance of the semantic requirements and properties of the cognitive perceiver. For example:
Ex: Ừ, cô cũng thấy nội nè để mà con toàn quyền! [15]  
In this example, we can see that the verb thấy (see) is used to describe the thinking of the cognitive perceiver có (the aunt). Therefore, we have the corresponding English translation of the sentence is: I think we should give your mother complete authority here. [16]

5.4. Due to Cognitive Spaces Switching

These are the metaphors formed owing to cognitive spaces switching. They are the switching from the reality space to the assuming space (Ex: nhìn is judging, nhìn is accepting, etc.), from the assuming space to the cognition space (Ex: thấy is thinking, thấy is understanding, etc.), from the reality space to the experience space (Ex: thấy is knowing, thấy is realizing, etc.), and more.

| Verb | Metaphor meanings | Units with metaphor | Percentage |
|------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| nhìn | accepting         | 4                   | 1.40%      |
| thấy | watching          | 6                   | 2.13%      |
| thấy | observing         | 8                   | 2.84%      |
| Total |                   | 282                 | 6.39%      |
| see | quan sát          | 12                  | 4.99%      |
| Total |                   | 785                 | 1.53%      |
5.5. Due to Cognitive Results Conversion

These are the metaphors formed owing to the conversion of the cognitive results of other verbs into the perception verbs. For example, we have the metaphors such as thấy is finding, thấy is realizing, thấy is perceiving, etc.

5.6. Due to Perception Organs Conversion

These are the metaphors formed owing to the conversion of the perception organs. In Vietnamese, the verb thấy of the visual perception and the verb nghe of the hearing perception can be used to convey the cognitive results of all the senses, not just the visual and the hearing only.

6. Conclusion

The survey results have shown us that the cognitive meanings of the perception verbs are extremely diverse, various, and special. Among them, the meanings with cognitive metaphors account for a big proportion.

The polysemy, sophistication, and subtlety of the perception verbs have enriched the language. However, they meanwhile, cause a huge obstacle to language learners and language workers. Therefore, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to the identification of the exact meanings in each certain linguistic unit when teaching or handling with languages.

Further studies of these verbs as well as their contrastive research within multi-languages are also very essential work.

Finally, this research has made a very important sense not only in linguistic study but also in language teaching, learning, in translating and interpreting, and many other activities in relation with languages.

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