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# A Cognitive Investigation into the Love-life Relationship Expressed in Poetry

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to uncover the underlying metaphorical expressions regarding the importance of love to human life in English and Vietnamese poetry based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which suggests that metaphor is based on human thought as well as on language. For metaphor identification, the authors use a five-step procedure based on Pragglejaz Group's method for metaphorical expressions and a self-proposed three-step procedure for conceptual metaphors. The findings reveal that love is metaphorically expressed to have a considerable influence on both the physical and mental aspects of human life. This paper is also a comparative investigation showing both similarities and differences in the love-life metaphorical expressions between the two languages. The similarities are explained by the same grounding of metaphor-embodiment and the universality of conceptual metaphors. The differences are attributed to cultural distinction.

## Introduction

Love is one of the basic human emotions, a natural phenomenon that can be found in all cultures around the world (Karandashev, 2015). There have been many studies on love and its significance in the fields of psychology and anthropology (Freud, 2010; Lindholm, 2006). In linguistics, the concept of love has been shown to be one of the richest in imagery by cognitive linguists (Kovecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Tissari, 2005). The metaphorical expressions of love are found to be diversified, since they are based on individual experiences and are under cultural influences (Gibbs, 2011; Karandashev, 2015; Steenbergen, 2006). The matter of love-life relationship (i.e. the impact of love on human life), however, is still under-explored in the literature, even though love is considered one of the most significant parts of life and without love people may feel as though their lives were incomplete or even meaningless (Bergner, 2000).

This paper aims to investigate and shed light upon the love-life relationship via metaphorical expressions in poetry. As poetry is rich in figurative language, metaphor included, and is copiously laced with love-related expressions (Colston, 2019), this is a promising data source for our analysis. Although there are several kinds of love such as family love, religious love, or love of friends, our investigation focuses on romantic love – “the most powerful social bond between two persons” (Colston, 2019). We use Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) as the approach to understanding metaphors relating to the love-life relationship. Because metaphor is culturally and experientially based (Gibbs, 2011; Karandashev, 2015; Steenbergen, 2006), this paper is also a comparative investigation exploring whether there are cultural influences on the expressions of love-life metaphors in poems written in English and Vietnamese.

## Theoretical background

### Conceptual metaphor theory

Unlike the traditional views where metaphor is treated at the lexical level and believed to mainly come from literature (poetry included), Conceptual Metaphor Theory argues that metaphor operates at the level of thinking and is pervasive in everyday language (Kovecses, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The essence of a conceptual metaphor is the understanding of a concept in terms of another through cross-domain mappings, the principal mechanism of meaning transfers in metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). These mappings are understood as the systematic, partial, and unidirectional projections of basic knowledge elements from a source to a target through the TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN structure. The mapping structure is applicable in poetic metaphors because they are mostly extended from the everyday conventional system of metaphorical thoughts (Lakoff, 1993). Furthermore, even though poetic metaphors are often found unconventional and novel, the uniqueness and novelty mostly lie at the linguistic level rather than at the conceptual one (Phan & Ho, 2017). Let us look at one example, “*Lò làng mười tám đôi mươi./Tôi đi chợ muộn kiếm cối trầu già*” (I go to the market at its closing to look for a tray of old paans in my early twenties, the age of being tardy for marriage) (Đạo Tịch). The image of “*cối trầu*” (a tray of paans) is rather a popular reference to love or marriage (because of its use in such occasions) in Vietnamese culture but that of “old paan” is seldom used because old paans are distasteful and difficult to chew. The expression “*cối trầu già*” (tray of old paans) is hence novel but the underlying concept, UNITY, is not. Besides, because “*cối trầu*” is a cultural image, the interpretation of this metaphorical expression is uniquely related to the Vietnamese culture. In other words, conceptual metaphors are often universal but linguistic metaphors are culturally diverse and should be comprehended based on culture. In this paper, we will not discuss whether an expression is novel but rather focus on the issue of cultural impact on the understanding of metaphorical expressions.

### Romantic love

Romantic love, hereafter love, is considered a complex emotion with cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Stangor, Tarry, & Jhangiani, 2014). It occurs in a romantic context between two persons with a high level of intimacy and passion, probably causing great happiness or extreme misery which may even lead to the ending of one’s life (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013; Colston, 2019; Gottschall & Nordlund, 2006). This relationship is also argued as “the most powerful social bond between two persons” that inspires social interactions in which figurative language, metaphor included, counts pervasive (Colston, 2015). Right in this statement, love is manifested in terms of the notion of BOND via the expression “*powerful bond*,” which is understood as a conceptual metaphor. In the same vein, a collection of different notions (i.e. nutrient, journey, unity, closeness, bond, fire, container, economic exchange, force, opponent, captive animal, war, sport/a game, disease, magic, insanity, social superior, rapture) are exposed to illustrate the convention and pervasiveness of love metaphors and the diversity of love (Kovecses, 2010). Concurrently, love is also demonstrated to be culturally varied although the notion for it is universal, which is akin to the statement that love is a cross-cultural or common phenomenon but may be experienced and expressed differently in multiple cultural forms (Gibbs, 2011; Karandashev, 2015; Kovecses, 2010).

### Life

There are various ways to explain and describe life but it may seem that there is not really a standard definition of life. On the basis of Darwinian evolution theory, Chamary (2019) suggests interpreting life as the ability to adapt to the environment and self-reproduction with variations. More generally, Oxford dictionary defines life as “the existence of an individual” and distinguishes it from the state of

death.<sup>1</sup> The state of being alive of a human is further manifested in mental and physical experiences (Fuchs, 2012). The mental experience involves intellect and consciousness that is constituted and made sense by cultural values (Lizado, 2015). The physical experience is shed light upon in terms of biochemical processes such as metabolism and growth which are required to be supported by four factors including carbon, energy, liquid water and other elements (McKay, 2014). As aforementioned, the paper will discuss *life* in the meaning of *the state of being alive* with its supported and decisive factors.

## Research methods

Our investigation is mainly carried out by using contrastive analysis which is characterized as the scientific description and comparison of two or more languages to identify their similarities and differences (Joze-Tajareh, 2015). This paper is a preliminary study conducted based on our random sampling of more than two hundred English and Vietnamese love poems composed or published since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 40 of which were identified to contain metaphors relating to the love-life relationship.<sup>2</sup> The English poems are composed by authors in the United States or Great Britain; both belong to the Western culture. The Vietnamese works are written by Vietnamese authors who were born and grew up in Vietnam, a country with a distinctive Eastern culture. The Vietnamese poems used in the paper are all translated into English to facilitate the understanding of them. They are literally or equivalently transferred via semantic translation with a view to ensuring the maintenance of their meaning and metaphorical images included in the poems.

Because most of linguistic expressions of the love-life relationship are interpreted and manifested in metaphor, we rely on an extended Pragglejaz Group's (2007) procedure to identify them. The procedure includes five steps: (i) Read over the entire poem to understand its general meaning and get the contextual information; (ii) Mark the words or phrases related to life in both physical and mental aspects; (iii) Carefully examine the marked words or phrases using dictionaries to determine if their literal meanings were understandable or suitable in relation to other words or phrases; If not, (iv) identify them as linguistic metaphors; Finally, (v) bring the linguistic metaphors back to the context to ensure that they refer to love. In "*When you leave it will be empty:/ dried leaves on gray-haired limbs,/ clumps of gooseberry minus the berries.*" (Hansen), for example, the expressions of "dried leaves on gray-haired limbs" and "clumps of gooseberry minus the berries" describe a lack of vitality of trees, which appears not to be related to the part "when you leave." As a result, these expressions are marked as linguistic metaphors.

After identifying the linguistic metaphors, it is essential to formulate the conceptual metaphors underlying them. After several unsuccessful attempts using Steen's (2002) approach to Conceptual Metaphor Identification (CMI), especially at the three last steps, we decided to apply our own, more flexible, three-step CMI procedure that is found to better fit our analysis. The steps include: (i) Identify the hints behind the linguistic expressions; (ii) Identify the reference from the hints; And (iii) identify a concept under the reference. Let us examine and identify the conceptual metaphor in the example above.

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*when you leave*  
 (i) separation  
 (ii) absence of love  
 (iii) LOVE

---

*dried leaves on gray-haired limbs*  
 leaves lacking freshness on old limbs of trees  
 lacking vitality, the power giving continuance of life  
 LIFE

- conceptual metaphor LOVE IS LIFE
- 

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/life](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/life)

<sup>2</sup>The poems are available as supplementary material.

Furthermore, as a comparison of cultures should be involved in the scope of a contrastive study (Lado, 1957, extracted from; Johansson, 2008), cultural influences on English and Vietnamese metaphorical expressions referring to the relationship between love and life will also be examined via descriptive methods.

## Findings and discussions

### LOVE-AS-LIFE mapping

As one of the basic human emotions, love is deemed as an indispensable factor that determines human survival. It is metaphorically expressed as what can bring life to human beings and keeps human life ongoing under the conceptual metaphor LOVE AS LIFE and understood via the mapping as follows.

#### LOVE-AS-LIFE mapping

LIFE	LOVE
Living	Loving
Base for life	Love
Person alive	Person in love
Person who is killed	Person who is left
Dying	Losing love
The dead	Ex-partners

We can see from the mapping that, as love is life, a person may die without love. This is illustrated by such expressions as “*Without you I would die*” (Brittney) or “*Làm sao sống được mà không yêu*” (How to live without love) by Xuân Diệu. Not only can love help maintain one’s living, keep humans alive but it also brings the person in the relationship back to life.

In Bryan’s line “*You make my heart come alive*” and Nguyễn Bính’s “*Yêu đương sống lại, con người ấy/ Lại thấy đời tươi tựa nắng vàng*” (Love revived, that person/ once again, found the life as fresh and bright as the golden sun), love is described to provide a source of living energy for human beings’ revival through metaphorical expressions of “*heart come alive*” and “*đời tươi lại*” (a life becoming fresh and bright again). Out of line with the image of the “*heart come alive*” where love- the source of energy is not referred specifically, “*đời tươi lại*” compares love to water that has a capacity of resurrecting a person’s withered life plant. In spite of being expressed differently, love is still considered to be important to human life. It is not just a source of energy or water but a base or a foundation for the lover to live on, which is illustrated in the stanzas “*You are [...] My earth, my sky, my sea*” by Gordon and “*em là [...] bầu trời của anh, mặt đất của anh*” (you are all, my sky, my earth) by Cao Xuân Sơn. It is a fact that nobody on earth can live without “*the sky*” and “*the earth*.” These images are hence used to highlight the indispensability of love to human survival.

The essentials of love are also depicted finely in “*here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud/ and the sky of the sky of a tree called life*” (Cummings), where human life is metaphorized as a tree whose root and bud are love. In botany, the root works to absorb and store water and nutrients needed for the tree survival and growth, to protect the tree from being removed from the ground. As the root of a life tree, love fulfills the crucial functions to maintain, protect and develop lovers’ life. Likewise, love in terms of the bud helps maintain the life tree growth or its reproduction. In other words, love nourishes human life and keeps it safe.

Thanks to love, the life tree develops well, which is manifested via the expression “*xanh tươi*” (verdurous) from Xuân Diệu’s verse- “*Vĩnh viễn anh yêu em, như yêu sự thật/ Và cây đời mãi mãi xanh tươi/ Mãi mãi em ơi/ Cây đời trĩu trái*” (I love you forever like loving the truth and the life tree is verdurous and fruiting heavily forever, my darling). Besides, the image of “*cây đời trĩu trái*” (tree laden with fruit) allows us to think about a high ability of reproduction for fruit is biologically a reproductive organism of a tree.

As life is raised by love, life could be taken away from a person who are not loved, which is described in “*I gave you my life and you killed me day by day*” by Santamaria and “*Em đã giết anh rồi, em vứt xác anh đâu?*” (You’ve killed me, where did you throw my body?) by Xuân Diệu. The feeling of being killed here is, in fact, an emotional dissatisfaction the lovers perceive. It is grasped via the love-as-adversary metaphor.

In short, the relationship between love and life has so far been partly made sense based on poetic expressions. In this relationship, love is described as a source of living energy, a base or a background on which the life can exist, grow and reproduce. To learn more about the significance of love for life, the paper will go on with possible connections between love and life through human physical and mental experiences.

### **Love – life relationship through physical experiences**

Physical experiences are the ones people have in the real world related to the senses and biochemical processes. In this part, possible effects of love on each of these aspects of a human being will be investigated and made clear with a view to finding out how important and significant love is to human life and how it interferes in life.

Biochemical processes are concerned with metabolism, an instance of which is breathing- the process of bringing oxygen into the lungs so that it can be transported to the cells and sustain their life. However, oxygen in “*You are the oxygen that keeps me alive*” by Mercedes is not a gas but love, which is also implied in Nguyệt Phạm’s “*Ai đó đã đi đâu/ Em hụt hơi và hụt chân*” (The man has left/ I am in shortness of breath and stumbling block) through the metaphorical expression “*hụt hơi*” (shortness of breath). Thereby, the expressions show a need of love for the lovers’ survival.

Not only does love have an ability to maintain one’s life, it can help the lover revive. In Nguyễn Bình’s extract “*Thế rồi máu trở về tim/ Duyên làm lành chị duyên tìm về môi./ Chị nay lòng ấm lại rồi*” (Then blood returns to the heart and makes it warm again. Love heals me and makes my lips ruddy), for example, love makes the circulatory system of the woman (“*chị*”) work again (“*máu trở về tim*”- blood returning to the heart) and brings her back to life (“*lòng ấm lại*”- the heart becoming warm again). The woman concurrently undergoes a physical experience in terms of the tactile sense, the perception of “*ấm*” (being warm) with love. Such a similar experience is found in English poetry, “*True love keeps you warm/ on cold nights*” (Bryan), where love is thought as what can generate energy, maybe fire, to keep the beloved from the coldness and help to maintain her/his life.

The sun, the major source of energy for life on earth is also used to refer to love. In “*you are my sun*” (Cummings), equivalent to the Vietnamese one “*Anh là /mặt trời/ của em*” (DTNg), for instance, the sun metaphorically refers to the person in the loving relationship that metonymically stands for love. Being compared to the sun, love may consequently help the beloved survive with its living energy. In other words, the persons in love are living.

Looking at the verse “*Earth was in (live/ live) spring/ with all beautiful/ things when to/ me/ you gave/ gave darling*” (Cummings), one can see the irregularity when spring is represented to come when love appears. Sharing the same experience with Cummings, Xuân Diệu puts in words that “*Xuân của đất trời nay mới đến/ Trong tôi xuân đến đã lâu rồi/ Từ lúc yêu nhau hoa nở mãi/ Trong vườn thơm ngát của hồn tôi*” (Natural spring has just come while it came to me a long time ago. Since we love each other, floral fragrance has spread throughout my soul garden). Spring is the time of growth and development when the weather becomes warmer. It is the time of budding and flowering, hence the season for rebirth, renewal and regrowth. As a result, love accompanying spring provides the persons in the relationship with full of energy, refreshing them, making them happy; thus, everything around them becomes more beautiful. By contrast, a dull prospect is thought to be waiting for those who lose love as what is expressed in “*Day becomes night/ without your bright light*” (Bryan) and “*Không có em tất cả sẽ tối đen/ Những vì sao sẽ không còn ánh sáng/ Cả đất trời sẽ trở nên u ám/ Tất cả ao hồ phủ tấm áo băng.*” (Without you, it would be pitch-black; stars would stop twinkling; the sky would be dark; all pools would be frozen) by Nguyễn Thanh Bình.



Obviously, love in these verses is conceptualized as the sun that provides light and warmth to sustain life in the universe, lovers included. On the other hand, the universe that the sun of love is shining is the lover himself because every human being is a universe. Therefore, everything in this universe would be dark and lack vital force without the sun of love; that is, the lover would die. As can be seen, the expressions once again confirm the importance of love in human life.

The importance of love in the relationship with human life should not be discussed without mentioning the nutrients which is essential for the growth and maintenance of life. Nutrients come from food and drinks that is used to conceptualize love, hence the expressions “*I look for you/ on the menu*” (Miller) or “*Bữa tình yêu*” (a love meal) (Lò Ngân Sũn). And as love is thought as food or drinks, it is often expressed as “*hungry for*” or “*thirsty for*” love which is found in Acharya’s “*I am hungry for the love I don’t have/ I am thirsty for the care I want*,” Nguyễn Khắc Thiệu’s “*Em khát tình anh ở nơi đây*” (I’m thirsty for your love here) and “*Trái tim đập cồn cào cơn đói*” (My heart beats with an extreme hunger) by Xuân Quỳnh.

In summary, love plays an essential role in human life. Via metaphorical language, love is found to facilitate or directly a part of the operating process of the respiratory system, circulatory system and digestive system. Those systems are vital to human beings. Besides, love is metaphorized as the sun which provides the source of living energy for the person in the relationship. As a result, a person may not survive without love.

### **Love – life relationship through experiences of mental health**

The World Health Organization (2004) states that mental health is vital to human beings. Experiences of mental health are those related to its emotional, psychological and social components (Galderisi, Heinz, Kastrup, Beezhold, & Sartorius, 2015; Keyes, 2014). The emotional component includes individual happiness, interest and satisfaction; the psychological constituent consists of the capacity of personal life management and having good relationships with others; the social one refers to the ability of social integration and coherence. In this part, the question of how love is able to intervene in the human state of being alive in terms of mental health experiences will be made sense.

### **Love – life relationship through experiences of emotional health**

Emotional health is an important component of mental health relating to happiness, interest and satisfaction. “*Bliss, satisfaction, contentment*” (in “*Bonded to you in emotional bliss,/ united in physical rapture,/ I realize my dreams and fantasies./ Engulfed in contentment/ and satisfaction,/ I know heaven in your arms*” by Fuchs) and “*niềm vui sống*” (happiness) (in “*Nhưng lúc này anh ở bên em/ Niềm vui sống trong ta là có thật*” by Xuân Quỳnh) are all metaphorically comprehended via the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS RAPTURE. These metaphorical expressions are obviously used to represent the beloved’s happiness and satisfaction, show the feelings of mental well-being, and bring a joyful life to the persons in love. However, love sometimes leads them to sufferings or even death. Marie tells her miserable feeling through the ADVERSARY metaphor of love underlying the expressions “*rip and shatter my soul*” and “*my heart vanished*.” In other words, love has a negative impact on the lover’s spiritual life. Furthermore, as the heart is symbolically well-known as the center of emotion, love may be interpreted to cease the lover’s emotional life via the image of the “*heart vanishing*” which may concurrently arouse the feeling of life devastation since the heart functions to sustain human beings’ life. The destruction of life is manifested more clearly via the image of a “*broken heart*” and the expression “*I’m going to die from this pain*” by Santamaria.

Suffering and dying from love is also found in Vietnamese with Diệu Nguyễn’s “*Yêu là khổ!*” (Love is a misery!) and “*Yêu là chết ở trong lòng một ít*” (Loving is dying a little in heart) by Xuân Diệu. The expressions expose the lovers’ mental pain when the needs of love are not satisfied. It is also noteworthy that the death love causes in the later context occurs in the heart- the center of emotion; thus, the lover there is emotionally injured or his emotional life is killed.

So far, the importance of love to human life has been made sense in the emotional aspect of mental health. Psychological and social components of mental health will be discussed in the following section.

### ***Love – life relationship through experiences of psychological and social components***

Psychological aspect manages personal life on the one hand and the relationship with others, i.e. the social integration and coherence on the other. Accordingly, psychological and social aspects are, in fact, intertwined. In the loving relationship, the management of personal life and the relationship with others, particularly with the partner, are expressed as a perfect combination between the two souls or two persons. Therefore, the lovers commonly feel a fulfilling, complete and perfect life in love which is, for example, metaphorized as a unity via the expressions “*you’ll be my heart’s true center*” by Gordon.

For the heart is symbolic of emotion, the expression may be explained as that the beloved occupies the most pivotal position in the lover’s emotion, his love. Also, from the biological perspective, the heart is one of the most essential organ to keep a human alive. Taking an important place in the lover’s heart, the beloved or the love indeed, is thought to bring life to the lover. The meaningful position of love and the partner in one’s life is also nicely manifested in “*Anh như quả trứng tươi ngon, / Em là lòng đỏ bồi hồi của anh!*” (I’m like a fresh egg, and you are my hot yolk!) by Xuân Diệu. An egg would not be itself if it was without the yolk. The lover may hence not exist without his partner. The expression shows a perfect combination between two persons in love. It makes the lovers’ life balanced and whole. By contrast, they may be incomplete and their life is insignificant when love is lacking.

The expressions “*I’m incomplete without you*” (Bryan) and “*một nửa hồn tôi mất*” (half of my soul gone) (Hàn Mặc Tử) are some instances for the incompleteness of the person without love. In fact, missing the heart or the soul makes the lover’s life lacking and unhappy. Their spiritual life may even be destroyed as being confined via the expression “*tâm hồn héo*” (withered soul) in “*Biết đâu tôi, một tâm hồn héo / Bên cạnh chồng nghiêm luống tuổi rồi*” (He may not know that my soul is withered beside my strict old husband) by TTKH.

Through “*tâm hồn héo*” (withered soul), love is comprehended as a source of water that brings life to the soul of the person in the relationship. When the source of love water is exhausted, the lover’s soul tree becomes withered; that is, it is possible to die. In fact, for some persons, love is their life and they would die without love.

In brief, love plays an essential role, effecting the emotional, psychological and social aspects of human life. It seems to control the lover’s mental life, making the lovers unable to manage their life. As a result, lovers are likely to be perfect and cheerful with love. On the contrary, they are empty, unhappy, suffering or even dying without love. They find their lives insignificant and everything in their lives meaningless when love departs.

### ***Similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese metaphorical expressions of love-life relationship***

Metaphorization has long been demonstrated to be both universal and varied across cultures and languages (Kovecses, 2010). The phenomena take place both in thought and in language, which is understood as conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions respectively. It is once again found in a comparison of metaphorical treatment relating to the love-life relationship between English and Vietnamese.

#### ***Similarities***

The universality of conceptual metaphors in terms of the love-life relationship is manifested by the appearance of the same source domains for love in both English and Vietnamese; namely life/ living source, unity, rapture, nutrient, spring, source of energy, and adversary. These similarities may be explained based on Kovecses (2020) view, which stated that the embodiment may be partly responsible for the universality of conceptual metaphors between different cultures and languages “since the



human body and the brain are predominantly universal.” The resemblances of embodied experiences relating to love in the relationship with life manifested in English and Vietnamese poems are identified as the warmth of love, the desire for love, the desire for attachment between the lovers, the feelings of happiness or suffering, satisfaction or disappointment, and expressed via equivalent metaphorical expressions between the two languages.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that romantic love is accompanied by the experience of warmth (Hong & Sun, 2012). In the relationship with life, love is perceived as a warm source of energy that brings life to the beloved in both languages with such expressions as love keeps one “warm” and makes the heart warm again (“lòng ấm lại”), “you are my sun” and “anh là mặt trời của em.” The perception of love may also refer to physical and/or psychological experiences which are manifested via some equivalent metaphorical expressions or images in both English and Vietnamese, including the desire for love and for attachment between the lovers with “hungry/thirsty for love,” equivalent to “đói/khát tình”; the feelings of “a part” and “cái nửa” of each other; the necessity of love in terms of “the sun” and “mặt trời”; the vital force love brings to the lovers through “spring” and “mùa xuân.”

Besides, cognitive and emotional aspects of embodied experiences of love in the relationship with life are also found the same in both English and Vietnamese. It is the satisfaction, a happy life with love via “bliss” in English and its Vietnamese equivalence- “niềm vui sướng,” “heaven” in English- equivalent to “thiên thai” (as in “Bên em say đắm, thiên thai cuộc tình!” by Liên Phạm) in Vietnamese. Not only the satisfaction and happiness but the suffering and disappointment are also expressed similarly between the two languages with such expressions as “kill” and “giết,” “die” and “chết,” “heart vanishing” and “chết trong lòng.”

So far, it is interesting to say that English and Vietnamese share several ubiquitous conceptual metaphors of love, which is accounted for based on the embodiment. Concurrently, the universality of conceptual metaphors and embodied experiences are the basis that help shed light on the equivalent and similar metaphorical expressions of love in the relationship with life between the two languages.

### Differences

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that metaphor is rooted in cultural experiences. Kovecses (2010, 2020) considers the context that is determined by culture as one of the important factors on metaphorical production. Consequently, there should be culture-influenced variations between English and Vietnamese metaphors regarding the love-life relationship.

As mentioned above, English and Vietnamese share the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A NUTRIENT underlying some equivalent metaphorical expressions such as “thirsty for love” and “khát tình,” “hungry/ starved for love” and “đói tình.” Yet, there are some that are merely found in one language but not in another. For example, bread, knife, and wine are found in English love expression (“You are the bread and the knife, / the crystal goblet and the wine. / [ . . . ] I [ . . . ] the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table” by Collins) while they are vegetables in Vietnamese (“Em ngon như rau cải./ Em ngọt như rau ngót./ Em giòn như củi dứa” by Nguyễn Bình temporarily translated as She is as delicious as cabbage, sweet as sweet-leaf; crisp as copra).

Bread is supposed to be one of the most significant staple foods in the Western world, and a popular food in the United States (Park, Hongu, & Daily, 2016). It is thus unsurprising that Collins, an American poet, metaphorized his beloved as “bread” though it is a borrowed image. The bread may also be rather popular in Vietnam but it is not the main food in Vietnamese culinary culture; as a result, bread-related expression is hardly found in Vietnamese poetry. Also, the familiar images on the US dining table, i.e. “the knife,” “the crystal goblet,” and “the wine,” are used to compare to the beloved in English while they may not appear in Vietnamese.

On the other hand, the metaphorical images of the beloved, i.e. “rau cải” (cabbage), “rau ngót” (sweet-leaf), and “củi dứa” (copra), are completely Vietnamese. They bring pleasant feelings to the lover through their lovely flavors – “ngon” (delicious), “ngọt” (sweet) and “giòn” (crisp). Comparing the beloved to cabbage, sweet-leaf and copra – the main ingredients for foods in

Vietnamese meals, the author of the verse appears to emphasize the importance of the beloved, and also of the love in human life. Likewise, love in “*Tình già/như là thịt trâu sấy*” (Old love is like desiccated carabeef) by Lò Ngân Sủn is conceptualized as a nutrient that is tasty and strange via the expressions “*tình . . . là thịt trâu sấy*” (love . . . is desiccated carabeef). Desiccated carabeef is one of the well-known specialties in Northwest Vietnam, which is made of local buffalo meat in a combination with some kinds of spices made by the ethnic people there. It is not only appetizing but also essential for the locals because desiccated carabeef is used as both a daily food and a stored food for rainy season. Besides a delicious food, desiccated carabeef contains in it the cultural feature of the Northwest mountainous region of Vietnam- homeland of the poet (Ho & Phan, 2019). As a result, the image of desiccated carabeef employed to refer to love may hardly be found in English.

Another image, the abdomen (“*lòng*”), is used to present love just in Vietnamese whereas the “*heart*” (*tim*) appears in both the languages. The phenomenon may be explained by the ubiquitous symbol of the heart for emotion love whereas the abdomen is a Vietnamese typical emotional symbol (Ho & Phan, 2019).

Thus, although the conceptual metaphors of love in the relationship with life are identical with similar linguistic metaphors between English and Vietnamese, there are some different metaphorical expressions between the two languages. The differences may result from cultural distinction between English and Vietnamese.

## Conclusion

As one of the basic human emotions, love plays an important role in human life. With all its marvel, love brings vitality to the persons in the loving relationship, which is demonstrated in this study through evidences from 40 English and Vietnamese love poems from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Our analysis shows that both positive and negative feelings are put in words via equivalent metaphorical expressions that are understood based on common conceptual metaphors between English and Vietnamese. The similarities are explained as a result of the universality of conceptual metaphors and of embodied experiences. Despite the resemblance of the metaphorical concepts, some linguistic metaphors are identified to be different in the two languages, especially those related to culinary culture and the symbol of love.

This paper also evokes some considerations and suggestions. Firstly, linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphor are not always clear to identify. It is even more difficult to recognize the system of metaphoric concepts underlying linguistic expressions in poetry due to the context-based nature. Thus, trying different identification methods, even combining them, is necessary. Secondly, beyond metaphor, the physical and mental aspects of the love-life relationship unveiled in this study bear important implications for other fields of study, such as psychology. Finally, while this study focuses on the language of poetry, the love-life relationship can be found in other forms of language. Katz, Cacciari, Gibbs, and Turner (1998) and Colston (2015) point out that the use of figurative language is not limited to poetic situations but is rather a ubiquitous characteristic of speech. Thus, future analyses for lyrics, proverbs or other forms of language should be considered to explore the cultural, or even religious, similarities and differences, in the way of relating love and life by people speaking different languages.

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