

Original Paper

The Metonymy of “Tay”(Hand) in Vietnamese

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Abstract

Traditional linguistics treats metaphor and metonymy as a kind of rhetoric in language. But now many linguists have proved that metaphor and metonymy are not only a means of modification, but also a way for humans to understand things. Based on the concept of metonymy, this paper uses the methods of metonymy and implicit metaphor to analyze the word “Tay” (hand) in Vietnamese.

Keywords

cognitive linguistics, metonymy, implicit metonymy, Vietnamese

1. Introduction

The human body part is the category of the basic vocabulary in each language, although there are differences in the thinking and culture of different languages. Because of its stability and commonness, related to human body part words are high-frequency words in all languages. However, it is not difficult to find that words with the hand, face, head, and heart are the most common words in human body parts. In the process of interacting with the outside world, “hand” is obviously one of the most important parts of the human body. Unlike most limb animals, humans can use both hands flexibly. In the course of manipulating exercise, “hands” play an important role. Even when we are standing, sitting, walking, running, “hands” can help the body maintain balance. From the “Vietnamese Dictionary”, we can find more than 80 words relate to “Tay” (hands). Based on the concept of metonymy, the Vietnamese “Tay” (hands) is analyzed and investigated using the metonymy and implicit metaphorical thinking model, then find out the cognitive mechanism of the concept of metonymy “Tay” (hand).

2. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept. Metonymy is enable us to use one part or aspect of an experience to stand for some other parts (or the whole) of that experience. In *Metaphors We Live by*

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson devote a complete chapter to metonymy and define it as: “Using one entity to refer to another that is related to it.” (p. 35)

Metonymic concepts like these are systematic in the same way that metaphoric concepts are. The sentences given above are not random. Like metaphors, metonymic concepts structure not just our language but our thoughts, attitudes and actions. And, like metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience. In fact, the grounding of metonymic concepts is in general more obvious than is the case with metaphoric concepts, since it usually involves direct physical or causal associations. Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM) which is understood as “a complex, structures whole, a gestalt”, which organizes our knowledge, and uses metonymic mapping as one of its structuring principles (Lackoff, 1987, p. 68). As for the internal relations within an ICM, Lakoff states, Given an ICM with some background condition, there is a “stand for” relation that may hold between two elements A and B, such that one element of the ICM, B—may stand for another element A. In this case, B is “the place” and A is “institution”.

3. The Metonymy Analysis of “Tay” (Hand)

First, in order to generalize the metonymy projection of “hand”, an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) can be created first, in which the source domain is “hand”, and the target domain is the factors, events and states related to the “hand”. Because “hand” belongs to the human body part, so that “hand” domain belongs to the “human” domain.

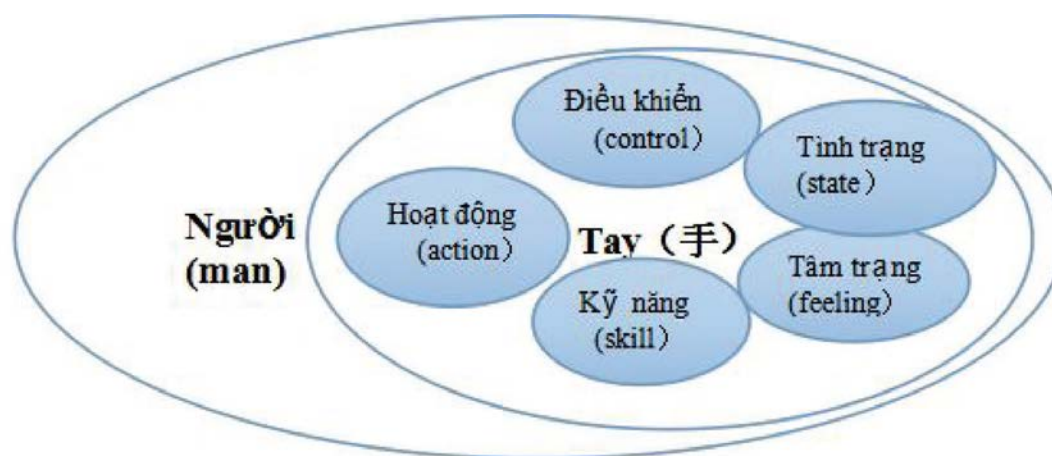


Figure 1. ICM “Tay”

3.1 “Tay” (Hand)—Stand for People

In English, “hand” can be used instead of people. For example, factory hand, farm-hand, all hands on deck. In Vietnamese, the situation of “hand” can be used instead of people’ is mostly projected through double metonymy.

The most common Metonymy formula is: “hand” combined with “occupation” or “tool”. For example: “hand + occupation”: tay giám đốc (manager), tay công nhân (worker), tay cảnh sát (police). “hand + tool”: tay vợt (hand + tennis racket=tennis player); tay bóng bàn (hand + table tennis racket=table tennis player); tay súng (hand + gun=gunner).

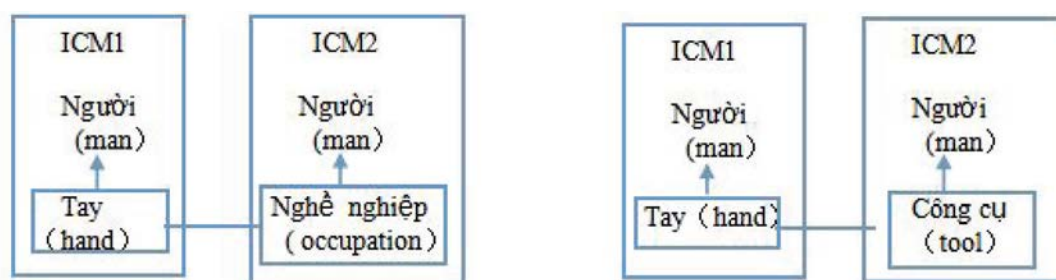


Figure 2. “Tay+Occupation” & “Tay+Tool”

3.2 “Tay” (Hand)—Stand for Control

People always feel that what can be grasped is something people can master and control. Therefore, there are many examples in Vietnamese and English to prove the metaphorical power of “hand”. For example in English “in the palm of hand”, “in someone’s hand”, “out of someone’s hand”, “have/hold/keep something in hand”, “in good hand”. Same as in Vietnamese: “trong tầm tay” means “in one’s hand”, “nắm trong tay” means “in one’s hands possession”, “sa vào tay” means “get into trouble with”.

3.3 “Tay” (Hand)—Stand for Feeling

The action of the hand can refer to the person’s feeling. In English, “hand's expression of feeling” is very common, such as: a show of hands, accept with both hands, get a good/big give somebody the glad hand. In Vietnamese, we have some examples of “hand’s expression of feeling” but not much, they are generally divided into two cases: the first one is used as a metaphor for expressing approval of someone or something, for example, “vỗ Tay” (clap hand). The second is to express the meaning of happiness. “tay bắt mặt mừng” means “very happy to see someone”.

3.4 “Tay” (Hand)—Stand for Action

In the metonymic features of Tay, Tay refers to “action” as the most common phenomenon. For example: “thẳng tay” (direct + hand): simply, directly to do things. “buông tay” (letting go): the meaning of the abandonment. “ra tay”, “xuống tay”, “trở tay” mean “start actions”.

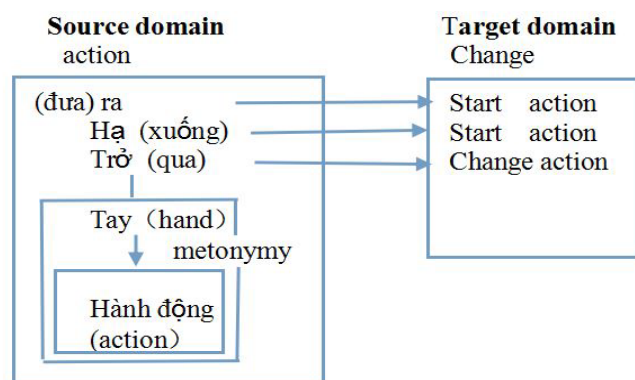


Figure 3. Tay—Stand for Action

3.5 “Tay” (Hand)—Stand for State

Bó tay (have one’s hands tie), trói tay (tied hand), khóa tay (binding hand) are the state of inability to act.

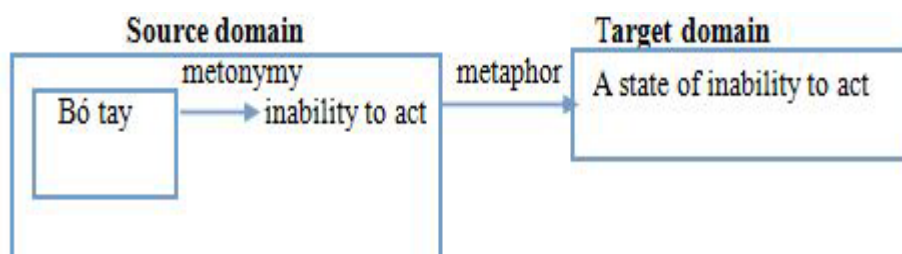


Figure 4. Tay—Stand for State

3.6 “Tay” (Hand)— Stand for Skill

“Hand—Stand for skill” is very common in English and Vietnamese. For example:

- She won the debate hands down.
- You should get Ann to have a look at that. She’s a dab hand at getting stains out of clothes.
- She’s an old hand at magazines, having trained on Cosmopolitan before editing company.

We need to have certain skills to do something. If we want to skillfully manipulate an action, we need to learn and practise more and more, until it becomes to our skills. For example: In English, “hands down” (1) means “easily and decisively”, “a dab hand” (2) means “ a person who is very good at doing something”, “an old hand” (3) means “a person with a lot of experience and skill in a particular activity”. In Vietnams, we can find many examples about the metonymy of “hand-Stand for skill”, such as “khéo tay” means “good/clever with one’s hand”; “mát tay” is a new word which combine of two factors: the metonymic skills of “hand” and temperature metaphorical nature of things.

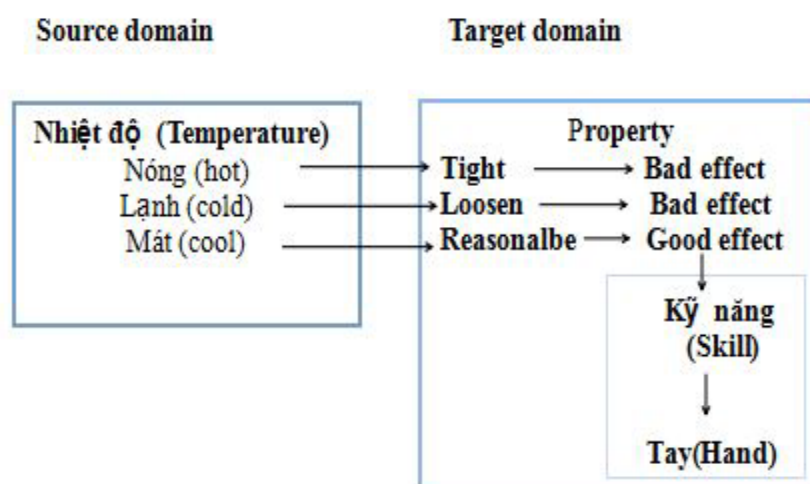


Figure 5. Tay—Stand for Skill

Second example, “non tay” in Vietnamese means “lack of experience”. “non tay” also is a combination of the metonymic skills of “hand” and “tree metaphor experience”. We can see the Figure 6:

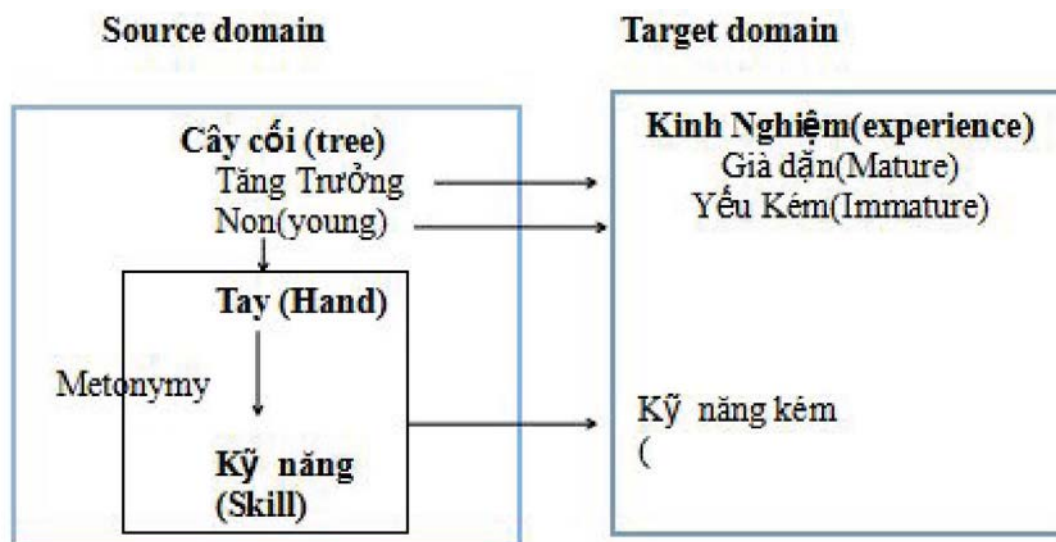


Figure 6. The Metonymy of “Non Tay”

Moreover, we can find many examples relate to “hand- Stand for skill” in Vietnamese, such as: “Khéo chân khéo tay”, “Tay năm tay mười”, “Tay chèo tay lái”, “Tay dao tay thót”, “Tay thầy thuốc thợ” ...

4. Conclusion

Expressions of body-part terms have been also understood in light of cognitive linguistics. Studies on metonymical expressions in the term of hand have proliferated. Therefore, we have suggested that the addition of standpoints for metonymy of hand is necessary to handle expressions involving hand which cannot be understood solely on the basis of previous standpoints. Since hand is a body-parttern that is frequently used, the increased ability to explain avariety of idiomatic expressions on the basis of these new sets of standpoints will prove valueable for future analysis.

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