

Mapping Mechanism of Source “Taste” on Target “Life” in Vietnamese and English

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Abstract: The concept of taste is used as a source domain to map onto more abstract target domains such as life, human qualities, thoughts, feelings, social relationships, and other social activities. By employing the grounding knowledge of the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, this article focuses on identifying the metaphor mechanisms, mappings, and cultural factors of the significant conceptual metaphor related to the source domain tastes and the target domain life experiences, specifically, life experiences are tastes in Vietnamese and English. The aim is to compare and find out if there are similarities and differences in the metaphorical mapping mechanisms of life experiences are tastes in these two languages. By analysis and comparison of 441 Vietnamese discourses and 452 English discourses, it seems that the conceptual metaphor life experiences are tastes reflects both a universal concept and the typical national thinking systems of the two nations. The findings are consistent with those of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Sweetser (1990), reflect the concept and thinking of Vietnamese culture, and Anglo-American culture, identifying the way Vietnamese and British people understand about life, highlight the similarities and differences in perceiving the world of the two peoples.

Keywords: Source domain, target domain, taste, life, life experiences.

Subject classification: Linguistics

1. Introduction

Metaphor, as stated by Lakoff and Johnson, is a ubiquitous aspect of our thoughts and language. It is present in everyone’s lives, including children, and is a vital component of our everyday thought and language. The reason that metaphor can be expressed clearly is that it is rooted in the human conceptual system, which influences all our concepts and thoughts. This is known as conceptual metaphor, a central aspect of cognitive linguistics. This field of study has inspired numerous research and studies examining the metaphorical

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mechanisms in various domains of daily life. However, taste was previously considered a lower domain in linguistics due to its elusive nature and the requirement of direct contact to feel its taste. Recent research has revealed unique attributes of the taste domain in the relationship between language, thinking, and culture. Taste is directly related to the body's embodied experience, which accurately reflects the way we perceive and think about target mapping domains. This article explores the conceptual metaphor of *life experiences are tastes*, with the aim of shedding light on the cognitive understanding of *life* in the Vietnamese and English-speaking communities. The findings indicate that this conceptual metaphor is both universal and specific to national cultures, as people perceive life through their experiences of *tastes*.

2. Literature review

In pioneering studies of cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor, metaphor is no longer viewed solely as a linguistic matter, but also as a matter of thought, action, intellect, and culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.4). With the approach of studying linguistics based on human experience and perception of the world, and the way in which people categorise and conceptualise it, cognitive linguistics has shifted the study of metaphor from language structure to mental processing structure (including people's perception of the objective world and the way they conceptualise objects and phenomena).

Leading scholars in the field, such as Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 2003), Lakoff (1993), Gibbs and Steen (1997), and Kövecses (2000, 2005, 2010), among others, have all agreed that the human conceptual system is structured and defined metaphorically. Metaphor is the connection between two conceptual domains: the source domain, which consists of interconnected attributes, processes, and relationships expressed through interrelated linguistic expressions, often found in groups of similarity referred to as "lexical sets" or "lexical fields"; the target domain, which is the object or concept targeted through the source domain structure and has relationships between entities, properties, and processes that can be reflected through the source domain.

In Vietnam, linguists have also recently begun to pay special attention to the field of cognitive linguistics, producing numerous highly valued academic works, such as those by Lý Toàn Thắng (2005), Trần Văn Cơ (2006, 2007), Phan Thế Hưng (2007), Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, et. al (2022), and Nguyễn Đức Tồn (2007), among others.

Regarding the studies on the domain of taste, linguists have recently shown more interest from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Sweetser (1990), best known for her Mind-as-Body metaphor, is one of the most renowned researchers in the field of taste metaphors. She explains that people prefer to use taste words, such as "sweet" and "bitter", to describe emotions because of a similarity mechanism. She argues that love makes us feel good in the same way that sweetness stimulates the taste buds on the tongue. Similarly, anger is

discomforting, just like the bitter taste we perceive with our tongues. Many scholars have conducted experiments and analyses to uncover the metaphorical patterns of taste words and the cultural and psychological roots of these metaphors across different cultures. Schlosser, Chan, Tong, Tan & Koh, and Kövecses have all confirmed that the most commonly used metaphorical mapping of sweetness is when talking about someone being kind or acting prosocially (Schlosser, 2015). Other studies indicate that people who prefer sweet tastes have a much higher level of pleasantness than those who prefer spicy, bitter, salty, or sour tastes (Nosek, Spies, & Motyl, 2012).

Recently, two studies *Comparing Conceptual Metaphors of Taste Terms in Thai and Vietnamese* by Rujiwan Laophairoj (2012) and Zhang Xiangheng's *Taste Metaphor in Chinese and English* have been published, comparing the similarities and differences in cognitive mechanisms of the conceptual metaphors of the taste domain in the two languages. However, in Vietnam, there is no such study. This article will attempt to fill this gap.

3. Data collection and methodology

Regarding the study of the concept of *life experiences are tastes* in Vietnamese and English, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, primarily discourse analysis, are used, along with statistical tactics and classification. This corpus-based methodology has been employed in previous Vietnamese linguistic studies, such as by Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh, Le Vien Lan Huong, and Pham Hien (2022) in their study of the *sport as war* conceptual metaphor. The first step is to identify the basic taste words in both Vietnamese and English. The basic taste word identification was adapted from *Principles of Categorisation* by Rosch, Eleanor (1978). This study considers five key criteria for the identification of basic taste terms: monosyllabic, regular occurrence in both languages, distinct from represented objects, non-reduplicative meanings, and having specific food samples associated with them. As a result, five Vietnamese words (*ngọt, chua, cay, đắng, mặn*) and five English words (*sweet, sour, spicy, bitter, salty*) were identified as basic taste words.

Data is collected from the Vietnamese Language Corpus by The Institute of Dictionary and Encyclopedia, and the British National Corpus (<https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>), with around 1000 discourses in each language selected from each corpus.

To establish a mapping diagram of the *life experiences are tastes* conceptual metaphor, the author identifies the attributes of the source domain of tastes, including physical properties, physiological effects, concentrations, thermal attributes, and associativity and opposite nature, to compare them with the attributes of the target domain of *life*. Metaphors are then identified through the four-step *Metaphor Identification Procedure* (MIP) proposed by Pragglejaz Group (2007): (i) reading all the discourses to gain a general understanding of the study objectives; (ii) identifying words with potential metaphorical

meanings and related words in context; (iii) determining the form of the expressions with potential metaphorical words and naming the source and target domains; (iv) naming metaphorical expressions (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p.3).

The results of the study found 441 Vietnamese discourses and 452 English discourses that demonstrate different mappings of the *life experiences are tastes* conceptual metaphors in the two languages.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Conceptual metaphor *life experiences are tastes* in Vietnamese

4.1.1. Concept of life in Vietnamese

A Vietnamese dictionary (Hoàng Phê, 2003) defines “Life” with two specific meanings: 1) The entire life process of a person or individual organism, from birth to death, and 2) Social life with all its accompanying activities and events. As a result, the concept of “life” has a broader scope, encompassing both the experiences of a person’s personal life with its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, and events, as well as social life with its countless activities and events affecting all people.

4.1.2. Mapping schema of conceptual metaphor *life experiences are tastes*

Cognitive linguistics clearly indicates that one of the important purposes of conceptual metaphor is to bring abstract ideas to life through a specific conceptual domain.

From the corpus survey, by applying the Metaphor Identification Procedure, and after clarifying the properties of the source domain, the mapping schema of the source domain (*Taste*) to the target domain (*Life*) can be presented by observing and noticing the correlational characteristics between the two domains:

Table 1: Mapping Schema of Metaphor *Life Experiences Are Tastes* in Vietnamese

Source-taste	Mapping path	Target - Life
Physical attributes	>>>>>	Qualities of life
Feelings about tastes	>>>>>	Feelings about life
Degrees of tastes	>>>>>	Degrees of life experiences
Mixture of tastes	>>>>>	Complexity of life experiences
Changes of tastes	>>>>>	Changes in life

Thus, the abstract concept of *life* has been specifically perceived by Vietnamese people through human knowledge and perception of the source domain “tastes”. With the concept of *life experiences are tastes*, Vietnamese people perceive life as a combination of tastes, in which each person represents the different features and qualities of life. Life is also visualized in the same way that tastes are added or changed. By applying the detailed mechanism, the Vietnamese have highlighted several aspects of the source domain, especially the concentration properties and physiological effects of taste, as a mechanism for perceiving the concept of the target domain. This mechanism gives rise to derivative metaphors: “Values/Qualities of Life are Tastes”; “The Development of Life is Changes of Tastes”; “The Characteristics of Life are Activities with Tastes”.

The determination of the source domain tastes with selected characteristic attributes being projected onto the target domain *life* forms the basis for constructing metaphorical expressions. Typically, life, with its multitude of events, is identified and evaluated, considering attributes such as new, pleasant, enjoyable, unpleasant, changeable, getting better, or worse, among others. When the attributes of tastes are activated to map onto the target domain *life*, categories, characteristics, and properties are selected and visualized into sub-categories for perception, leading to the formation of derivative metaphors such as the qualities of *life* are *tastes*: a good life is sweet (*ngọt*)/salty (*mặn*); an unhappy life is sour/spicy/bitter (*chua, cay, đắng*).

4.1 3. Good life experiences are sweet

Sweet is the symbolic taste of delicious, pleasant foods, causing feelings of excitement. Sugar or glucose is a substance that increases heart rate, blood pressure, and has a positive effect on human nerves. Those attributes are gradually transformed, from the perception of taste to the perception of life. Therefore, for humans, the sweetness is the basis for perceiving good and positive things.

(1) *Ôi, tự do **ngọt** ngào, đẹp đẽ, sung sướng biết bao. Vì tự do là sự sống, là tình yêu vĩnh hằng!* (*Oh, how sweet, beautiful, happy freedom is. Because freedom is life, eternal love*).

(2) *...bỗng được trở về nếp nhà thân thuộc với tất cả sự dịu ngọt, êm đềm của cuộc sống hoà bình.* (*Hoang Minh Tuong, p.251*) (*...suddenly returned to his beloved home with all the sweetness and serenity of a peaceful life*).

(3) *trên cõi đời này dầu vạn điều đắng đót vẫn luôn còn **mặn ngọt** thương trao từ những tấm lòng* (*Đàm Lan, 2011*) (*In this world, even though many things are bitter, they are still sweetness and love, given from hearts*).

The basic properties of sweetness have been selected to be mapped onto the target domain of life, including properties of psychological effects and temperature. The effects of sweetness on taste nerves have been studied and assigned to the target domain, making the concept of life a defined entity with a pleasant taste like sweetness and a mild temperature like that of sweetness. This mapping of sweetness has been found in 68

discourses, while 12 expressions including the mapping of the salty taste (*mặn*) have been found. Thanks to the knowledge of sweetness, people can easily express their feelings about a good life, happiness, luck, success, and at the same time, they can ease difficult and stressful problems in life.

4.1.4. Bad life experiences are sour, spicy, bitter

According to Williams, Huang, & Bargh, embodied metaphors arise because “concepts are mapped onto existing and understood concepts, so that the structure of the underlying concept is retained in the newly created concept” (Williams, Huang, & Bargh, 2009, p. 1257). Negative and irritating characteristics of bitter (*đắng*)/sour (*chua*)/spicy (*cay*) tastes have been mapped to the target domain of life, with similar views on the value and nature of life, such as grief, unhappiness, and failure. The survey found 16 discourses with the metaphorical word *đắng*/bitter on its own, 28 combinations of *đắng* with other words (*đắng lòm, đắng ngòm, đắng đót, chát đắng...*), 58 combinations of *cay đắng* (spicy and bitter), 54 discourses with *đắng cay*, 32 discourses of *chua cay*, and 8 discourses with *chua chát*.

When perceived by taste receptors in the mouth, bitterness causes the taste buds to shrink and creates a feeling of choking, tightness in the throat, and discomfort, which are fully mapped onto the target domain “feelings of failure in life”.

(4) *Năm 2000 đi vào lịch sử bóng đá Braxin với thất bại cay đắng ở Olympic Sydney và những thành tích tồi tệ nhất ở vòng loại World Cup (Nguyễn Minh, 2001) (The year 2000 went down in Brazilian football history with a bitter defeat at the Sydney Olympics and the worst achievements in the World Cup qualifiers.)*

(5) *....đắng cay đòi sống diêm dân (Khuê Việt Trường, 2001).*

As for the sour and spicy taste with strong concentration properties, high temperature and numbing and stinging physical effects, it is the basis for mapping to the target domain about the psychological trauma that life is hard but worth it.

(6) *Đời trình sát cũng lắm chua cay, lúc ấy phần thắng đã chắc chắn đến 99%, nào ngờ chỉ 1% ngoài dự kiến khiến chúng tôi phải tốn nhiều thời gian, công sức để truy bắt tên tội phạm ma túy (Long Vĩnh, 2001). (The life of the scout was also very bitter, at that time the victory was 99% certain, but only 1% unexpectedly made us spend a lot of time and effort to catch the drug criminal).*

4.1.5. Changes in life experiences are changes in tastes

Since life is identified with the attribute of taste, people can essentially work to make it more beautiful, richer, and more affluent, similar to the changes in tastes of the unripe and ripe fruits. Therefore, in Vietnamese, there are mappings such as life has come to be sweet(er); From the bitter life to the sweeter life, the sweet moment to remember the bitter moment. There were 56 samples in the studied corpus denoting this mapping mechanism.

Life becoming better is becoming sweeter

(7) Có trải qua thất bại, đắng cay mới “hái được quả ngọt”, nhưng bạn phải biết nâng cấp bản thân, đối phó với những thời điểm đen tối nhất của cuộc sống. (There are failures and bitterness to “pick the sweet fruit”, but you have to know how to upgrade yourself, deal with the darkest times of life.)

(8) Khiêm im lặng trong niềm giao cảm sâu xa với ông. Anh đoán có lẽ ông muốn nói; hoặc là: cũng không hẳn là thế đâu, cay đắng còn có phần chiều là ngọt ngào, càng cay đắng càng ngọt ngào hơn... (Ma Văn Kháng, *Ngược Dòng Nước Lũ*, p.333).

The concept of “picking sweet fruits” makes thinking about the process of striving, overcoming hardships in life to get happiness and success, clearer.

Life turning bad is turning sour, spicy, and bitter

(9) Tôi đứng lặng im để em tôi tựa đầu thỏn thức. Bên cái **ngọt** ngào, nước mắt em tôi đã bắt đầu có vị **đắng**, cái vị đắng nhân thế mà người ta thường nhận ra sau mỗi lúc trưởng thành. (Trúc Phương, 2009, p.209) (I stood silently so that my sister could rest her head and sob. Besides the sweetness, my sister’s tears began to have a bitter taste, the bitter taste that people often visualize after growing up.)

The concept of life “becoming sour, astringent”, “turning bitter”, “enduring a lot of bitterness...” is metaphorically perceived in relation to tastes that have become corrupted, damaged, or moldy, becoming sour, spicy, or bitter. These tastes are said to cause discomfort to the taste buds, be harmful to health, or even toxic. Thus, they are often used to describe an unhappy and unlucky life.

From a cognitive perspective, it can be seen that the target domain *the changes of life* has been clearly illuminated by mapping taste changes: bitter, acrid becoming sweet; sweet taste becoming sour, spicy... The interaction between the source domain of taste and the target domain of life, with the interference of properties between the two domains, has created the basis for constructing conceptual metaphors of taste, providing clear concepts, inferences, and making the concept of life easier to visualize and understand.

4.2. Conceptual metaphor life experiences are tastes in English

4.2.1. Concept of life in English

The conceptual system of taste In British people’s thinking is also rich and profound In the dictionary <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>. The concept of life has many layers of meaning, formed based on different perspectives that people view their life: 1) The ability to breathe, grow, produce young, etc. that people, animals, and plants have before they die, and that objects do not have; 2) The state of being alive as a human; an individual person’s existence; 3) The period between somebody’s birth and their death; a part of this period; 4) A period of somebody’s life when they are in a particular situation or job; 5) The period of time when something exists or functions; 6) The experience and

activities that are typical of all people’s existences; 7) The activities and experiences that are typical of a particular way of living. The corpus survey proves that the source domain tastes has quite fully mapped its attribute characteristics to the target domain life, including physical properties, physiological effects, concentrations, thermal attribute, as well as associativity and opposite nature of tastes. A number of 452 samples have been found in English corpus conveying metaphorical meaning about life to support the idea.

4.2.2. Mapping schema of conceptual metaphor life experiences are tastes in English

From corpus analysis, it can be seen that in English, the concept of *life* is expressed on the conceptualisation of basic attributes of basic tastes: pleasant (positive) characteristics of sweetness, the burning of the sour taste, the astringent and choking characteristics of the bitter taste, the unpleasant, hot, and biting characteristics of the spicy taste are the basis of the perception of different attributes and characteristics of life. The mapping schema of the metaphor is shown as following table:

Table 2: Mapping Schema of Metaphor Life Experiences Are Tastes in English

Taste - Source Domain	Mapping	Life - Target domain
Sweet taste	>>>>>	Good experiences in life
Sour, bitter, spicy tastes	>>>>>	Bad experiences in life
To taste	>>>>>	To experience life
Taste degrees	>>>>>	Degrees of happiness and sadness in life
Changes of tastes	>>>>>	Changes in life

Based on the embodiment and detailed mechanism, the British have highlighted some aspects of the source domain *tastes*, to conceptualise the target domain - *life*, with the lower-level metaphors: *quality of life are tastes (good life is good taste, bad life is bad tastes); changes in life are changes in tastes.*

4.2.3. Good life experiences are sweet

In the studies of Western scholars, the sweetness in food is a good example of a feeling of pleasure, thanks to the strong psychoactive effects of sweetness. Both infants and non-human animals respond to the taste of sucrose by exhibiting a characteristic facial expression (lips curl, tongue protrusion, muscle relaxation, and smiling) which are thought to be reliable expression of species of positive emotional experience (Berridge, 2000; Steiner, 1979; Steiner, Glaser, Hawilo and Berridge, 2001).

(10) *Matthew grew up in a family atmosphere of **sweetness** and **light**. His parents never exchanged a cross word. If there was a difference of opinion, they would hurriedly remedy the situation by changing the subject. Conflicts were never even acknowledged, let alone resolved. (Edwards, Gill., 1991).*

(11) *It was the sweet life he had always craved. The ambitious politician was awash with power, the friendship of the Premier... but without the money to gild it. Then suddenly, this summer, a different woman entered the scene (The Daily Mirror.London).*

The perceived positive value of sweet taste in Western culture projects onto the target domain, creating the basis for the perception of the concept of *life* associated with sweet. The good, positive, coolness, euphoric nature of sweet is mapped to many lower-level target domains in *life* target domain, including family happiness, personal satisfaction, success. The English corpus survey has found 45 texts with the phrase *sweetness and light*, denoting a peaceful life. Furthermore, other 46 texts with conceptually used words: *sweet*, *sweetness*, *sweetened* denoting a good and happy life were found in the corpus.

4.2.4. Bad life experiences are bitter and sour

In the Oxford English Dictionary (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>), the main definition of bitter is an adjective, having a strong, unpleasant taste, or a descriptor of foods that are “disgusting, unpleasant, or unhelpful” (e.g., “bitter gourd”). Bitter can also transfer meaning into other target domains, such as auditory (“bitter laughter”), visual (“bitter facial expression”), and mental (“bitter experience”).

(12) *She had tasted the fear of being cast out, and it left a **bitter** taste in her mouth (Cox, Josephine, 1992).*

(13) *When this happened, a much more detailed picture of them and their way of life is usually given; and in all but one case the memory is strikingly positive. The exception was a former aristocratic beauty who had led a **bitter life**, losing five children through death and almost leaving her soldier husband on account of his affairs. (Abendstern, Michele; Thompson, Paul; Itzin, Cathy).*

The etymology of the English word bitter seems to be of Proto-Germanic origin, meaning 'bitting/biting, cutting/cutting, sharp'; and with Proto-Indo-European root: *bheid- 'to split'. In Old English, bitter meant 'spicy, sharp, cut; angry, full of hatred; cruel', a cognate of the Old English word *bîtan* “bitting”. This suggests that the word bitter, related to taste, has, in fact, been moved from the taste-perceptual domain, to the emotional, negatively affective, emotionally destructive domain and cause pain. That is the cultural basis of the conceptual metaphor that sad/ unhappy life experiences are bitter.

Along with *bitter*, *sour* is also negative and unpleasant, which in turn is mapped onto the target domain of unpleasant and negative experiences in people's lives, such as failure, decline in success, the transition from the good nature to the negative nature of life:

(14) *Paula's life turned sour during the Eighties -- wrecked by alcohol. Her marriage to camera technician Paul Mindel failed* (Francome, John, 1990). The cognitive mechanism behind this mapping is based on the attribute selection of sour taste, which occurs when a positive, delicious taste (sweet taste) becomes spoiled and tastes sour due to natural factors. This process is similar to the experiences of life, where it can go from an excellent, successful, and happy period to a failure and unhappiness, caused by factors affecting life. Statistically, there were 76 texts containing the words “bitter/bitterness”, 32 texts containing the word “sour”, 12 combinations of “sour and bitter”, and 14 combinations of “sweet and sour”. Unfortunately, the author did not find any texts conveying the mapping from the taste domain to the life domain for the taste word “spicy”, which is a stark difference compared to Vietnamese.

4.2.5. Changes in life experiences are changes of tastes

- Life becoming better is to be sweeter

The most notable feature of tastes, besides being perceived by taste receptors, is their psychological and physiological impact on humans. When a sweet taste is tasted, taste receptors send signals of sweetness to the brain, causing the brain to activate a feeling of pleasure and the body to respond with openness, dilation, freshness, increased blood pressure, a rosy face, and an excited spirit. All these attributes are transferred intact to the thinking domain of people's good life. When life is good or improving, people always have a confident expression, a smiling face, and an elated spirit. This is a metaphorical explanation that can be seen in 26 expressions in the studied English corpus.

(15) *Doreen's aunt and the au pair, who was quite a caring sort, did much to **sweeten** the latter part of Doreen's childhood.* (Lawson, Michael. *Sevenoaks, Kent*, 1991).

The conceptual base is that food can be sweetened by adding more sweeteners, so that the food can be more enjoyable. This concept is mapped onto the domain of life, which means life can also be sweetened and made enjoyable by decent actions or kindness.

(16) *Life going bad is to turn sour/bitter*

(17) *At church, at the pub, or sitting by Dermot's roaring peat fire, she would catch a glimpse of her father as he once was, before his life **turned sour** -- expansive, smiling, good-humoured.*

(18) *The former Champion amateur rider was associated with top horses Browne's Gazette and The Mighty Mac, but everything **turned sour** when he set up as a trainer in 1990. Eventually his licence was taken away because he didn't have enough horses* (The Daily Mirror. 7680 s-units.)

The phrases “*turn sour*” (24 times), *turn bitter* (11 times) are clear indication of the property transition from the source domain *Taste* to the target domain *Life*. The use of the concept of “*turn sour, turn bitter*” makes the concept of a deteriorated, negative life

obvious. Corrosive, degrading, numbing properties of sour and bitter taste can be understood as the cognitive basis for mapping.

4.3. Similarities and differences in conceptual metaphor life experiences are tastes in Vietnamese and English

Conclusively, it can be seen that the most noticeable similarity between the two nations is their love for sweet tastes. This is due to the pleasant feeling it brings and therefore, both map sweetness to happy, pleasant and good feelings, and associate it with the “*Good Life*” target domain. The most outstanding attribute of sweet taste is the feeling of pleasure experienced upon tasting it, which is equated to the experience of a happy life. Similarly, sour, spicy, and bitter tastes, which bring about unpleasant and negative feelings, are used to symbolise an unlucky and unpleasant life. There are many expressions in both languages that demonstrate similar thinking patterns, such as: “*thuốc đắng già tật*” in Vietnamese and “the bitter pill” in English; “*hái được quả ngọt*” in Vietnamese and “pick up the sweet fruit” in English. Furthermore, both peoples view the changes in food tastes as being similar to the changes in life experiences, likely because of their shared attitudes towards different tastes.

However, deliberate observations reveal notable differences in the way the source domain *tastes* are perceived in the two languages. In Vietnamese, “sour” is never used alone to describe a negative life experience, but is often accompanied by other adjectives indicating taste, such as “spicy” and “acidic”. In English, the word “sour” is commonly used alone, combining with verbs indicating a transition, such as “turn sour”, “get sour”, or “be soured”, to express changes in food from a positive to a negative state. This is due to the “cultural filter”. In Vietnamese culinary culture, sour is considered a basic taste, along with the five tastes, and according to traditional medicine, it regulates the balance of the spleen and stomach. So, sour taste is not seen as bad. However, when combined with other tastes such as acidic or spicy, sour taste can indicate unripe or spoiled fruit, leading to negative connotations. In contrast, sour is not popular in Western cuisine and therefore is associated with unpleasant experiences and negative emotions. This supports the statement, “Although people share the same physical experiences (body experiences), the ‘cultural filter’ creates differences in language metaphors” (Kövecses, Zoltán, 2002, p.89).

Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the way that Vietnamese and Western people associate the taste of salt with life experiences. For the Vietnamese, salt is considered the most important and necessary taste in cuisine, leading to the mapping of *good life experiences are salty*. This means that attributes such as richness and palatability are associated with a good life. In contrast, no such mapping of salt to the target domain of life has been found in English, with either positive or negative attributes. Moreover, while the Vietnamese often associate spicy flavours with an unhappy life (*cay đắng, chua cay, and cay cức*), the English do not seem to use the word “spicy” to conceptualise a bad life.

5. Conclusion

With the above analysis and comparison of 441 Vietnamese discourses and 452 English discourses, the study comes to the conclusion that the conceptual metaphor *life experiences are tastes* reflects both a universal concept and the typical national thinking systems of the two nations. The findings are consistent with the concept that Lakoff and Johnson posited in the theory of conceptual metaphors, that is, *metaphors related to human thinking systems*. When people perceive a new thing, that concept will be compared with existing experience and reflects the new concept in the form of language, which suits to Sweetser's popular metaphor "*Body as mind*", and at the same time reflects how people perceive the surrounding world through the lens of culture and national identities. Specifically, in this study, the concept of tastes metaphorically reflects the concept and thinking of Vietnamese culture, a culture with a strong oriental and agrarian characters, and Anglo-American culture, with unique characteristics of Western culture, identifying the way Vietnamese and British people understand about life, highlight the similarities and differences in the process of perceiving the world and the different cultural characteristics of the two peoples.

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