

# The Conceptual Metaphor of *Sorrow Is Tears* in a Number of English and Vietnamese Song Lyrics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Vương Hữu Vĩnh\*

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**Abstract:** Several works in cognitive linguistics have focused on the conceptual metaphor *sorrow* in relation to other domains. Little attention has been paid to the link between sorrow and tears that appears in Vietnamese song lyrics. This article explores the conceptual metaphor *sorrow is tears* featured in 300 English and Vietnamese song lyrics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century written/composed by John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, Phạm Duy, Văn Cao, Trịnh Công Sơn, and Thanh Tùng. It appears that *sorrow is tears* is common in both languages, reflecting the cultures, histories, and mindsets of those using the two languages as mother tongues/first languages. The conceptual metaphor *sorrow is tears* appears more in Vietnamese songs than in English ones, indicating a preference for the imagery of tears in Vietnamese culture. The connection between emotion and nature is expressed differently; Vietnamese culture emphasizes the close link between humans and nature, while Western culture focuses on empathy and personal reflection.

**Keywords:** Conceptual metaphor, sorrow, tears, conceptual metaphor in lyrics.

**Subject classification:** Linguistics.

## 1. Introduction

Conceptual metaphor is a powerful tool in language, aiding individuals in expressing and understanding the complex experiences of life through familiar imagery. In the realm of art, particularly music, conceptual metaphors are often

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\* Đông Á University.

Email: vinhvh@donga.edu.vn

employed to convey profound emotions and intricate psychological states. Consequently, this topic receives a lot of attention from cognitive linguists, ranging from hope to despair, from sorrow to joy, etc. One of the most common metaphors representing sorrow in musical works is *sorrow is tears*.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an explosion of music in both the West and Vietnam, with the emergence of numerous song lyrics that delve deeply into human emotions and reflect societal upheavals. Musicians have used music to share personal sorrows, losses, and the collective tragedies of humanity. In this context, the metaphor of “sorrow” in music emerges as an effective means to express the deepest human emotions, from tears of separation and loss to the anguish caused by war and conflict. Through the lens of each musician, the metaphor of sorrow is articulated and presented in various ways, reflecting the linguistic style and thought processes of each author, while also embodying the cultural, historical, and contextual imprints of each linguistic community.

Examining and comparing the metaphor of “sorrow” in English and Vietnamese song lyrics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will help readers better understand the similarities and differences in the expression of sorrow, as well as the cultural and social values reflected in music. This, in turn, provides deeper insight into artistic thinking and human emotions that are conveyed through music. This paper aims to answer the question: ‘From the perspective of cultural and linguistic analysis, how is sorrow metaphorically expressed through tears in both English and Vietnamese lyrics?’

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. Theoretical background of conceptual metaphor***

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), pioneered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), posited that metaphor was not merely a literary device but a fundamental cognitive tool through which humans understood and structured their experiences. Conceptual metaphor was “the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another, called systematic mapping from one domain to another to create a cognitive model that helps to grasp the target domain more effectively” (Lakoff & M. Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphor is formed based on human experiences with the world, where one domain (often concrete) is used to understand another domain (often more abstract); the former is called the source domain, and the latter is referred to as the target domain. This is an essential mechanism through which one can carry out complex reasoning. For example, the conceptual metaphor *sorrow is tears* helps individuals understand the abstract emotion of sorrow through the concrete, physical experience of crying.

Several scholars have studied the relationship between metaphors and cognitive linguistics, emotion, and culture. Kövecses (2000) explored how metaphors reflected emotional and cultural diversity across languages. Studies by Gibbs (1994) and Deignan (2005) provided corpus-based analyses of metaphor usage in different contexts, confirming the prevalence of metaphoric thought in everyday language.

Lakoff's framework is best known for its pioneering role in linking language with cognitive processes. His theory of systematic mappings between the source domain (tears) and the target domain (sorrow) is particularly apt for analyzing metaphorical expressions in music lyrics, which often serve as rich sources of emotional and cultural insights. Using Lakoff's model, this study aims to reveal how the universal concept of sorrow is expressed metaphorically in both English and Vietnamese, while also reflecting the cultural specificities embedded in each language's use of metaphor.

## ***2.2. The concept of “sorrow”***

“Sorrow”, an abstract aspect of human experience, is not merely a physical discomfort but also a profound, complex emotional state. It can arise from various sources and manifests as sadness, anxiety, despair, loneliness, deceit, regret, loss, remorse, etc. Psychological sorrow can also originate from unconscious experiences or worries about the future. The concept of “sorrow” can vary according to culture and social context, reflecting the diversity and complexity of human experience. “Sorrow”, in the Vietnamese language, is “mental pain and suffering” (Hoàng Phê, 2021). It may also be defined as “a feeling of deep sadness or regret” (Thomson, 2007). It may be “(a) a feeling of great sadness because something very bad has happened”, or “(b) a very sad event or situation” (Hornby, 2003).

For convenience, in this paper, the author uses “sorrow” in its various emotional manifestations such as failure, injustice, misfortune, dissatisfaction/disappointment/disillusionment, loneliness, endurance, pain/suffering, regret, deceit, loss, doubt, betrayal, fatigue, mistakes, fear, injury, separation, etc.

## ***2.3. Previous studies***

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) studied conceptual metaphors of sorrow, particularly those related to injury and suppression. They emphasized that metaphors such as *sorrow is injury* and *sorrow is oppression* frequently appear in everyday language.

These studies indicated that conceptual metaphors of sorrow were not only ways to express emotions but also reflect how one experienced and understood these emotional states. Gibbs (1994) examined metaphors of sorrow, noting that they were often related to concepts of injury and burden. Metaphors like *sorrow is a burden* and *sorrow is injury* were common in how people talked about sorrow.

Kövecses (2000) explored conceptual metaphors related to sorrow, highlighting that it is often expressed through metaphors of injury and darkness. Metaphors such as *sorrow is injury* and *sorrow is darkness* are prevalent across many languages and cultures. He concluded that “emotion metaphors arise from recurring embodied experiences, one reason why human emotions across many cultures conform to certain basic biological-physiological processes in the human body and of the body interacting with the external world” (Kövecses, 2000). In another work, Kövecses (2006) identified numerous conceptual metaphors of sorrow such as *sorrow is darkness*, *sorrow is a sharp object*, and *sorrow is a burden*. Deignan (2005) used data from text corpora to study how sorrow is expressed through metaphors in English, discovering that metaphors such as *sorrow is physical injury* and *sorrow is darkness* were commonly used to describe painful emotions.

Schröder (2012) investigated 150 lyrics of Brazilian rap and 150 from its German counterpart to understand conceptual metaphors and linguistic functions in these lyrics; he found that “cultural variation in relation to the specific mapping parts involved”, and “dispersing tendencies might be related to different cultural contexts and functions of speech” (Schröder, 2012). Akuno, L., Oloo, P. & Lilian, M. (2018) analyzed metaphors used in Dholuo Benga song lyrics (a music genre from the Luo community in Kenya, known for its fast rhythms, guitar melodies, and common themes of love, daily life, and society) from the 1970s and 2000s, identifying both similarities and differences in how the metaphor “the object of love is food” was conceptualized during these two periods.

Nguyễn Thị Bích Hạnh (2015) delved deeply into conceptual metaphors in the lyrics, categorizing them by the following functions: structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. Salvador Climent and Marta Coll-Florit (2021) studied metaphors of love in number-one hits on the Billboard charts between 1946 and 2016. The identified metaphors included *love is closeness*, *love is possession*, and *love is a journey*. They found that the two predominant conceptualizations of love in pop songs were “the experiential, originating in the physical proximity of the lovers, and one cultural, reflecting possession by one lover and showing a non-egalitarian type of love”.

Existing studies on conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese song lyrics have focused primarily on love and life, exploring various structural, ontological, and

orientational metaphors. Additionally, international research has examined metaphors of sorrow, often emphasizing concepts like injury, oppression, and darkness. However, the metaphor *sorrow is tears*, despite appearing frequently in both English and Vietnamese song lyrics, remains underexplored in scholarly work. Therefore, this paper gives a detailed, cross-cultural analysis of how “sorrow” is metaphorically expressed through “tears” in both English and Vietnamese song lyrics, contributing a fresh perspective to the field of conceptual metaphor research.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Material**

The research material consists of 300 English and Vietnamese songs, including 150 English songs selected from two collections and 150 Vietnamese songs chosen from three collections and reliable Vietnamese websites. The chosen songs were composed by renowned twentieth-century musicians such as John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Bob Dylan (English); and Phạm Duy, Văn Cao, Trịnh Công Sơn, and Thanh Tùng (Vietnamese). These authors were chosen based on three main criteria. *Firstly*, the popularity of their works and their representativeness of the musical era; *secondly* the meaningfulness of the lyrics; and *thirdly* their symbolic and metaphorical content.

The author collected conceptual metaphor/lyrics from the following sources: in English are: *Classic Bob Dylan*: Amsco (Skyline, N., 1991); *The Best Beatles Collection* (Nguyễn Văn Phước et al., 2003). In Vietnamese, the author gathered data from: *Vang vọng một thời (Echo of a time)* (Phạm Duy, 2015); *Những tài danh âm nhạc Việt Nam - Văn Cao (Vietnamese musical talents - Văn Cao)* (Nguyễn Thụy Kha, 2017); *Tuyển tập những bài ca không năm tháng (Collection of timeless songs)* (Trịnh Công Sơn, 1998). The following websites were also studied: <https://trinhcongson.foundation>; <https://phamduy.com>; and <https://nhac.vn/album/nhung-sang-tac-hay-nhat-cua-thanh-tung-plnLKm?st=so3QO0v>.

#### **3.2. Data collection analysis**

The chosen musical works were divided into two groups: English songs coded from E01 to E150, and Vietnamese songs coded from V01 to V150. For the English data, the author translated the linguistic expressions using a paraphrasing method and placed the translations in quotation marks after a slash (/) immediately

following the English expressions to clarify the conceptual metaphors used in the English songs.

The data was processed in two stages. In the first stage, the author identified the metaphors used in the songs based on the theoretical framework of metaphors and the concept of sorrow along with the characteristics of the source domain. The metaphors were further subdivided into subcategories according to the source domains used to activate these metaphors. In the second stage, the author compared the identified metaphors between English and Vietnamese to determine the similarities and differences between the two languages, while also exploring the social and cultural contexts to explain these comparisons.

4. Results

Based on the survey of 150 English songs and 150 Vietnamese songs, the author found the number of works that include the conceptual metaphor *sorrow is tears* as listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Statistics of the Conceptual Metaphor “Sorrow Is Tears”

	Number of songs that use conceptual metaphors				Number of metaphor expressions		Number of metaphorically expressed words			
	English		Vietnamese		English	Vietnamese	English		Vietnamese	
	Quantity	Percentage	Quantity	Percentage			Quantity	Percentage	Quantity	Percentage
<i>Sorrow is tears</i>	21	14	33	22	23	47	58	38,7	62	41,3

Analysis found that 21 English songs and 33 Vietnamese songs use the source domain “tears” to clarify the target domain “sorrow.” In these songs, there are 58 instances of metaphorical expressions in English and 62 in Vietnamese (accounting for 38.7% in English and 41.3% in Vietnamese), as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of “Sorrow Is Tears” Metaphorical Expressions

No.	Metaphorically expressed words in English	Frequency	Metaphorically expressed words in Vietnamese	Frequency
1.	Tear	5	Lệ	9
2.	Tears	6	Nước mắt	20
3.	Teardrop	1	Giọt lệ	7
4.	Tearjerker	1	Khóc	25
5.	Cry	9	Tiếng khóc	1
6.	Crying	35		
7.	Weeping	1		
	Total	58		62

The source domain “tears” in the metaphor *sorrow is tears* encapsulates many images and meanings. In this context, “tears” are not merely a physiological phenomenon associated with crying but also a symbol of sorrow, loss, and profound emotions. “*Tears*” evoke the image of a droplet rolling down a cheek, each drop carrying a story, a memory, a heartache. These tears contain sadness, pain, loneliness, and even liberation.

In English, tears are expressed through derived and synonymous terms such as: “weeping”, “crying”, “tearful”, “sobbing”, “crying rivers”, “bawling”, “misty-eyed”, “watery eyes”, “shedding tears”, “blubbering”, “dissolving into tears”, “stream of tears”, “crying fit”, “in tears”, and “cry (...) eyes out”. In Vietnamese, “nước mắt” (tears) is expressed through synonymous terms such as: “lệ”, “nước mắt”, “giọt lệ”, “dòng lệ”, “lệ đắng”, “lệ sâu”, “lệ rơi”, and “lệ tuôn”.

According to Hoàng Phê’s dictionary definition, “tears” are water secreted by the eye glands when crying or when the eyes are strongly stimulated. For example, “tears well up” or “smoke made my eyes water profusely.” In the conceptual metaphor *sorrow is tears*, the source domain “tears” has the following attributes: expressing sorrow, flowing from the eyes, being caused by an external factor, and sometimes being uncontrollable. When mapped onto the target domain “sorrow,” it expresses sorrow, originating from the heart, caused by an external factor, and difficult to control, as illustrated by the mapping diagram below:

Diagram 1: Mapping Diagram Sorrow Is Tears

Source domain (Tears)		Target domain (Sorrow)
Express sadness	>>>	Express sadness
They flow from the eyes	>>>	Originates from the heart
They are triggered by an external factor	>>>	Originates from the heart
Sometimes uncontrollable	>>>	Often difficult to control

The attribute of “tears” is used as mapping to express sadness in the target domain “sorrow.” Tears are the natural result of strong emotions, such as sadness and suffering. For example:

(1) “I’m sorry that I made you **cry**  
Oh no, I didn’t want to hurt you.”

(John Lennon - Jealous Guy)

The author uses the image of tears to describe the pain he caused. Here, the pain is expressed through the act of crying, indicating that the author's lover has experienced such strong emotions that tears flowed. The image of a mother crying for her blue-eyed boy also illustrates deep and enduring sorrow. The mother's tears not only express sadness but also convey love and loss. In this context, tears symbolize an unspeakable pain:

(2) “Somewhere Mama’s **weeping** for her blue-eyed boy.”

(John Lennon - Man of Peace)

Sorrow is also depicted through the image of tears and helplessness in the face of violence. Tears here are not just a response to physical pain but also to mental and emotional agony when confronted with a stressful situation, an inner sadness:

(3) “**Nước mắt** mùa thu **khóc** ai trong chiều”

(4) “**Nước mắt** mùa thu **khóc** cho cuộc tình.”

(Phạm Duy - Nước mắt mùa thu)

Translation: “Autumn tears cry for someone in the evening”

“Autumn tears cry for the love affair.”

*Firstly*, we often say that “tears are heaven’s rain”, allowing outsiders to see and feel the deep emotions within. When this attribute is mapped to the target domain “sorrow,” we observe that pain is not just a static state but a dynamic process that can spread and affect deeply, similar to tears flowing. Metaphorical expressions such as “Nước mắt mùa thu khóc ai trong chiều” and “Nước mắt mùa thu khóc cho cuộc tình” clearly illustrate this relationship. In each expression, autumn tears are not merely a natural phenomenon but also a symbol laden with multiple layers of meaning about sorrow and suffering. “**Nước mắt** mùa thu **khóc** ai trong chiều” evokes the image of autumn with falling leaves, creating a melancholy scene. Tears here are not just a human reaction but also an embodiment of sorrow spreading across space and time. This mapping relationship makes the pain more vivid when compared to tears flowing in the sad autumn scene. Similarly, in the metaphorical expression “**Nước mắt** mùa thu **khóc** cho cuộc tình,” tears represent not only the end of a love affair but also the profound pain of being separated from a loved one. The pain of a broken heart is made tangible through the image of tears, showing that loss and suffering are not merely abstract emotions but a reality that can be felt through the phenomenon of tears.

*Secondly*, “tears” are used to metaphorically represent silent pain, a reflection from the physical act of tears flowing from the eyes to the deep-seated emotions originating from the heart. Through each tear, the story of pain is not only an internal feeling but also an external expression, allowing others to empathize and share. The following metaphorical expressions clearly illustrate the relationship between the physical act of crying and a deeper emotional state, demonstrating the correlation between the origin of tears and the origin of pain:

(5) “I’ll give you my heartbeat/And a bit of **tear** and flesh.”

(John Lennon - Stand by me)

The combination of the imagery of tears with flesh creates a connection between emotional and physical pain. Tears flowing from the eyes symbolize pain from the heart, while “flesh” emphasizes the physical pain that can be felt. This indicates that pain can manifest both physically and emotionally, and they are often closely intertwined. Tears flow from the eyes when the tear glands are activated, but the deep-seated reason behind this phenomenon originates from the profound emotions within the heart. The latter, metaphorically, is where the strongest and most genuine emotions originate. When this attribute is mapped to the target domain “pain,” one sees that pain is described as an overflow of emotions, starting from the heart and expressed through tears.

In Vietnamese songs, the pain from the heart is expressed through dried tears, teardrops, and torrents of tears, etc. The imagery of tears flowing from the

eyes, then drying up and fading, signifies prolonged pain and emotional depletion. Pain from the heart, over time, can make one feel exhausted and drained, like tears that have dried up:

(6) “Hàng cây trút lá nghĩa trang điêu hiu

Từng chiếc từng chiếc **lệ khô** vàng héo

Buồn thương từng kiếp nằm trong mộ rêu tên người đời quên”.

(Phạm Duy - Nước mắt mùa thu)

Translation: “Rows of trees shed leaves in the deserted cemetery

Each teardrop dries up and turns yellow

Sorrowful, each life lies in the grave, crying the names of the forgotten ones.

Or tears reflect a life full of pain and regret. Pain from the heart can last a lifetime, and tears are the continuous expression of this emotion:

(7) “**Nước mắt** tuôn suốt một đời hoa

Cánh lá rơi, mặn mà tình ngơ

Suối núa sông ra biển bao la, **nước mắt** ta...”.

(Phạm Duy - Nước mắt rơi)

Translation: “Tears flow throughout a lifetime of flowers

Petals fall, the love remains bittersweet

Streams flow into the vast sea, our tears...”

*Thirdly*, “tears” are used not only as an expression of sadness but also as a metaphor for underlying emotional causes. The attribute of the “impact factor” of tears is mapped onto the attribute of “causality” of pain, indicating that each tear is not just a natural reaction but also the result of a specific event or situation. The following metaphorical expressions illustrate the connection between the act of crying and the events or emotions this act reflects, emphasizing the relationship between cause and reaction in human emotions:

(8) “So baby, please stop crying 'cause it's tearing up my mind.”

(Bob Dylan - Baby stop crying)

(9) “You could make me **cry** if you don't know

Can't remember what I was thinkin' of”.

(Bob Dylan - You're gonna make me lonesome when you go)

The metaphorical expression “So baby, please stop crying 'cause it's tearing up my mind” emphasizes the impact of someone else's tears on one's own emotions.

The pain here originates not only from a personal impact factor but also from witnessing a beloved in distress. The tears of the other person become the cause of pain for the speaker, demonstrating a strong emotional connection between the two individuals. Similarly, “You could make me cry if you don't know” (Bob Dylan - You're gonna make me lonesome when you go) illustrates that pain and tears can stem from the lack of understanding or unintentional actions of others. Here, the lack of understanding of the other person becomes the impact factor causing the pain, and tears are the expression of that emotion. This shows that the cause of pain is not always an intentional action but sometimes arises from ignorance or the unintentional.

Through these metaphorical expressions, one sees that pain is not merely a natural emotion but is the result of impact factors and underlying causes, much like tears are the result of specific stimuli.

Considering the following metaphorical expressions in Vietnamese songs:

(10) “Anh yêu em bằng **nước mắt** đứng lưng trời

Bằng tia nóng máu trong tim dần khô héo”.

(Phạm Duy - Anh yêu em vào cõi chết)

Translation: “I love you with tears standing at the end of the sky

With the hot rays of blood in the heart slowly withering.”

(11) “**Nước mắt** rơi cho tình ra đời

**Nước mắt** theo duyên về xa vời”.

(Phạm Duy - Nước mắt rơi)

Translation: “Tears fall for love to be born

Tears follow fate into the distance”.

Tears are the expression of deep love and pain: “Anh yêu em bằng nước mắt đứng lưng trời” - tears appear due to incomplete love or difficulties in relationships. This indicates that the pain of love always has specific causes, which could be separation, misunderstandings, or barriers in love. Or “Nước mắt rơi cho tình ra đời/Nước mắt theo duyên về xa vời”. Tears here are the expression of both joy and sorrow when love begins and when fate ends. The cause of tears lies in changes in emotions, from a happy beginning to a painful separation. Emotional pain always has a cause, manifested through the transitions in relationships.

*Fourthly*, “tears” are also described as a natural response that is sometimes uncontrollable, reflecting a similar psychological state in pain. The emotions

expressed by tears, whether sorrow, suffering, or loss, are inherently uncontrollable and difficult to manage, akin to the emotional pain they reflect. The metaphorical expressions using the imagery of falling tears not only highlight the lack of control over this action but also demonstrate the expression of deep and inexorable pain. For example:

(12) “Everybody’s flying and no one leaves the ground

Well, everybody’s **crying** and no one makes a sound”.

(John Lennon - Nobody told me)

(13) “Baby, please stop **crying**, stop **crying**, stop **crying**”.

(Bob Dylan - Baby stop crying)

Sorrow, like tears, cannot be controlled because it is the result of strong external impacts or life events. When someone experiences loss, separation, or other heart-wrenching events, the pain is overwhelming and dominating, making it impossible for one to control their emotions. The pain becomes too intense, surpassing human control, much like tears flowing incessantly when emotions surge. In “Well, everybody’s crying and no one makes a sound,” the phrase “no one makes a sound” signifies the helplessness and inability to control tears when the pain becomes overwhelming. No one can restrain their tears, indicating that the pain is too intense to conceal or control. Similarly, “Baby, please stop crying, stop crying, stop crying” reflects the helplessness in trying to control someone else's tears. The tears of the other person express a pain that the speaker cannot soothe, reflecting that pain is sometimes too powerful to control or console.

Thus, through metaphorical expressions, one clearly sees that both tears and pain possess the attribute of being difficult to control. Tears are a natural, uncontrollable response to strong emotions, and pain similarly arises from uncontrollable life events and strong impacts that a person cannot fully control. This projection elucidates that emotions, whether tears or pain, are natural and powerful reactions that humans must face and accept in life.

In Vietnamese songs, tears expressing pain are delicately used through metaphors such as tears, crying, and shedding tears:

(14) “**Nước mắt** đã buông xuôi, theo tiếng hát qua đời

Đừng nhìn nhau nữa..., anh ơi” !.

(Phạm Duy - Kiếp nào có yêu nhau)

Translation: “Tears have been shed, following the singing through life

Don't look at each other anymore..., my dear!”

(15) “**Nước mắt** mùa thu **khóc** than triền miên”.

(Phạm Duy - Nước mắt mùa thu)

Translation: “Tears of autumn cry endlessly.”

Tears are a physical reaction to powerful emotions like sadness, suffering, or even joy. In moments of overwhelming emotional intensity, tears often flow uncontrollably, symbolizing the inability to manage these strong feelings. This uncontrollability of tears mirrors the nature of pain, which can also exceed a person's ability to suppress or conceal it. When pain reaches a certain threshold, it forces a direct confrontation with emotions rather than allowing for restraint. Similarly, sorrow - much like tears - arises from intense external factors or life events and can overpower a person's emotional defenses. Whether it's the pain of loss or personal heartbreak, sorrow reaches a point where it becomes unmanageable, forcing the individual to confront the emotional weight directly. Both tears and pain are natural, uncontrollable reactions that one must eventually face and endure.

Through analysis and comparison, one can observe the similarities and differences of the metaphorical concept *sorrow is tears* in English and Vietnamese song lyrics. In both languages, the metaphor *sorrow is tears* describes a deep connection between emotions expressed through tears and the experience of psychological pain. Both utilize tears to express emotions, emphasizing the projection from what can be seen (tears) to what is felt (pain) with a high ratio compared to other source domains expressing pain. Expressions such as “Why do the tears run down your face” in English and “Nước mắt mùa thu khóc than triền miên” in Vietnamese similarly emphasize how tears express hidden pain, demonstrating the similarity in using tear imagery to express pain in two different cultural backgrounds.

The use of the source domain “tears” to express pain in English and Vietnamese reveals significant cultural differences. In Vietnamese, the metaphor *sorrow is tears* appears more frequently, with a usage rate of 41.3% (62 metaphorically expressed words across 33 songs using the metaphor) compared to 38.7% (58 metaphorically expressed words across 22 songs using the metaphor) in English. This higher frequency underscores the cultural emphasis in Vietnam on expressing emotions visually and tangibly. Tears in Vietnamese culture are not just a physiological response to sorrow but a profound symbol that directly conveys the depth of emotional pain. The act of shedding tears is seen as a transparent and honest expression of one's inner state, often linked with natural elements such as the seasons, weather, or landscapes, which reflects a deep harmony between human

emotions and the environment. This connection suggests an integrated mindset in Vietnamese culture, where personal feelings are expressed in sync with the natural world, highlighting a respect for nature's role in human life.

Furthermore, the prominence of tears in Vietnamese song lyrics can be traced to traditional values that emphasize communal and interpersonal relationships. Tears are not merely individual expressions but serve as a bridge to share and communicate emotions within a collective context. The cultural expectation for emotions to be expressed openly aligns with the philosophical influence of Confucianism and Buddhism, where human emotions are viewed as part of a larger social and natural cycle. This holistic approach to emotional expression places great importance on transparency and empathy, using tears as a visible manifestation of sorrow that fosters connection between individuals and their surroundings.

In contrast, in English lyrics sorrow is treated more as an introspective experience, where the metaphorical expressions surrounding tears often emphasize internal reflection and personal emotional processing. This reflects the individualistic nature of Western culture, where emotions are typically viewed as private and personal, and their open expression may be seen as a choice rather than a necessity. English metaphors of sorrow often focus on internal struggles or empathy between individuals rather than communal or natural harmony, highlighting a more self-contained approach to emotional expression.

These differences illustrate how each culture conceptualizes and manages pain. While Vietnamese culture encourages visible, communal displays of sorrow through tears, Western culture values personal reflection and emotional independence. This divergence is deeply rooted in each society's cognitive and cultural frameworks, affecting not only the language but also the way emotions are understood and shared within the community.

## 5. Discussion

The metaphor *sorrow is tears* has been examined in various languages, although not as extensively in song lyrics. Prior studies, such as those of Schröder (2012) and Goddard (2014), have investigated metaphors of love and sadness in song lyrics. These studies confirm that metaphorical expressions of sorrow often draw on physical experiences, such as tears, to convey emotional depth. However, most of these works focus on the genre of Western music, leaving a gap in comparative cross-cultural analysis.

This research shares the view of Kövecses (2000) that human feeling is revealed through different channels, one of which is the metaphor *sorrow is tears*. Sorrow can have a wide range of expressions, not just tears. The findings show that while both English and Vietnamese words utilize tears to express sorrow, Vietnamese lyrics display a higher frequency of this metaphor, emphasizing a stronger cultural connection between emotions and natural elements. This differs from English lyrics, which often emphasize personal reflection and empathy, as pointed out by Kövecses (2000; 2006), Deignan (2005), Schröder (2012), and Irma (2021).

Sorrow is just another state of human feeling; one can see some examples of the conceptual metaphor “pain” as illustrated by Kövecses (2006): pain is down; pain is dark; pain is heavy; pain is a captor/prison; etc. One can see its relation to happiness like two sides of a coin. Sorrow may be reflected not only as “tears” but in different forms of expressions.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the study of the metaphorical concept *sorrow is tears* in twentieth-century songs in both English and Vietnamese, one can observe that both cultural backgrounds utilize the imagery of “tears” to express “sorrow” in a profound and specific manner. The occurrence of this metaphor's usage is higher in Vietnamese songs, indicating a preference and frequency of employing tear imagery in Vietnamese culture. This suggests that Vietnamese people tend to express emotions in a more vivid and tangible manner.

Furthermore, the differences between the two languages also reflect the cultural and cognitive characteristics of each ethnicity. While Vietnamese often connect sorrow with nature, demonstrating the integration between man and the environment, English emphasizes empathy and personal reflection. This reflects the individualistic mindset, typical of Western culture, where everyone is encouraged to explore and express their own individual emotions.

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