

Conceptual Metaphor Health is Gold on Vietnamese Online Newspapers

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Abstract: Health is a primary concern for humanity. Therefore, the concept of health is universally valued across cultures. Often, this concept is mapped onto the source domain of “gold.” In life, gold is something of great value. The conceptual metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD” aligns the target domain of HEALTH with the source domain of GOLD. Examining this conceptual metaphor also reveals distinctive characteristics of how Vietnamese people conceptualize health. This study analyzes data from 200 randomly selected articles from prominent Vietnamese online newspapers, which are frequently accessed by Vietnamese people. The findings indicate that attributes of the source domain, GOLD, specifically, its properties, values, and functional uses - are mapped onto HEALTH, as evidenced by 16 metaphorical expressions. It illustrates how Vietnamese people conceptualize health, drawing on a cognitive framework where the target domain is human, and the source domain is wealth. Through this cognitive framework, the properties of the source domain are mapped, creating a structured model for understanding health. This study provides insights into the cognitive patterns of Vietnamese cultural perspectives on health.

Keywords: Health, gold, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, cultural concept.

Subject classification: Linguistics.

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1. Introduction

The conceptual metaphor serves as a prevalent framework for human cognition. Shaped by cultures and experiential domains, each nation manifests distinctive characteristics in its perception of the world. Structurally, conceptual metaphors typically consist of a target domain and a source domain, wherein the source domain projects meaning onto the target domain to elucidate its significance. This article examines the conceptual metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD”. Health, being universally significant, holds intrinsic value in human life, while gold, likewise, is precious to humans. Consequently, the source domain, GOLD is mapped onto the target domain, HEALTH, to highlight the significance and value of health.

The novel contribution of this article lies in its exploration of Vietnamese cognitive patterns in relation to expressions and conceptualizations of HEALTH. Humans often interpret the world around them through mental constructs, and health consistently emerges as a primary concern. As regarded by Vietnamese people, health is an invaluable asset and integral to a balance of body and mind. Thus, exploring how health is perceived and conveyed provides insights into the cognitive and cultural dimensions of Vietnamese thought.

This paper seeks to address the following research questions:

How many attributes of the source domain, GOLD, are mapped onto the target domain, HEALTH?

What is the radiation pattern within the conceptual metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD”, and how are these mappings manifested linguistically?

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptual metaphor

Conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson suggests that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a cognitive structure shaping our understanding (Lakoff et al, 1980). Kövecses extended this theory by incorporating contextual factors and proposing a hierarchical structure of metaphors across four levels of schematicity (Kövecses, 2021). The relationship between metaphor and culture is complex, involving both universal and culturally variable aspects (Kövecses, 2010). Metaphor variation depends on broad cultural dimensions and

fine-grained contextual factors, influencing everyday language and poetic expression (Kövecses, 2010). The automatic identification of conceptual metaphors in texts has been explored by using various methods in combination with corpus-based approaches, which are proven to be the most effective ways in exploring source and target domain expressions (Babarczy et al., 2010). The research highlights the importance of statistical patterns in depicting the characteristics of conceptual domains and demonstrates the potential for computational analysis of metaphorical language (Babarczy et al., 2010).

According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor is not only an aspect of language but fundamental part of human thought and experience (Ritchie, 2006; Gibbs, 2011). This theory suggests that abstract concepts are understood through more concrete experiences, such as relationships conceptualized as journeys (Wickman et al., 1999). Conceptual metaphors are found everywhere, structure our reasoning and everyday language (Taylor, 2002). They are based on embodied physical experiences and combine to form the foundation for new metaphors (Ritchie, 2006). This approach has revolutionized metaphor studies, proposing that most metaphorical language arises from pre-existing patterns of metaphorical thought (Gibbs, 2011). Conceptual metaphor provides a powerful counseling framework, applicable across theoretical orientations, offering insights into clients' conceptualizations of their experiences (Wickman et al., 1999). The theory carries implications for epistemology, highlighting the gap between concepts and reality, and also suggesting that learning and ideation depend upon metaphorical thinking (Taylor, 2002).

This literature review examines conceptual metaphor research in science education and cognitive science. Conceptual metaphors play a crucial role in developing scientific concepts with influences on science learning and teaching (Iván, 2021). Studies have demonstrated that metaphors have influence on various cognitive activities, including perception, memory, thinking, and reasoning (Amin, T. G., Jeppsson, F., & Haglund, J. (2015). Recent research emphasizes the importance of embodied cognition and experientialism in how conceptual metaphors are understood (Iván, 2021). The field has evolved to view conceptual metaphors as dynamic systems rather than fixed representations, resulting from various self-organizing factors across different time scales (Siman, 2020). From this perspective, conceptual metaphors are viewed as cognitive biases and the broad relationships between metaphors and cognition are acknowledged to encompass all aspects of human experiences (Siman, 2020). Future research directions include

exploring associations between the human body, environment, and language in science education, as well as addressing criticisms and controversies within the field (Iván, 2021; Siman, 2020).

Recent research on conceptual metaphors has shown increasing interest and output over the past two decades (Zhao et al., 2023). Studies have explored various applications, including analysis of COVID-19 related metaphors in German media (Pandža, 2024) and examination of political speeches during wartime (Skichko et al., 2023). Diverse methodologies, such as bibliometric analysis have been employed by researchers to identify prominent trends and research groups (Zhao et al., 2023), and corpus-based tools have been also applied for detailed linguistic analysis (Skichko et al., 2023). The theoretical frameworks of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending continue to be central in such studies (Skichko et al., 2023). Findings suggest that ontological metaphors are notably prevalent in some contexts, reflecting speakers' physical experiences (Skichko et al., 2023). Future research directions may include interdisciplinary approaches which include corpus linguistics, neurolinguistics, psychology, and critical discourse analysis (Zhao et al., 2023).

2.2. Studies on the concept of HEALTH and GOLD

The conceptualization of health has evolved beyond traditional measures of morbidity and mortality to take in a more holistic view. Greenberg (1985) proposes a model in which social, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical components are integrated, with wellness representing their integration and balance. Larson (1999) presents four conceptual model namely medical, World Health Organization, wellness, and environmental to highlight the complexity and changing nature of health definitions. The importance of reviewing patients' perceptions and preferences in health evaluation is also emphasized by Schwartzmann (2003), who notes the cultural and historical dependence of health-related quality of life concepts. Earp & Ennett (1991) advocate for the use of conceptual models in health education research and practice, describing them as diagrams of proposed causal linkages among concepts in connection with specific public health problems. Informed by multiple theories and empirical findings, these models help narrow research questions and intervention targets.

The concept of “gold” in exploration and cultural contexts has been studied to a great extent. In orogenic gold exploration, it is crucial to adopt a scale-integrated

approach using mineral system models, with metamorphic fluids from subducted oceanic slabs or metasomatized mantle lithosphere as potential sources (Groves et al., 2020). Prospectivity mapping techniques, such as weights-of-evidence and fuzzy logic, have been applied to predict gold-rich areas by using geophysical and geochemical data (Nykänen & Salmirinne, 2007). The combination of empirical data with conceptual geological parameters can improve predictive capacity, particularly when logistic regression is used (Nykänen et al., 2008). Beyond geological contexts, the concept of “gold/golden” serves as a universal cultural and linguistic text and they are often represented in proverbs and sayings. These attributive constructions reveal deep mental images and symbolism, indicating both positive and negative connotations in relation to value and human experience (Amichba, D et al, 2021). Understanding the concept of “gold” across various disciplines contributes to broader discussions on linguistic and cultural form and content.

The conceptual metaphor of “health is gold” is studied in various contexts across the papers. The “gold standard” metaphor is common in health research and used to describe the best care or most certain medical knowledge (Love, 2003). Metaphors are often employed in health campaigns to convey complex information, and their effectiveness depends on experiential, internal, external, and narrative coherence (Refaie, 2015). The concept of health itself is metaphorically conceptualized, and there is a model viewing it as a manageable valuable commodity (Scott, 2023), which aligns with the metaphor of “health is gold”. In political and economic discourse, health metaphors are used to conceptualize difficulties as health problems, in which the “problem is ailment/malfunction” metaphor is the most common (Urbonaitė, 2007). While these metaphorical conceptualizations show some universal tendencies, they also retain culture-specific features in their lexical realization (Urbonaitė, 2007; Scott, 2023).

Thus, the review of relevant studies shows that the concepts of health and gold have been studied to a great extent, however, there has not been much research into the conceptual metaphor of “HEALTH IS GOLD”. Therefore, this study focuses on clarifying the way of thinking through this conceptual metaphor by surveying articles on Vietnamese online newspapers.

3. Methodology and research documents

3.1. Methodology

To investigate these questions, the study employs two primary methods namely the descriptive method and quantitative analysis. The former is applied to outline the mapping process from the source domain GOLD to the target domain HEALTH, detailing the attributes of GOLD that are metaphorically mapped onto. Additionally, this approach is used to conduct descriptive analysis of linguistic expressions that incorporate metaphorical references, thereby revealing the cognitive processes underpinning the HEALTH IS GOLD metaphor.

The latter is adopted to measure the frequency of metaphorical expressions and references. Quantitative data enables us to identify prominent attributes of the source domain, GOLD, and to offer insights into prevalent metaphorical references. For each metaphorical mapping, the quantification of expressions allows us to discern which mappings are most commonly invoked, providing a lens into distinctive aspects of Vietnamese conceptualizations and linguistic expressions of health.

This study uses this method to find metaphorical language expressions as follows:

Step 1. Read articles

Step 2. Choose out metaphorical language expressions with hidden features.

Step 3. Find metaphor vehicle and quantitative statistics.

Step 4. Classify the paths to find attribute mappings from the source domain onto the target domain.

3.2. Research documents

The study draws upon a corpus of 200 articles from widely-read Vietnamese online newspapers, including vietnamnet.vn, vnexpress.net, baobinhphuoc.com.vn, qdnd.vn, bachhoaxanh.com, giaoducthoidai.vn, dantri.com.vn, giadinhonline.vn, cafef.vn, luatminhkhue.vn, dangcongsan.vn, nhandan.vn, laodong.vn, suckhoedoisong.vn, doanhnghiepv.vn, and thanhnie.vn, among others. A random selection of articles from these sources constitutes the primary data for analysis.

3.3. Theoretical background

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) introduced by Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is fundamental to human thought and not only a linguistic device (Ritchie, 2006; Gibbs, 2011). This theory suggests that abstract concepts are

understood through more concrete experiences, such as viewing relationships as journeys (Wickman et al., 1999). CMT proposes that most metaphorical language originates from preexisting patterns of metaphorical thought or conceptual metaphors (Gibbs, 2011). These conceptual metaphors are found everywhere and have become powerful frames for human thought and experience, at the same time structure our reasoning and everyday language (Taylor, 2002). The theory carries implications for various fields, including counseling, where it provides a potentially impactful framework generally applicable across theoretical orientations (Wickman et al., 1999). While having revolutionized the study of metaphor, CMT has also faced criticism within cognitive science, prompting new perspectives on conceptual metaphors from embodied simulations and dynamical systems theory (Gibbs, 2011). Conceptual metaphors are foundational to human cognition and language and thanks to them, abstract concepts can be understood through concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, as cited in Ritchie, 2006). These metaphors are often based on embodied physical experiences and form the foundation for more sophisticated metaphorical expressions (Ritchie, 2006). In Vietnamese, conceptual metaphors frequently utilize human senses as source domains for conceptualizing abstract targets (Tran, 2019). The automatic identification of conceptual metaphors in texts has been explored using various methods, with corpus-based approaches which are proven to be the most effective ways in exploring source and target domain expressions (Babarczy et al., 2010). However, theories which rely on category assignments or characteristic mappings to explain metaphor comprehension face criticism for circularity, as these comparisons often require understanding of the metaphor earlier (Ritchie, 2003). Conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual blending theory avoid this by focusing on underlying cognitive concepts and schemas (Ritchie, 2003).

At its essence, the nature of conceptual metaphors is relatively consistent among researchers. This study adopts the perspective of Lakoff & Johnson (1980) as a theoretical basis to conduct the literature review. A conceptual metaphor involves understanding one concept (or domain) through the lens of another. For example, we often conceptualize life or love in terms of a journey, time in terms of movement, arguments as war, and people as plants, etc. as shown by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). Their conception has become known as the “cognitive linguistic view of metaphor.” Lakoff and Johnson challenged traditional views of metaphor, arguing that:

metaphor is a property of concepts, and not words;

the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, and not just some artistic or esthetic purpose;

metaphor is often not based on similarity;

metaphor is used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by special talents;

and metaphor, far from being a redundant though pleasing linguistic ornament, is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning (G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, 1980).

“Metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another one” (Kovecses, 2002: 4).

Conceptual metaphors are embedded within cognitive systems, which explains why knowledge is interconnected within cognitive frames rather than existing independently. Conceptual metaphor is a common way of thinking in human life. The structure of a conceptual metaphor of A is B, where A is the target domain, B is the source domain. The target domain maps its attributes onto the source domain. For example, the conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE PLANTS has HUMANS as the target domain, PLANTS as the source domain. If we use the properties of plants to talk about humans, we are using a process of mapping the properties of the source domain onto the target domain. This helps people's expression and thinking processes become more meaningful. A convenient shorthand way of capturing this view of metaphor is the following: conceptual domain (a) is conceptual domain (b), which is what is called a conceptual metaphor. A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another (Kovecses, 2002: 4).

For example:

Children are young trees that need to be cared for and cultivated properly.

In the above verbal expression, a sapling is a concept belonging to the plant source domain, cultivating is an activity to help the tree grow well. From the young, weak attribute of the tree links to the stage of human childhood and the attribute of taking care of the tree to grow connects with the process of raising the child by parents. That is the cognitive process of human thinking. Conceptual metaphors are based on the principle of similarity. This means that the irradiated attribute in the source domain must be similar to the target domain. Similar to the example above, the plant source domain has the following similarities:

Source domain attribute Mapping Target domain characteristics

Young tree => The stage of human infancy

Cultivate plants => The care and upbringing of the child

The irradiated property is the similarity between the source domain and the target domain. Through that process, we receive a perception from the immature concept to the childhood stage of a person, from the act of cultivating to the upbringing of a human being. Lakoff and Johnson say that “Metaphor is pervasive in every life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 3) “In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain.” (Kovecse, 2002: 4). One’s experience is the basis for creating cognitive processes. That is why the human living environment, including the natural environment and the social environment, will affect the process of forming ideas in the human mind. Conceptual metaphors are divided by many scientists into three basic types: structural metaphors, ontological metaphors and directional metaphors (see Lakoff (1980), Kovecses (2002), etc.

Regarding the classification of conceptual metaphors, cognitive linguists almost unanimously divide conceptual metaphors into three types: structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and metaphors. Orientation Metaphor are based on their cognitive function. Structural metaphors have a specific source domain and target domain, the source domain maps its properties onto the target domain to clarify the meaning of the target domain. Ontological metaphor is the categorization of abstract entities by drawing their boundaries in space, meaning that the target domain is usually an abstract idea. Metaphor orients the structure of certain domains and creates a common conceptual system for them, that is, it organizes an entire conceptual system with respect to another system. The orientation metaphor is related to spatial orientation with pairs of opposites such as top - bottom, inside - outside, front - back, shallow - deep, center - periphery... These pairs of opposites originate from the fact that our bodies have certain properties and function in a certain way in the physical world. Therefore, the orientation metaphor gives the concept of spatial orientation meaning.

4. Results

4.1. The concepts of HEALTH and GOLD

In the conceptual metaphor of “HEALTH IS GOLD”, the target domain is HEALTH, while the source domain is GOLD. Each of these domains possesses its own cognitive framework. The cognitive framework of the target domain, HEALTH, is tied to human beings:

HEALTH \leq PHYSICAL/MENTAL \leq HUMAN

In this framework, health comprises physical and mental dimensions, both within the broader cognitive framework of humanity. Thus, the concept of health is assessed from both physical and mental perspectives.

The source domain, GOLD, is structured as follows: GOLD \leq VALUABLE THINGS \leq WEALTH

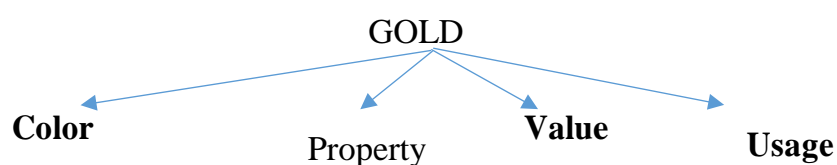
In this hierarchy, GOLD is understood within the cognitive framework of valuable items and, more broadly, within the framework of wealth.

Through the interplay of these cognitive frames, the metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD” operates by mapping attributes of the source domain (GOLD) onto the target domain (HEALTH). Consequently, health is conceptualized as a precious property in life, endowed with value and significance.

4.2. Mapping Model from Source Domain to Target Domain

In a conceptual metaphor, the source domain consistently maps its attributes onto the target domain, making the target concept more tangible and accessible. In practical experience, gold represents an asset of exceptional value- highly prized, safeguarded, and preserved. Gold possesses multiple dimensions of value including economic, spiritual, utilitarian, and aesthetic value. Within Vietnamese cultural cognition, GOLD is often used to conceptualize HEALTH. Based on the survey data, the primary attributes of the source domain GOLD, which are mapped onto the target domain HEALTH, include the following:

Table 1: Attributes of the Source Domain GOLD



Source: Compiled from survey data by the author

GOLD possesses fundamental attributes, including property, color, value, and usage. The properties of GOLD are further divided into economic utility (financial significance) and physical properties (substantial essence). “Value” within the GOLD domain often refers to tangible assets, while the use of gold is widely recognized for its role as a currency in traditional economies. However, in practical economic terms, not all aspects within the source domain are mapped seamlessly onto the target domain of HEALTH. Based on survey data, color emerges as a primary visual attribute, with gold traditionally symbolized by its distinctive yellow hue. Yet, this color attribute does not directly reflect the conceptualization of HEALTH. Attributes such as the material essence of gold, its value, and its usage, do map onto the target domain, HEALTH. This mapping pattern is illustrated in the conceptual metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD” as shown in the following summary mapping diagram.

Table 2: Summary of Mapping Diagram of the Conceptual Metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD”

HEALTH	<=	GOLD
The significance of health	<=	Economic Value of GOLD
Approaches to healthcare	<=	Use of GOLD
Health condition	<=	Properties of GOLD (economic and physical properties)

Source: Compiled from data by the author

This diagram synthesizes results from the analysis of 200 articles. It demonstrates that category transformation occurs through mapping, in which some aspects of the source domain are conveyed metaphorically within the target domain via linguistic expressions. Each attribute in the source domain exhibits distinct mapping characteristics, associated with unique linguistic markers articulating these metaphorical connections. Based on the survey of 200 articles, metaphorical expressions relative to each aspect of the HEALTH IS GOLD metaphor are mapped in the mapping diagram as follows:

Table 3: Metaphorical References in the HEALTH IS GOLD Conceptual Metaphor

No.	Metaphorical Mapping	Frequency	Ratio (%) above 455
Economic Value of GOLD => Significance of HEALTH			
1	Precious wealth	35	7,6
2	Invaluable	32	7,0
3	Property	29	6,3
Financial Attributes of GOLD => Connotations of Healthcare			
4	Investment	38	8,3
5	Buying	31	6,8
6	Selling	25	5,4
7	Exchange	23	5,1
Use of GOLD => Approaches to Healthcare			
8	Squandering	33	7,2
9	Waste	30	6,5
10	Saving	27	5,9
11	Protection	26	5,7
Physical properties of GOLD => Health Status			
12	Erosion	34	7,4
13	Wear and Tear	32	7,0
14	Loss	21	4,6
15	Decline	20	4,3
16	Enhancement	19	4,1
	Total	455	

Source: Compiled from data by the author

Metaphors appeared in various aspects as stated in the above table roughly in equal numbers. In 200 studied articles, the Investment metaphor vehicle appeared the most, 38 times; the Enhancement metaphor vehicle appeared the least, 19 times; the remaining vehicles appeared between 20 and more than 30 times. These metaphor vehicles are properties of the source domain GOLD that are mapped onto the target domain HEALTH. Through mappings, the values of health are more clearly perceived by people.

4.3. Linguistic expressions reflecting the metaphor of HEALTH IS GOLD

4.3.1. Mapping of GOLDS's economic value onto the significance of health

Preciousness: The notion of “precious” is a significant feature of GOLD’s economic worth. In common thought, having an abundance of GOLD signifies immense wealth. Similarly, good health is viewed as an invaluable asset of individuals. This parallel perception positioning health as a highly prized commodity, akin to gold, is common in daily life.

“There is nothing more precious than good health. It is the greatest treasure a person can possess” (Bach Hoa Xanh, 2024).

The metaphorical mapping here equates health with a valuable commodity, such as gold, underscoring its universal importance. The resonance of the “most valuable asset” metaphor has fostered a cognitive mindset in which health is perceived as precious and indispensable, similar to the value of gold. The cognitive mechanism of this mapping suggests that if GOLD is a precious asset, then HEALTH, too, is the most valuable property one can have.

“Uncle Ho said: ‘People are the most valuable capital of society; health is the most valuable capital of people’” (Tuong Vy, 2021).

In these metaphorical language expressions, health is symbolized as “capital,” drawing a direct comparison between one’s health and valuable economic resources. Through this comparison, the mapping process effectively fulfills its function. This comparison demonstrates the priceless nature of health through a linguistic structure that associates health with financial terms like “capital,” “gold,” and “money.”

*Asset: The term “Asset” implies something that provides substantial benefits or returns to those who possess it. In this sense, assets are generally associated with tangible assets or intrinsic value. Similarly, human health is conceptualized as a resource of invaluable worth. The mapping extends from the metaphor of property to articulate the value of human health.

Health is the true wealth (Ngoc Tu, 2021).

This expression reflects the economic value of gold as it maps onto the worth of health. Just as people possessing a considerable amount of gold are considered wealthy and secure and those with good health are regarded as fortunate and experiencing life’s fullness. This linguistic construction reinforces the perception of

health as a vital asset that is as desirable as material wealth, thus embedding the metaphor deeply within Vietnamese cultural cognition.

4.3.2. Mapping of economic properties of GOLD onto the domain of health care

*Investment: The concept of “investment” implies the dedication of resources, such as time, energy, or money, into an endeavor with the expectation of future benefits or returns. GOLD, as a precious asset, is often invested in to yield financial returns. In metaphorical mappings, “investment” is frequently used to reflect actions taken towards maintaining and improving one’s health.

“Investing in health is a wise investment for young people. Investing in health to reap productivity in the new year” (Bich Dao, 2024).

In these expressions, the metaphor of “investment” corresponds to the proactive maintenance of health, suggesting that caring for health will bring future returns, similar to the benefits of investing in gold.

Buying / Exchanging / Trading off: Actions like “buying,” “exchanging,” and “trading off” are commercial activities associated with valuable assets like GOLD. This also represents the physical attribute of gold. By extension, these terms are metaphorically mapped onto health, suggesting it is a precious commodity subject to transactions.

“The greatest folly of modern man is to trade health for money, then spending money to buy back health” (Thuy Linh, 2021).

This is a linguistic expression featuring a combined metaphor, meaning that two or more metaphors appear together within the same expression. In this case, they are “trading” and “buying” “Buying” involves exchanging money for something, while “exchanging” entails giving something valuable in return for something else, which may be of equal or lesser value. Health, inherently intangible, is conceptualized through two metaphors: “buy” and “trade”. Here, health is symbolically “bought” and “exchanged” for wealth, underscoring its perceived material value and the cognitive dissonance in prioritizing money over health. The cognitive effect it produces is to aid in conceptualizing the target domain of health.

* Selling: “Most workers are 'selling their health' in their youth and worry about money for healthcare in their old age” (Thai Binh, 2023).

“By skipping breakfast, having quick lunch of bread or instant noodles, and drinking milk tea instead of eating balanced meals, many young people “sell” their

health to make money, only to later spend that money on medicine when they fall ill” (Bao Vy, 2019).

In the examples above, the metaphor of “selling” conveys the idea of exchanging goods for money or gold. Expressions like “selling” imply a trade-off where individuals sacrifice their well-being for material gain, perceiving health as a sellable resource. “Selling” also represents a form of commercial activity typically involving gold, silver, currency, and other valuables. The cognitive framework here transfers the concept of selling goods onto health, making the latter seem more tangible and subject to depletion.

*Exchange / trading off: “Exchange health for money, only to spend it all on healthcare later-what’s the difference?” (Phuong Thuy, 2020).

“The biggest mistake in life is to trade health and happiness for other things” (T.Linh, 2022).

The concept of “exchange/trade off” implies giving up something valuable to acquire something else, which, in economic terms, is often associated with GOLD. Here, health is metaphorically seen as an asset traded for other pursuits. In these examples, health is depicted as an asset capable of being “exchanged” or “traded off”, highlighting its material value and the perceived loss when traded for lesser goods. This metaphor reinforces the idea of health as something precious and finite, warranting careful consideration.

*Saving: The term “saving” typically refers to the prudent management of valuable resources, such as gold or money. This metaphor extends to health, implying that health should be preserved and protected.

“Save your health, for it is the most precious asset; save your time and do not waste the ‘golden hours’” (Nguyen Duc Tuan, 2020).

The linguistic expression above contains multiple combined metaphors. The first is the metaphor of saving, used to conceptualize the prudent use of health and time, as in “saving health” and “saving time.” The second is the metaphor of waste and the golden hour is employed to perceive the value of time. This expression combines metaphors of saving health and time, integrating the conceptual metaphors “HEALTH IS GOLD” and “TIME IS GOLD”. The association of health with “saving” underscores its value and the importance of conserving it, akin to the safeguarding of wealth.

4.3.3. Mapping of gold usage onto health care

* Squandering: The metaphor of “squandering” implies using resources excessively or unnecessarily. This attribute is mapped onto health when individuals

misuse or neglect their well-being, causing self-harm.

“Young people are squandering their health.

A man dreamed he was interviewing God: ‘What surprises you most about humans after you created them?’ God replied, ‘That they squander their health to make money and then spend that money to restore their health.’” (Vietnam+, 2013)

This metaphor evokes an impactful cognitive effect. While health is an intangible quality, the metaphor of “squandering health” brings attention to behaviors that harm one's well-being. Thus, the way we value and use gold is mapped onto how we treat our health. Through this lens, we come to understand the true value of health.

*Waste: The concept of “waste” extends the metaphor of waste to actions or resources that are expended without benefit, specifically mapping onto the health domain as a warning against needless depletion of one's physical and mental resources.

“There are immeasurable waste like time, opportunities, energy, and intelligence”(Thu Hang, 2021).

We use expressions such as: “waste of time,” “waste of opportunity,” “waste of energy,” “waste of intelligence”.

In those expressions, waste of energy also implies health. Energy is a fundamental aspect of health. Therefore, this is also a mapping onto an aspect of health. Based on practical experience, all human activities in life require physical effort; expending strength on unproductive tasks is, therefore, a waste.

*Preservation: The metaphor of “preservation” signifies the act of preventing damage or loss, projecting an emphasis on health protection. This notion aligns with the cultural perception of gold, silver, and other valuable items that require careful preservation.

“Research by the US National Institute of Health reveals that individuals over 50 are at higher risk of heart disease and stroke. It also outlines methods to preserve good health at this age” (Hieu Ngan, 2023).

The expression “preserve health” reflects the conceptual metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD”. By invoking familiar symbols, such as preserving “gold” or “jade”, in Vietnamese culture, the concept of health becomes more concrete through the mapping. The metaphor strengthens the view that health is an invaluable resource deserving of conscientious protection, akin to protecting precious treasures within the home.

*Protection: Protection is an attribute that involves resisting all forms of

destruction and violation to preserve something in its original state. This action is commonly applied to things people consider precious, such as property, love, and similar values. When mapped onto the target domain of health, this attribute represents human efforts to protect health from any harm.

“Protecting students’ health in hot weather” (Sunhouse, 2018).

In this example, the metaphor of protecting health refers to efforts to prevent heat from adversely affecting students' well-being. This thought process illustrates the mapping scheme of the anti-invasion property inherent in the metaphor of protection. The link between protecting something precious and safeguarding health reflects a mechanism within conceptual metaphorical thinking.

4.3.4. Mapping of physical properties of GOLD onto health status

*Erosion/Wear and tear: The metaphor of erosion/wear and tear conveys a gradual decline in quality and value from the original state, eventually leading to deterioration. This attribute is also characteristic of gold, as the metal tends to degrade over time. This property is mapped onto the concept of health, representing the gradual decline of physical health.

“The type of occupation that wears out your health” (Thanh Mai, 2013).

Through metaphorical mapping, the expression health wear and tear conveys complex information concisely. This example highlights occupations that lead to a slow, gradual decline of health. Drawing from the practical “wear and tear” property of gold, this metaphor exemplifies a way of thinking rooted in the real-life properties of gold, which is used to understand the gradual erosion of health.

The property of erosion involves gradual deterioration that eventually leads to damage. This characteristic is common among metals, particularly gold. Given its value, each instance of erosion represents a significant loss.

Frequent stress and staying up too late are factors that erode people’s health by weakening the immune system. (Khanh Vy, 2023)

The metaphor of eroding health reflects a perception grounded in the physical corrosion of gold. Each metaphor illustrates different aspects of how health is understood. Factors such as stress and lack of sleep contribute to the gradual erosion of health, eventually leading to exhaustion. This metaphor, based on gold’s corrosive properties, effectively conveys the slow deterioration of health and produces a compelling cognitive effect in metaphorical thinking.

*Loss: The attribute of loss signifies that something that once belonged to us has become invisible or is no longer present. This metaphorical mapping is grounded in real-life experiences. Gold, being a valuable asset, evokes a deep sense of regret when lost- a significant and impactful loss. This quality is mapped onto the

concept of health.

“It is to lose health than to maintain it. We only truly value health, as we do with time, once it is lost” (Nguyen Lan Dung, 2023).

Health is an inherent part of human biology; without it, individuals lose their vitality to live and work. The metaphor of loss in this example demonstrates a mapping pattern where the attribute of regret upon loss becomes salient. That is why we need to treasure our health.

*Improvement/deterioration: The concepts of improvement and deterioration are closely related to value fluctuation. In the source domain GOLD, an increase or decrease in gold value significantly impacts social life, making it a defining attribute of gold. This attribute maps onto the target domain of health, representing changes in human physical health.

“Cachexia syndrome, also known as health deterioration syndrome, is a complication of chronic diseases” (Nguyen Thi Thao Nguyen, 2024).

The term “health deterioration” serves as a metaphor, illustrating the gradual decline in physical condition. This attribute of deterioration reflects a continuous decline, similar to the depreciation of gold. The foundation of this metaphor lies in the principle of similarity between the source domain and the target domain.

*Enhancement: “Strength exercises, such as weightlifting, have been scientifically proven to effectively enhance bone health” (Ngoc Quy, 2024).

The concept of health enhancement involves enhancing or fortifying, projecting a metaphor that contributes to improved physical health. In this case, the property of strengthening implies making something stronger or more resilient, which is mapped onto the target domain to signify improved bone health. The cognitive mechanism combines the inherent characteristics of strengthening with the specific activity of weightlifting to produce a clear mapping effect.

5. Discussion

Research on conceptual metaphors is currently of significant interest to epistemologists. This study provides an initial exploration of the ways Vietnamese people conceptualize HEALTH through the mapping of the source concept GOLD. The typical attributes of the source domain GOLD are mapped onto the target domain HEALTH, raising further questions for investigation. The research results have demonstrated the correlation between the source domain GOLD and the target domain HEALTH. It is the connection in terms of value, property, usage, etc. The naturally abstract concept of target domain HEALTH has become easy to understand. Health is valuable to every human being; the essential and precious nature of health in life and the way of maintaining health is similar to the use of gold, if treasured, it will last and if squandered, it will be gone. All these attributes of health appear clearly through the reflection of the source domain GOLD.

For instance, in other languages, are the attributes of GOLD mapped similarly onto HEALTH as they are in Vietnamese? Additionally, beyond GOLD, are there other source domains that also map onto the concept of HEALTH? This represents an area for further research to deepen our understanding of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural cognitive frameworks.

6. Conclusion

Thus, conceptual metaphor serves as a cognitive framework in human thought, manifesting in daily life through the ways we think and communicate. At its core, a conceptual metaphor involves a mapping from a source domain onto a target domain. This mapping enables a clearer and more elaborate understanding of the target domain. This article is grounded in the principles and nature of conceptual metaphor. Studying conceptual metaphors is also a study of the unique characteristics of national thought. The metaphor “HEALTH IS GOLD” illustrates how Vietnamese people conceptualize health, drawing on a cognitive framework where the target domain is human, and the source domain is wealth. Through this cognitive framework, the properties of the source domain are mapped, creating a structured model for understanding health. An analysis of 200 articles reveals 18 metaphorical examples in alignment with this mapping. While the source domain contains multiple attributes, only certain ones are mapped onto the target domain. For instance, the attribute of color is not whereas attributes related to properties and characteristics of gold have multiple metaphorical references onto health. This finding suggests that each target concept involves a selective process, where only specific attributes are mapped to enhance meaning.

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