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# Conceptual metaphors of Vietnamese taste terms

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## Abstract

The objectives of this study were to examine the use, metaphorical meanings and metaphorical concepts of four Taste Terms in Vietnamese, namely bitter, salty, sour and sweet. The data of the taste terms were collected from dictionaries, linguistic corpora and interviews with five informants.

The result on metaphorical distribution of the taste terms based on their structure reveal that the terms in Vietnamese languages have metaphorical use in two types. The first type is single taste terms with metaphorical meaning. The second type is the taste terms in combination with other words with metaphorical meanings. This type is divided into the taste terms in combination with other taste terms and the taste terms in combination with other words. Each type is different in details.

With the regard to the result on metaphorical meanings in Vietnamese, the taste terms are categorized in one semantic domain: state metaphor. The state metaphor was semantically divided into three subgroups: feelings metaphor, habits/manners metaphor and qualities metaphor. For metaphorical concepts of Vietnamese taste terms can be categorized into concept: *human qualities are taste*<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** methaphor, semantics, taste terms  
**ISO 639-3 codes:** vie

## 1. Introduction

Taste is one of the five basic perceptions of human beings, including sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. Taste is important to the learning and existence of mankind, because man has to eat on a daily basis in order to survive. When food is eaten, the tongue perceives the tastes and sends signals to the brain to process the perceptions. Moreover, humans have created lexical items to express or describe various kinds of tastes. These words are called taste terms, which vary from one language and culture to another.

Taste terms in certain languages are used not only to describe or refer to tastes but to compare other entities as well. In Vietnamese, the term *chua* ‘sour’ in the expression

Cô	ấy	giọng	<i>chua</i>	lắm.
woman	3 <sup>rd</sup>	voice	<i>sour</i>	very

‘That woman has a very high pitched voice.’

The word *chua* refers to an attribute of a high, ear-splitting voice. It can be seen that *chua* ‘sour, acidic and corrosive to the throat when eating something sour’ has been transferred its inherent meaning of taste to the perception of sound.

From the above examples, it is seen that the meanings of taste terms have been used comparatively to refer to other entities with different meanings. In cognitive linguistics, the process is called metaphor. This is different from literature which describes metaphor as a figurative language meant to provoke emotions and visualize images that authors or poets want to convey as well as to classify types of metaphors in the language. However, cognitive linguistics views metaphor as a concept system that humans learn from the environment by means of comparison or analogy. What they have learned reflects in the language they speak on a daily basis

1. In this study, metaphorical concepts are written as devised by George Lakoff. The metaphorical concepts are written from target domain to source domain (TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN).

and metaphorical language expresses the concepts, thinking and beliefs of members of a particular society.

It is thus interesting to examine meanings and metaphorical concepts of the taste terms Vietnamese based on the cognitive linguistics, because the investigation would enhance better understanding of the mental and cultural systems of native speakers of the Vietnamese. Additionally, it would help us to better understand perspectives of the Vietnamese culture. More importantly, there have not been previous studies on metaphor of taste terms in the Vietnamese language.

### *1.1 Metaphor according to cognitive linguistics*

This is a new trend of language study, viewing metaphor as a language used in daily life and reflecting the processes of thinking and perception of language users.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) were pioneers in applying cognitive linguistics to analyze meanings. They stated that metaphor is a language form used in daily life and reflects the thinking process, beliefs and concepts of social members. Language users are usually unaware that the language they use for daily communication is metaphor. Additionally, metaphor expresses systematization and this systematization reflects conceptual metaphor that tells how language users think about and understand events and things in their culture.

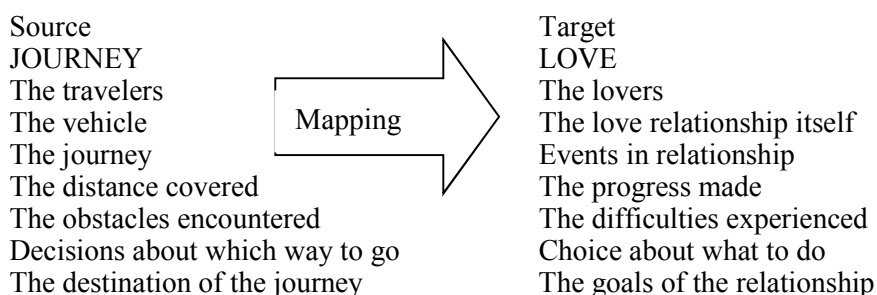
Lakoff and Johnson (1980) gave an example of metaphorical language use about time of English speakers. It is found that there are several expressions about time in English that express temporal metaphor.

How do you *spend* your time these days?  
That flat tire *cost* me an hour.  
I've *invested* a lot of time in her.  
You need to *budget* your time.  
You don't *use* your time *profitably*.

(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 8)

The above sentences use words usually collocated with money (spend, cost, invested, budget, use and profitably) to collocate with time. They are metaphorical and systematic, which implies the conceptual metaphor of English speakers that TIME IS MONEY. It is further found that there are other types of metaphor in English, such as LOVE IS A JOURNEY, MORE IS UP, or ARGUMENT IS WAR. These metaphors support Lakoff's view that human thinking processes are in the form of metaphor.

Lakoff further explained that metaphorical thinking processes map common aspects or qualities of source and target. The mapping is unidirectional from source to target, not the other way round. He cited an example of mapping of metaphorical concept of LOVE IS A JOURNEY. The source is JOURNEY and the target is LOVE. The mapping is illustrated as follows:



(Kovecses, 2002 cited in Chatchawadee, 2007)

The above diagram illustrates the ontological correspondences, the 'the travelers' as the source domain and 'the lovers' as the target domain. The two domains are in the one-on-one correspondence as follows.

- ‘The travelers’ are in correspondence with ‘The lovers’.
- ‘The vehicle’ is in correspondence with ‘The love relationship itself’.
- ‘The journey’ is in correspondence with ‘Events in relationship’.
- ‘The distance covered’ is in correspondence with ‘The progress made’.
- ‘The obstacles encountered’ is in correspondence with ‘The difficulties experienced’.
- ‘Decisions about which way to go’ is in correspondence with ‘Choice about what to do’.

and ‘The destination of the journey’ is in correspondence with ‘The goals of the relationship’.

Regarding semantic correspondences, Croft and Cruise (2004) categorize the correspondences into two types as follows.

1) Ontological correspondences refer to semantic correspondences from source to target on a one-to-one basis, as shown in the following example.

The ontological correspondences of the “anger” metaphor

<i>Source</i>	<i>Target</i>
- Container	- Body
- Heat of liquid	- Anger
- Level of heat	- Level of anger

2) Epistemic correspondences refer to the semantic correspondences from source to target on a group or collective basis. In the source, components are related to a collective basis and they correspond to the target components which are related to a collective basis as well, as shown in the following example.

The epistemic correspondences of the “anger” metaphor

<i>Source</i>	<i>Target</i>
- When liquid in a container is overheated, the pressure increases to the point of explosion.	- When anger is at its peak, one loses self-control.
- The explosion damages the container and harms people nearby.	- Loss of self control is harmful and endangers others nearby.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed that metaphor could be found in language of daily use and the metaphors used in daily life reflected the thinking systems, beliefs and concepts of social members. Their proposal has brought about an interest among linguists to study meanings of words. Many have investigated metaphor in language in everyday use or metaphor according to cognitive linguistics. Investigations on metaphor in Vietnamese are summarized as follows.

- Phoung Vi Vo (2003) investigated the conceptual metaphor of “love” in Vietnamese from past to present in poems and songs in contemporary and folk literature.
- Ly Toan Thang (2011) investigated the Vietnamese Expression of BODY and SOUL: A Cognitive and Cultural Linguistic Study
- Ly Toan Tanga and Kieu Van Le Thi (2013) A cross-cultural study of conceptualizing internal body organs in SEA languages.

As for metaphorical studies of taste terms, there have not been any previous investigations. Most studies focused on linguistic forms of taste terms, their structures and meanings in order to examine the mentality and understanding of language users. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate metaphors of taste terms to understand the mentalities and concepts of Vietnamese speakers.

## 2. Results

The results of the analysis are presented in three topics as follows.

## 2.1 The metaphorical use of taste terms

According to the investigation and analysis of the four Vietnamese taste terms, namely *chua* ‘sour’, *đắng* ‘bitter’, *mặn* ‘salty’ and *ngọt* ‘sweet’, it is found that their metaphorical distribution of taste terms can be grouped into two main groups according to their structures as follows.

### 2.1.1 Single word taste terms with connotative meanings

#### 2.1.2 Taste terms compounded with other words with connotative meanings

This type was divided into two subtypes based on their occurrence as follows:

A taste term co-occurring with another taste term

A taste term in combination with other words

#### 2.1.1 Single word taste terms with connotative meanings

There is only one taste term *chua* that can occur as single words with metaphorical meanings in context. This is shown in the following examples.

- 1) *chua*  
 Cô            ấy            chua            lắm.  
 woman      3<sup>rd</sup>            sour            very  
 ‘That woman is very outrageous.’

#### 2.1.2 Taste terms compounded with other words with connotative meanings

##### A) A taste term co-occurring with another taste term

There are two terms: *chua* and *đắng* that can co-occur with other taste terms with metaphorical meanings. Each taste term can precede or follow another taste term as a compound word. This is shown in the following examples.

- 2) *chua* ‘sour’ + *cay* ‘spicy’  
 Lời            châm biếm      chua            cay.  
 word          satirize            sour            spicy  
 ‘Bitter sarcasms’

In (2) *chua* precedes a taste term *cay* forming a compound.

- 3) *cay* ‘spicy’ + *chua* ‘sour’  
 Lời            châm biếm            cay            chua.  
 word          satirize                    spicy            sour  
 ‘Bitter sarcasms’

In (3) *chua* follows a taste term *cay* forming a compound.

- 4) *đắng* ‘bitter’ + *cay* ‘spicy’  
 Trên    khuôn mặt      cô            ấy,            tràn đầy      những    giọt      nước mắt      đắng  
 on        face                    woman      3<sup>rd</sup>            brimful      some      drop      tear            bitter  
*cay.*  
*spicy*

‘Her face is covered with tears of bitterness.’

In (4) *đắng* precedes a taste term *cay* forming a compound.

- 5) *cay* ‘spicy’ + *đắng* ‘bitter’  
 Bao nhiêu    cay            đắng,      bấy            nhiêu      niềm tin.  
 how much    spicy            bitter      so            much      sense of confidence  
 ‘So much bitterness, so much faith’

In (5) *đắng* follows a taste term *cay* forming a compound.

B) A taste term is in combination with other words

Furthermore, the term *chua*, *mặn* and *ngọt* also have metaphorical meanings when they compound with other words, either before or after the compounding elements, as shown in the following examples.

6) *giọng* ‘voice’+ *chua* ‘sour’

Cô            ấy            giọng    chua            lắm.  
woman    3<sup>rd</sup>            voice    sour            very

‘That woman has a very high pitched voice.’

In (6) *chua* follows a noun *giọng* ‘voice’ forming a compound.

7) *nói* ‘speak’+ *ngọt* ‘sweet’

Nói            ngon            nói            ngọt.  
speak        delicious    speak        sweet

‘To use sweet words’

In (7) *ngọt* follows a verb *nói* ‘speak’ forming a compound.

8) *chua* ‘sour’+ *xót* ‘sting’

Cảnh ngộ    chua            xót.  
Plight        sour            sting

‘A heart-rending plight’

In (8) *chua* precedes a noun *xót* ‘sting’ forming a compound.

9) *mặn* ‘salty’+ *tình* ‘love’

Mặn        tình        anh                    em.  
Salty    love    older brother    younger brother

‘Warm brotherhood’

In (9) *mặn* precedes a noun *tình* ‘love’ forming a compound.

10) *ngọt* ‘sweet’+ *ngào* ‘cook in syrup’

Cười    cười    nói    nói    ngọt    ngào.  
smile    smile    say    say    sweet    cook in syrup

‘To smile and speak suavely.’

In (9) *ngọt* precedes a noun *ngào* ‘cook in syrup’ forming a compound.

## 2.2 Metaphorical meanings and semantic mapping of Vietnamese taste terms

The investigation of the four taste terms further reveals that they have one semantic domain: state metaphor.

Before presenting examples of the analysis of metaphorical meanings and semantic mapping of the Vietnamese taste terms, it would be better to discuss attributes of the four taste terms in order to facilitate better understanding about the analysis of their semantic mapping. This is due to the fact that one taste term has different attributes in different contexts. Therefore, some prominent attributes that are in line with the aspects in the target domain are presented. Details of the attributes of the taste terms are shown in the alphabetical order as follows.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [ ] indicates a semantic attribute of a word.

<i>Chua</i> 'sour'	<i>Đắng</i> 'bitter'
[A taste of unripe fruit]	[Mouth-sticking taste]
[Able to be cooked]	[Oral perception]
[Acidic taste]	[Perceived taste]
[A unique taste]	[Taste in the mouth]
[Irritating throat]	[Taste of gallbladder]
[Oral perception]	[Unfavorable]
[Perceived taste]	[Unsavory]
[Sharp taste]	
[Taste of lemon]	
[Taste of star apple]	
[Taste of tamarind]	
[Tingling in the teeth]	
<i>Mặn</i> 'salty'	<i>Ngọt</i> 'sweet'
[Be full-flavored]	[A taste of ripe fruit]
[Healing and preventing oral diseases]	[Clear as sugary syrup]
[Intense taste]	[Good taste]
[Make thirsty]	[Liking]
[Oral perception]	[Oral perception]
[Perceived taste]	[Perceived taste]
[Preserving food for a long time]	[Savory]
[Taste of salt]	[Sugary]
[Taste that difficult to change]	[Taste of sugar]
[Valuable]	

### 2.2.1 State metaphor

A state metaphor refers to linguistic forms with reference to deeds and manners. In this study, state metaphor includes feelings which are states occurring in the mind, and habits and manners which are states of actions expressed externally.

It was found from this investigation that the state metaphor was semantically divided into three domains: feelings metaphor, habits/manners metaphor, and qualities metaphor. Details are as follows.

#### *Feelings metaphor*

Feelings metaphor refers to taste terms with comparative meanings to feelings that occur in the minds of humans.

There are four taste terms: *chua*, *đắng*, *mặn* and *ngọt*, co-occurring with other taste terms and other words, which metaphorically express feelings. This is shown in the following example.

In presenting the data for analysis, the taste terms from each language were arranged in alphabetical order.

- 11) Nhếch                      mép                      cười      *chua*      *chát*.  
 part a corner              corner.of.mouth      smile      *sour*      *tart*  
 'To smile with bitterness'

*chua chát* means bitterness<sup>2</sup>. *Chua* is sour and *chát* is tart. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it means bitterness. *Chua chát* metaphorically represents a mental corrosive feeling. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<sup>2</sup> This and subsequent English translations of Vietnamese taste terms follow the dictionary of Nguyễn Sanh Phúc (2000).

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	feelings
<i>chua</i> ‘sour’+ <i>chát</i> ‘tart’	bitterness
[Perceived taste] [Perceived taste]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception] [Oral perception]	[Mental perception]
[Acidic]	[Corrosive feeling]

**Diagram 1:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua* in *chua chát*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *chua* ‘sour’ and its compounding element, *chát* ‘tart’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Chua* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings], from [oral perception] to [mental perception] and from [acidic] to [corrosive feeling]. *Chát* also transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings] and from [oral perception] to [mental perception].

- 12) Cô ấy cảm thấy *chua xót* lắm khi nhìn thấy những đứa  
 She that feel *sour sting* very when see some CL  
 trẻ mồ côi này.  
 child orphan this  
 ‘The woman felt sad when she saw these orphans.’

*Chua xót* means painfulness. *Chua* is sour and *xót* is to sting. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it means painfulness. *Chua* metaphorically represents a mental corrosive feeling. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	feelings
<i>chua</i> ‘sour’ + <i>xót</i> ‘to sting’	painfulness
[Perceived taste] [Cause sharp pain]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception]	[Mental perception]
[Acidic]	[Corrosive feeling]
	[Painful]

**Diagram 2:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua* in *chua xót*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *chua* ‘sour’ and its compounding element, *xót* ‘to sting’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Chua* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings], from [oral perception] to [mental perception] and from [acidic] to [corrosive feeling]. *Xót* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [cause sharp pain] to the target domain [painful].

- 13) Đó là một bài học *đắng cay* dành cho người ích kỷ như  
 that is one lesson *bitter spicy* for give person selfish like  
 vậy.  
 this  
 ‘That is a bitter lesson for a selfish person.’
- 14) Những nỗi ngọt bùi và *cay đắng*.  
 some feeling sweet crunchy and *spicy bitter*  
 ‘The sweets and the bitter of life’

*Đắng cay* or *cay đắng* means suffering. *Đắng* is bitter and *cay* is spicy. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically expresses mentally suffering feelings. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.



<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term		feelings
<i>đắng</i> ‘bitter’ + <i>cay</i> ‘spicy’		suffering
[Perceived taste]	[Perceived taste]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception]	[Oral perception]	[Mental perception]
[Unfavorable]	[Corrosively hot]	[Unpleasant]
		[Corrosive feeling]
		[Suffering]

**Diagram 3:** metaphorical mapping process of *đắng* in *đắng cay*

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term		feelings
<i>cay</i> ‘spicy’ + <i>đắng</i> ‘bitter’		suffering
[Perceived taste]	[Perceived taste]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception]	[Oral perception]	[Mental perception]
[Corrosively hot]	[Unfavorable]	[Unpleasant]
		[Corrosive feeling]
		[Suffering]

**Diagram 4:** metaphorical mapping process of *đắng* in *cay đắng*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *cay* ‘spicy’ and its compounding element, *đắng* ‘bitter’ are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Đắng* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings], from [oral perception] to [mental perception] and from [unfavorable] to [unpleasant]. *Cay* also transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings], from [oral perception] to [mental perception] and from [corrosively hot] to the target domain [corrosive feeling].

- 15) Anh      chị      ấy      yêu      nhau      *mặn*      *nồng*      lắm.  
 Brother    sister    3<sup>rd</sup>      love      together    *salty*      *warm*      very  
 ‘That couple loves each other warmly.’

*Mặn nồng* means warm and timely love. *Mặn* is salty and *nồng* is warm or hot. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, its metaphorical meaning is a timely love. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term		feelings
<i>mặn</i> ‘salty’ + <i>nồng</i> ‘warm’		warm and timely love
[Perceived taste]	[Perceived feelings]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception]	[Body perception]	[Mental perception]
[Be full-flavored]	[A fairly high degree of hot]	[Good Feeling]
		[Closely]
		[Affectionate]

**Diagram 5:** metaphorical mapping process of *mặn* in *mặn nồng*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *mặn* ‘salty’ and its compounding element, *nồng* ‘warm or hot’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Mặn* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [oral perception] to the target domain [mental perception] and from [be full-flavored] to [closely]. *Nồng* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived feelings] to the target domain [perceived feelings], from [body perception] to [mental perception] and from [not cold] to [good feeling].

- 16) *Mặn tình* anh em.  
*salty love* older brother younger brother  
 ‘warm brotherhood’

*Mặn tình* means intense love. *Mặn* is salty and *tình* means love. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, its metaphorical meaning is intense love. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	feelings
<i>mặn</i> ‘salty’ + <i>tình</i> ‘love’	intense love
[Perceived taste] [Perceived feelings]	[Perceived feelings]
[Oral perception] [Mental perception]	[Mental perception]
[Intense]	[Overwhelming feeling]
[Taste that is difficult to change]	[Feeling that is difficult to change]

**Diagram 6:** metaphorical mapping process of *mặn* in *mặn tình*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *mặn* ‘salty’ and its compounding element, *tình* ‘love’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Mặn* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [intense] to [overwhelming feeling] and from [taste that is difficult to change] to [feeling that is difficult to change]. *Tình* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived feelings] to the target domain [perceived feelings] and from [mental perception] to [mental perception].

- 17) Trái qua biết bao khó khăn, cô ấy đã cảm nhận  
 through know many difficulty woman 3<sup>rd</sup> already feel get  
 được những ngọt bùi.  
 get some sweet crunchy  
 ‘After having been through life’s difficulties, she has finally found happiness.’

*Ngọt bùi* means fun or happiness. *Ngọt* is sweet and *bùi* is crunchy. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically means happy or enjoyable feelings. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	feelings
<i>ngọt</i> ‘sweet’ + <i>bùi</i> ‘crunchy’	fun or happiness
[Perceived taste] [Perceived taste]	[Perceived feelings]
[Savory] [Pleasingly]	[Favorable]
	[Enjoy]

**Diagram 7:** metaphorical mapping process of *ngọt* in *ngọt bùi*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *ngọt* ‘sweet’ and its compounding element, *bùi* ‘crunchy’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a feelings metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Ngọt* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings] and from [savory] to [favorable]. *Bùi* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived feelings] and from [pleasingly] to [enjoy].

#### *Habits/manners metaphor*

From the investigation, there are two taste terms, *chua* and *ngot*, which metaphorically express habits or manners. *Chua* can occur alone or co-occur with other words, as shown in the following example.

- 18) Cô                    ấy            *chua*   lắm.  
 woman                3<sup>rd</sup>            *sour*   very  
 ‘That woman is very outrageous.’

*Chua* metaphorically represent an overconfident manner of a woman or a woman dressed in outlandish color. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	habits or manners
<i>chua</i> ‘sour’	an overconfident manner of a woman or a woman dressed in outlandish color.
[Perceived taste]	[Perceived personality]
[Sharp taste]	[Strike the eyes]
[A unique taste]	[A unique personality]
	[Self-confidence]

**Diagram 8:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua*

From the above semantic mapping, it is found that the attribute, [perceived taste], [sharp taste] and [unique taste] of the term *chua* is transferred to the target domain, [perceived personality], [strike the eyes] and [unique personality] respectively, which is a habits/manners metaphor, which is a subgroup of the state metaphor category.

- 19) Chị            Hạnh   là        người   *chanh chua*   trong   gia đình   đó.  
 older sister Hanh is person lemon sour in family that  
 ‘Ha is the most outlandish person in that family.’

*Chanh chua* means a confident and tomboyish manner. *Chanh* means lemon and *chua* means sour. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically represents an overconfident manner of a woman. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>	<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term	habits or manners
<i>chanh</i> ‘lemon’+ <i>chua</i> ‘sour’	overconfident manner
[Fruit]                    [Perceived taste]	[Perceived personality]
[Acidic taste]            [Acidic taste]	[Strike the eyes]
[A unique taste]        [A unique personality]	[Self-confidence]

**Diagram 9:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua* in *chanh chua*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *chanh* ‘lemon’ and its compounding element, *chua* ‘sour’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a habits/manners metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Chanh* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [acidic taste] to the target domain [outlandish color]. *Chua* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived personality] and from [acidic taste] to [strike the eyes].

- 20) Cô gái        ấy            là        người   *chua ngoa*.  
 woman        3<sup>rd</sup>            is        person   *sour rude*  
 ‘She is rude’

*Chua ngoa* means a confident manner. *Chua* means sour and *ngoa* means rude. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically represents an overconfident manner of a woman. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term		habits or manners
<i>chua</i> ‘sour’ + <i>ngoạ</i> ‘rude’		an overconfident manner of a woman and exploit.
[Perceived taste]	[High pitch]	[Perceived personality]
[Irritating to throat]	[Irritating to ears]	[Strike the eyes]
[A unique taste]		[A unique personality]
		[Self-confidence]

**Diagram 10:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua* in *chua ngoạ*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *chua* ‘sour’ and its compounding element, *ngoạ* ‘rude’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a habits/manners metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Chua* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived personality], from [irritating to throat] to [strike the eyes] and from [a unique taste] to [a unique personality]. *Ngoạ* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [irritating to ears] to [strike the eyes]

- 21) Ngoài mặt thì ngọt ngào, trong bụng thì thâm độc.  
 outside face CON suave inside stomach CON wicked  
 ‘To be suave on the outside and to be wicked within.’

*Ngọt ngào* means gentle and sweet. *Ngọt* means sweet and *ngào* means to mix in syrup. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically represents a gentle and sweet manner. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>
Taste term		persons
<i>ngọt</i> ‘sweet’+ <i>ngào</i> ‘to mix in syrup’		gentle and sweet
[Perceived taste]	[Sweet]	[Perceived personality]
[Sugary]	[Outside]	[Outside aspects]
		[Favorable]

**Diagram 11:** metaphorical mapping process of *ngọt* in *ngọt ngào*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *ngọt* ‘sweet’ and its compounding element, *ngào* ‘to mix in syrup’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a habits/manners metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Ngọt* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [perceived taste] to the target domain [perceived personality] and from [sugary] to [favorable]. *Ngào* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [outside] to the target domain [outside aspects].

### *Qualities metaphor*

From the investigation, *chua* and *ngọt* metaphorically express qualities and they occur with other taste terms and other words. In proverbs, only *chua* expresses qualities. This is shown in the following example.

- 22) Cô ấy là người dẫn chương trình thì không thể có  
 woman 3<sup>rd</sup> is person guide program CON cannot have  
*giọng chua* được.  
 voice sour get  
 ‘That woman is an MC, so she cannot use a high-pitched voice.’

*Giọng chua* means a high-pitched voice. *Giọng* means voice and *chua* means sour. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically represents a high-pitched voice. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>	
Taste term		qualities	
<i>giọng</i> ‘voice’ + <i>chua</i> ‘sour’		a high-pitched voice	
[Speech production]	[Perceived taste]	[Hearing voice]	
	[Irritating to throat]	[Irritating to ears]	

**Diagram 12:** metaphorical mapping process of *chua* in *giọng chua*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *giọng* ‘voice’ and its compounding element, *chua* ‘sour’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a qualities metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Giọng* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [speech production] to the target domain [hearing voice]. *Chua* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [irritating to throat] to the target domain [irritating to ears].

- 23) Người thầy giáo ấy luôn nói ngọt với học sinh.  
 CL teacher 3<sup>rd</sup> always speak sweet with student  
 ‘Teacher always speak sweet words with students’

*Nói ngọt* means to speak sweetly. *Nói* means to speak and *ngọt* means sweet. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically means to speak sweetly or pleasantly, which is a state of speech. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>	
Taste term		state of being	
<i>nói</i> ‘speak’+ <i>ngọt</i> ‘sweet’		to speak sweetly	
[Speech production]	[Oral perception]	[Auditory perception]	
	[Tasty look]	[Savory]	
	[Pleasant]		

**Diagram 13:** metaphorical mapping process of *ngọt* in *nói ngọt*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *nói* ‘speak’ and its compounding element, *ngọt* ‘sweet’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a qualities metaphor, a part of the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Nói* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [speech production] to the target domain [auditory perception] *Ngọt* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [oral perception] to the target domain [auditory perception] and from the [savory] to [pleasant].

- 24) Giọng nói ngọt ngào.  
 voice speak sweet mix in syrup  
 ‘Sweet tone of voice’

*Ngọt ngào* means sweet tone of voice. *Ngọt* means sweet and *ngào* means to mix in syrup. When the two words co-occur as a single unit, it metaphorically represents sweet voice. The transfer of its semantic attributes can be illustrated as follows.

<i>Source Domain</i>		<i>Target Domain</i>	
Taste term		qualities	
<i>ngọt</i> ‘sweet’+ <i>ngào</i> ‘to mix in syrup’		sweet	
[Oral perception]	[Conformity]	[Auditory perception]	
[Savory]	[Outside]	[Outside aspects]	
		[Pleasant]	

**Diagram 14:** metaphorical mapping process of *ngọt* in *ngọt ngào*

From the above semantic mapping, attributes of *ngọt* ‘sweet’ and its compounding element, *ngào* ‘to mix in syrup’, are transferred to the target domain, which is a qualities metaphor, a part of

the state metaphor. Details of the attribute transfer are shown as follows. *Ngọt* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [oral perception] to the target domain [auditory perception] and from [savory] to [pleasant]. *Ngào* transfers its semantic attributes from the source domain [outside] to the target domain [outside aspects].

From the data presented, it can be seen that semantic mapping of the taste terms has been transferred from the oral perception to various kinds of perceptions, be they visual perception, auditory perception, and mental perception, which is similar to Thai taste terms.

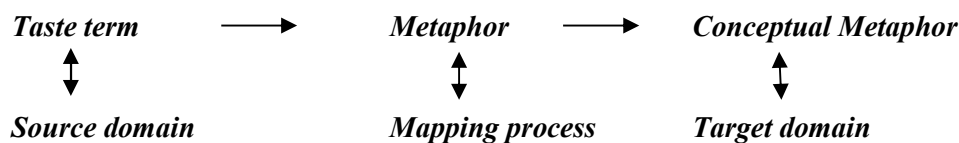
As for Vietnamese taste terms in combination with other words, it is found that most of the compounding elements are nouns, but one word is found to be a verb, *nói* ‘speak’, as in (23), which is similar to Thai taste terms. However, the compounding nouns are more numerous. For the compounding elements, if their meanings are related to perceptions, these shared properties with the taste terms are transferred to the target domain as well.

### 2.3 Metaphorical concepts of the Vietnamese taste terms

From examining metaphors of the taste terms, it is found that, besides realizing their comparative meanings, the metaphors enable us to perceive the concepts of language users, as reflected in Lakoff:

“...Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”  
Lakoff (1980: 3)

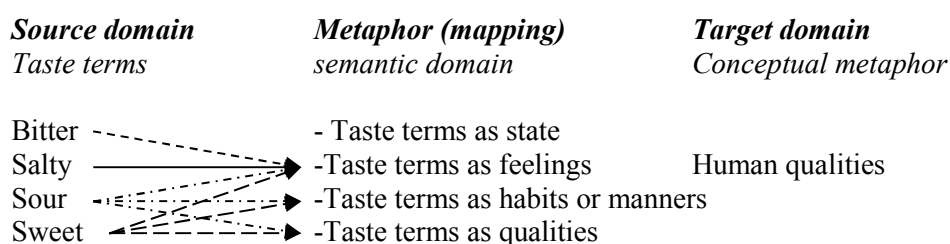
Metaphor that reflects the concepts of language users is called a conceptual metaphor. From the above-mentioned examples, the relationship between the taste terms, metaphor and concept can be illustrated in the following figure.



**Figure 2:** Process of conceptual metaphor of taste terms

From the above diagram, it can be explained that taste terms are used to describe tastes. When they are used to compare things, they are regarded as a source domain and objects being compared are regarded as a target domain. This use of comparative taste terms reflects how language users have metaphorical concepts about the terms. During the comparison, attributes of the terms will be transferred to the objects being compared.

It is found in Vietnamese that metaphorical meanings of the four Vietnamese taste terms, they can be categorized into one semantic domain: state metaphor as mentioned earlier. The state metaphor was divided into three subgroups: feelings metaphor, habits/manners metaphor, and qualities metaphor. Thus, it can be generalized in terms of taste terms as concepts that HUMAN QUALITIES ARE TASTES. As shown in following figure.



**Figure 3:** Process of conceptual metaphor of Vietnamese taste terms

In summary, the taste terms in Vietnamese reflect metaphorical concepts among Vietnamese speakers: *human qualities are tastes*.

### 3. Summary and conclusion

It is found from the analysis that there are two major types of metaphorical use of Vietnamese taste terms. The first type is single taste terms with metaphorical meanings. The second type is the taste terms in combination with other taste terms with metaphorical meanings. This type is also divided into the taste terms in combination with other taste terms and the taste terms in combination with other words.

First, the taste terms occur singly and *chua* is the only one in this category. Second, the terms occurring with other taste terms and *đắng* and *chua* are found in this category. They generally occur as the first element of compound words. Finally, the terms occurring with other words and *mặn*, *chua* and *ngọt* are found in this category. They generally occur as the first element of the compound words.

For metaphorical meanings, it is found that the taste terms can be categorized into one domain: state metaphor as expressed by *chua*, *đắng*, *mặn* and *ngọt*.

Regarding metaphorical concepts, the terms are metaphorically used in one domain as mentioned earlier. The metaphorical use of the terms can be categorized into one concept: *human qualities are tastes*

The investigation reveals that the findings are in line with the concept posited by Lakoff in that metaphor is related to the thinking system of human beings. When man perceives a new thing, it will be compared with existing experience and reflects the new concept in a language form rather than stating that a metaphor is a form of linguistic creativity of language users. When taste terms are considered, it is clear that they could not be categorized into any forms of conventional metaphors. Nevertheless, the taste terms do have metaphorical meanings that reflect the concepts of native speakers.

On the issue that human thinking system compares abstract objects to concrete objects; the findings from this investigation indicate that the taste terms are compared with many other things. It is still not clear whether the taste terms are concrete or not, as the terms are individualistic and idiosyncratic. For instance, a fruit may be sour to one but not to another. Anyway, the taste terms are regarded as a fundamental experience of humans, because every normal person can perceive tastes of various kinds. The comparison is based on daily fundamental experience in order to make it easy to understand. This thesis is also in accordance with embodiment theory in cognitive linguistics.

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### Websites/online resources

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sugar\\_addition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sugar_addition)
- <http://sealang.net/vietnamese/corpus.htm>
- <http://www.bioresearchonline.com/article.mvc/Taste-Perception-Differs-Fundamentally-from-O-0001>
- <http://www.scientificpsychic.com/workbook/chapter2.htm>
- <http://icaal.org/ICAAL-4.2.pdf>

### Definition of terms

*Taste terms* are words that humans have created to express or describe various kinds of tastes that they perceived. In this investigation taste terms include bitter, salty, sweet and sour.

*Conceptual metaphor* is a linguistic form derived from comparatively using a word with its inherent meaning that refers to one entity to refer to another entity and the use of such a language form exists on a daily basis, which reflects a concept system of language users.

*Metaphor of taste terms* refer to a language form derived from a comparative use of taste terms to refer to other entities.

*Semantic domain* is a group of words with shared semantic properties. In other words, it is a word group that native speakers have the concept (perception and understanding) on that the words have common properties, so they are classified into the same categories.



*Source domain* is a representation of word properties that native speakers have the concept about (perception and understanding). Some properties can be mapping to representation of words in the target domain.

*Target domain* is a representation of word properties that native speakers have the concept about (perception and understanding). And some features of those words can be linked with some features in the source domain. In this way, the target domain is being understood in terms of the source domain.

*Semantic mapping* is a process that shows a semantic relationship of words used in comparative manners. The mapping is unidirectional: from source domain to target domain.

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