

A Cognitive Study of Expressions Based on Hearing in English and Vietnamese

Tran Thi Thuy Oanh, University of Foreign Language Studies - The University of Danang, Vietnam

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Abstract

Hearing is said to be the sense of linguistic communication and in fact, in all the meanings, both concrete and abstract, it seems to be so. Through experiencing of human, hearing is used for many expressions in daily life popularly. In the view of cognitive linguistics, “the design features of languages and our ability to learn and use them are accounted for by general cognitive abilities” (Barcelona, 1997:8). In fact, hearing is considered a sense through which a person can understand, know, recognise, detect, imagine, discover or find sound. As in an example of “*You buy your life with it. You hear me? You give it to that dago devil and buy your life*”, the speaker wants the hearer to ‘understand’ what he/she transfers, he/she uses ‘hear’ to express his/her meaning, when the hearer can hear, it means that person can understand his/her thought. This paper refers to study the expressions based on hearing in both English and Vietnamese under the cognitive views. Since then, the article is concluded that English and Vietnamese people share the expressions based on hearing. This study will help teachers as well as learners of English linguistics approach their meanings exactly.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor, mapping, human senses, hearing.

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Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is considered “a modern school of linguistic thought with formal approaches to language” (Evans & Green, 2006:5). In the view of the CL, all knowledge and experience human beings use to express the things and events are unfamiliar and/or abstract concepts and the human conceptual system is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:3). In the CL approach, the concepts of metaphor has been changed. Traditionally, metaphor is used for artistic and rhetoric purposes, based on the similarities between two objects, used by only talented people or for special effects (Kövecses, 2010). However, according to Kövecses (2010), “metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words; the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, and not just some artistic or esthetic purpose” (p.10). He also defines that rather than being ‘based on similarity’, metaphor is found to be “used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by special talented people”, and it is, by all means, “an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning”. To understand metaphor, this author suggested ‘source domain’ (SD) – ‘a concrete domain’ and ‘target domain’ (TD) - ‘an abstract concept’. In systematic metaphorical mapping, the human mind can be a common target domain and “an ideal source domain” (2010:10-21). In fact, through experiencing the surrounding world by the senses, human beings express various meaning in communication based on them making language users misunderstand, especially those using English or Vietnamese as a foreign language. Thus, a cognitive study of expressions based on hearing - one of the human senses - in English and Vietnamese is of great significance.

1. Some main related concepts

In this study, we mainly approach Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980/2003) and Kövecses’ (2002/2010) cognitive trend. Hence, we review most of definitions for the study from them.

- Conceptual metaphors (CM)

CM is a “natural part of human thought.” To make it clear of what shape it is, Kövecses (2010) described it as having “two conceptual domains” and between those two domains, one (the target) is understood in terms of another (the source). Although they are the two seemingly different ways, of giving definition, their ideas summit in the point that conceptual metaphor is distinguished from linguistic metaphor and we are indebted to them for multi-dimensional understanding of conceptual metaphor that we draw out from their definition.

- Source domain (SD)

We use SD to understand another conceptual domain (the target domain-TD(s)). They are typically less abstract or less complex than TDs. Mapping keeps intact the “cognitive topology of the source domain” provided that it is “consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain” and he also hypothesizes that there might be.

- *Target domain (TD)*

A relatively abstract, less well-delineated, less familiar, or inherently unstructured concept, called TD. We try to understand the target domain, a conceptual domain, understand the target domain in terms of the structure of the source domain. This understanding is based on a set of conceptual correspondences between elements of the two domains.

- *Mappings*

Conceptual metaphors are characterized by a set of conceptual correspondences between elements of the source and target domains. These correspondences are technically called “mappings.” In other words, the systematic identification of the SD and TD is termed metaphorical mapping. A mapping is the systematic set of correspondences which exist between constituent elements of the SD and TD.

2. Conceptual Metaphors based on Hearing in English and Vietnamese

This paper refers to study the expressions based on hearing in both English and Vietnamese under the cognitive views so as to conduct a comparative study by analyzing 100 (50 from each language) expressions based on hearing.

2.1. In English

Hearing is considered a sense through which a person or animal is aware of sound, the ability to hear, the distance within which someone's voice can be heard, an opportunity to explain why you did, said, or believe something. From these characteristics, we have mappings for metaphorical expressions in daily life through experiencing of humans.

- UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING

Source domain: HEARING Target domain: UNDERSTANDING

This is clarified through the following examples “*I heard that. And I’m not proposing a life of secret passion* (Torow, 2003:519) or “*Twelve gunmen stood waiting until they got far enough out to sea to throw him overboard, while Joe listened to the engine chug and watched the water churn white at the stern* (Lahane, 2012:3).

In these expressions, a further development of meaning “to understand and know” is that in some contexts the speaker understand or know what he does. Through this conceptual metaphor, it can be confirmed that the sense of hearing makes information approached clear, reliable.

- ATTENDING IS HEARING

Source domain: HEARING Target domain: ATTENDING

In this case, the person that speaks the sentence is demanding attention from the hearer, even though the hearer has to obey to do what speakers is telling him to do and

to give attention to someone or something in order to hear the speakers, for example “*Listen to what I found in Rommy’s probation records,*” said Pamela.” (Torow, 2003:5) or “*Okay, people, listen up,*” he said.” (Connelly, 2011:365)

The sense of hearing in this mapping is characterized for meanings as being waiting eagerly to hear about something or stopping listening.

- DETECTING IS HEARING

Source domain: HEARING Target domain: DETECTING

Hearing is said to be the sense of linguistic communication. In all the meanings used in the mapping, the abstract one seems to be quite wide as in expressions as “*He heard (detected) a few creaking sounds from the aircraft, the air stair door on the left side of the fuselage swing down.*” (DeMille, 2010:54) or “*I heard (detected) his voice.*” (Torow, 2003: 512)

An interpersonal relation is acquired in this case aiming to get the semantic field that the sense has sent through context. The conceptual metaphors based on hearing in themselves do mean ‘detect’ contents.

2.2. In Vietnamese

In Vietnamese culture, hearing sense is focused extremely, it is the reason why we have not met any difficulties in collecting the expressions for hearing conceptual metaphors. All conceptual metaphors based on hearing in English could be found in Vietnamese. Thus, we do not repeat SD and TD for these conceptual metaphors from the found expressions.

- UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING

The curious examples are the substitution of the meaning ‘understanding’ or ‘knowing’. This also occurred in Vietnamese. It is also possible to use *nghe, nghe thấy, nghe hiểu, nghe biết* in many metaphorical expressions, such as “*Tôi đau thắt ruột, nước mắt chảy nhòe cả mắt mèo. Không nhìn thấy gì nữa, tôi chỉ nghe thấy tiếng lá cau rung rung từng hồi xào xạc*” (Suong, 2007:278) (‘I feel painful, my tears blurred the eyes. I see nothing, I just listened (knew) to the leaves of areca-nut rustling’) or “*Cục Cục nghe chuyện, cười nhạt, rồi anh uốn lưỡi bảy lần cũng chỉ được một câu:- Đàn bà rắc rối lắm.*” (Suong, 2007:45) (‘Cuc Cuc heard (understood), sickly laughed, then thought over, only one sentence: - Women are so troublesome!’)

- ATTENDING IS HEARING

Hearing is not only the perception of sounds that matters here, but also the perfect identification of those sounds. The semantic closeness between attention/ interest and hearing has been present in English and some other languages including Vietnamese for a very long time; whenever the type of perception is specified and, if referring to attention, when the sound is very soft or vague. The verbs *nghe, lắng nghe, nghe ngóng* better represents this mapping as in “*Có một câu duy nhất ông nói tôi thấy*

đáng nghe, rằng ông bảo ông bất hiếu quá, nên giờ tôi phải chăm sóc bà.” (Suong, 2007:337) (‘Only one speech from my grandfather I could listen (pay attention on) was that he told he was ungrateful to his parents, so now I have to take care of my grandmother’.)

- DETECTING IS HEARING

The phrases as *‘nghe, nghe thấy, nghe không thấy, như nghe, nghe rõ, nghe rõ ràng, nghe đồn, nghe nói, nghe râm ran, nghe râm rộ...’* are approached as an intellectual activity of “finding, discovering, imagining” in Vietnamese as *“Tu như nghe tiếng tanh tách từ miền băng lạnh cảm xúc đang vỡ.”* (Suong, 2007:57) (‘Tu found the onomatopocia of various sounds from the emotional cold ice domain breaking). Once it emphasizes that hearing considered as understanding, knowing is extremely important for Vietnamese.

2.3. Comparison between expressions based on hearing in English and Vietnamese

A second sense of convergence is that the two languages deploy the HEARING image-schema. The collected conceptual metaphors that follow the HEARING image-schema show that a dynamic view as UNDERSTANDING, ATTENDING and DETECTING are involved. The conceptual metaphors for all mappings are found to be common across the two languages.

Table 1 - Comparison between Expressions based on Hearing in English and Vietnamese

	Conceptual metaphors	Expressions in English (%)	Expressions in Vietnamese (%)
1.	UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING	19	11
2.	ATTENDING IS HEARING	15	17
3.	DETECTING IS HEARING	16	22

The conceptual metaphors are based on the commonsense knowledge and everyday experience of people. In both English and Vietnamese, therefore, the expressions based on hearing are structured by metaphor, which are grounded in common bodily experiences. As a result, the two languages share a good number of hearing conceptual metaphors.

3. Implications

For teachers, all main aims of introducing the CMs based on hearing to learners need approaching and understanding to make them be aware of the motivation. As teachers understand the similarities between English and Vietnamese conceptual metaphors based on hearing to teach their students, they can make her/his lesson more interesting. For learners, learners can activate the potentials of using the target language in a more meaningful way, build up vocabulary, meanings as well as determine the comprehension and the creation of a metaphor certainly.

Conclusion

In this study, we have set up the conceptual metaphors 'UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING', 'ATTENDING IS HEARING' and 'DETECTING IS HEARING' followed by those of semantic meanings in order to explain the hearing metaphorical expressions in both English and Vietnamese languages. We have conducted the research by ways of collecting words, phrases or sentences used hearing sense in expressing metaphors in both the English and Vietnamese languages so as to make a systematic analysis and comparison under the CM view, which is mainly based on the related theories in CL. From the perspective of comparative studies, it is said that the living condition regulates the way people think. Following this, two languages show their common points in using the knowledge of themselves, their body, their thought in depicting the world.

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Contact email: oanhthuytrandn@gmail.com