

The Conceptual Metaphor FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN in the Minds of Thai People as an Ethnic Minority in Vietnam

Quynh T. H. Pham

Institute of Linguistics, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam

Tam T. H. Dang

Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam

Hang T. Pham

Tay Do University, Can Tho, Vietnam

Abstract—The Thai people are one of Vietnam's ethnic minorities, possessing distinct cultural characteristics that shape their lived experiences. This paper explores the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A TALISMAN by examining 50 love charm songs that have been passed down through Thai folk culture and ancient texts. The study analyzes a corpus of 121 verbal expressions, categorizing them into three key mappings from the source domain TALISMAN to the target domain FATE OF LOVE. Specifically, the act of creating a TALISMAN symbolizes the formation of emotions, the materials used in its crafting represent the forces that bring two lovers together, and its effects correspond to the stimulation and deepening of love. Furthermore, this study offers insights into the daily life, labor, and spiritual world of the Thai people, revealing their intuitive thinking, which is deeply rooted in familiar, everyday experiences. Their expressions of love and marriage reflect a sincere and unembellished perspective, demonstrating a uniquely innocent and heartfelt way of understanding romantic relationships.

Index Terms—cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, love, talisman, cultural perception

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups, each characterized by distinct cognitive patterns shaped by their living conditions and cultural heritage. The Thai ethnic group primarily resides in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous regions of Vietnam. As an ethnic minority, they possess unique spiritual beliefs, maintaining a deep faith in gods and supernatural forces, which is reflected in their cultural traditions. Among their rich cultural heritage, a collection of mantras and talismans has been preserved through Thai folk culture and ancient texts.

This study focuses on love talismans, known as *koawmx dêt hau mặc* in Vietnamese, by analyzing approximately 50 talisman songs. Through this investigation, researchers explore how the Thai people conceptualize the fate of love using the metaphor FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN. Examining this conceptualization provides valuable insights into the cognitive characteristics and worldview of this ethnic minority in Vietnam.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Concept Formation

(a). Systematic Nature of Ideas

Concepts serve as the foundation of cognitive linguistics, functioning as fundamental units of consciousness that encompass three core elements: emotion, intelligence, and will. Building upon this framework, concepts can also be understood as associations and impressions that reflect the lived experiences of language users. Since ideas emerge from human interactions with the world, they are inherently experiential.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 4) explain:

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we navigate the world, and how we relate to others. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are correct in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.

From this perspective, ideas emerge as the result of cognitive processes through which individuals make sense of the world. Moreover, concepts do not exist in isolation but function within interconnected systems. For example:

(b). *Conceptual Structuring in Human Cognition*

DEATH ← LIFE ← HUMAN

The concept of DEATH is categorized under the broader concept of LIFE, which, in turn, belongs to the overarching category of HUMAN. Since human life is finite, the notions of life and death are inherently natural.

Another example of the systematic nature of concepts is:

DESTROY ← ACTION ← EVIL ← HUMAN

Here, DESTROY falls under the category of ACTION, which is classified under EVIL, and ultimately, EVIL is linked to the broader category of HUMAN. This distinction highlights that while DEATH and DESTROY represent different conceptual domains, both belong to the broader HUMAN conceptual system. DEATH is situated within the cognitive framework of life perception, whereas DESTROY is associated with the perception of evil human actions.

This demonstrates that in the process of conceptualization, human cognition systematically selects and organizes ideas. A conceptual system is only activated and interconnected when an appropriate cognitive signal is triggered. Researchers refer to this phenomenon as the structural nature of concepts. As Pham (2023, p. 87) explains:

The structural nature of the concept is an important issue in understanding conceptual metaphors. Currently, scientists classify concepts into two main categories: one examines concepts in relation to language and culture, while the other explores concepts through the relationship between language and cognition.

(c). *The Experiential Basis of Concept Formation*

The foundation of concept formation lies in self-experience. Throughout human life, the biological body continuously receives signals from the surrounding environment, and through repeated exposure, these experiences gradually become ingrained in cognition. As Gibbs (2005, p. 12) explains:

Embodiment is more than physiological and/or brain activity; it is constituted by recurring patterns of kinesthetic, proprioceptive action that provide much of people's felt, subjective experience.

In other words, human experiences form the basis of cognition. For instance, the perception of cold originates from the sense of touch, and the concept of cold is formed after repeated exposure to low temperatures. Cold and hot are opposing states, yet both belong to the broader category of temperature. This illustrates that concepts serve as cognitive structures that organize human understanding, linking experiences into a structured system—a process known as conceptualization.

When discussing concepts and the process of conceptualization, most cognitive linguists argue that this process is fundamentally expressed through metaphorical mapping—a transfer of meaning from a source domain to a target domain. A concept is constructed through multiple mappings, and these mappings are inherently partial: only certain aspects of the source domain are emphasized to facilitate understanding of the target domain, while other aspects remain less salient. Moreover, a single source domain can map onto multiple target domains, meaning that most source domains are not restricted to just one conceptual relationship but extend across several.

Consider the following example of a verbal expression:

Your road you go, my road I go.

The term “road” represents a path of journey, while “go” signifies movement along that path. The phrase “Your road you go, my road I go” metaphorically conveys the concept of separation in love, indicating that two individuals no longer share a romantic connection. This way of conceptualizing separation is shaped by the experience of walking different paths in life.

This verbal expression belongs to the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, where the attributes of paths and movement are mapped onto the experience of romantic relationships. However, other journey-related attributes—such as a starting point and destination—may not always be emphasized in this metaphorical framework.

Similarly, consider the following verbal expression:

He reached the end of the road. Death took him away.

Here, “reaching the end of the road” is a metaphorical representation of death, mapped from the journey’s endpoint attribute. This expression falls within the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

These examples demonstrate that the concept of JOURNEY extends to multiple target domains—LOVE and LIFE—with each metaphorical expression highlighting distinct mapped properties.

B. *The Experiential Basis of the Concept of Fate of Love Embodiment and Conceptual Metaphors*

The concept of embodiment is crucial in understanding how human physical experiences shape abstract thought and language. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that our interactions with the physical world not only form conceptual structures but also shape our capacity for abstract reasoning. Embodiment is often expressed through metaphors, which enable individuals to regulate motor and sensory neural activities in support of cognitive development. However, the relationship between bodily experience and embodiment metaphors is complex and varies depending on contextual factors (Goschler, 2005).

One challenge in studying embodiment is that the bodily experiences underlying self-awareness are difficult to capture through scientific language. Translating reflexive sensations into verbal expression requires nuanced interpretation (Stelter, 2000). Moreover, human bodily experience is dynamic and ever-changing, influenced by sociocultural factors and altered by conditions such as illness or disability. In these cases, the body itself becomes an object of metaphorical mappings, illustrating the flexibility of embodiment within metaphor theory (El, 2014).

The connection between physical experience and language is not merely linear but multifaceted, profoundly shaping human cognition and communication. To fully understand how language and thought emerge from lived experience, it is essential to consider the various dimensions of embodiment.

From an experiential perspective, all forms of human intelligence arise from bodily experience. Personal experiences accumulate into an expansive, ever-growing knowledge base about the world. Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 4) emphasize this universality:

It is universal, however, in that it is a capacity shared universally by all human beings. What allows it to be shared are the commonalities that exist in the way our minds are embodied. Reason is not completely conscious but mostly unconscious. Reason is not purely literal but largely metaphorical and imaginative. Reason is not dispassionate but emotionally engaged.

Thus, bodily experience is fundamentally tied to the mind-body relationship, playing a pivotal role in human perception of the world. Benjamin Bergen (2019) further distinguishes this relationship as follows:

- The first perspective suggests that the cognitive mechanisms underlying behaviors such as reasoning and language use develop from an individual's experiences, which may be perceptual, motor, or affective. These experiences shape the characteristics of cognitive system components over the course of development (Bergen, 2019, p. 14).
- A second possibility is that the connections between concepts and an individual's perceptual, motor, and affective experiences persist throughout development, remaining crucial for grounding and making sense of concept usage (Bergen, 2019, p. 14).

(a). *Embodiment in the Spiritual and Cultural Practices of the Vietnamese Thai Community*

The Vietnamese Thai community primarily resides in the mountainous regions of Lai Châu, Điện Biên, Lào Cai, Yên Bái, Sơn La, Hòa Bình, Thanh Hóa, and Nghệ An. Their houses are built facing rivers or streams, with their backs against the mountains. The Thai people developed early, mastering water conservation and cultivating crops such as rice, maize, cassava, cotton, and yarn. Each family raises livestock, poultry, and silkworms for weaving. As a result, their experiences with nature reflect the distinct regional identity of the Thai community (Dang, 2024, p. 866).

In their spiritual beliefs, the elders of the Thai ethnic group perceive everything on earth as having a soul (*Khoăn*). According to Thai culture, natural elements such as stones (Da), stone caves, watersheds, and streams are believed to be inhabited by spirits. Consequently, they often summon these spirits (*Phị khoăn*). However, unlike many other ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Thai people recognize only spirits, not gods, in their spiritual world.

As a community with diverse spiritual practices, the Vietnamese Thai engage in various worship and sacrificial rituals. This is evident in ceremonies such as:

- The New Rice Festival (*Xên Lầu No*)
- The First Water Source Ceremony (*Tế Họa Tá*)
- The Field Ritual (*Nguyệt Na*)
- The Grave Worship Ritual (*Lời Má, Tế Má*)

In Thai Muong villages, there is often someone skilled in magic (*bít nạng bằng phẫn*). Only individuals who are intelligent and discreet are allowed to learn this craft. The practice follows a strict principle:

- Magic may only be used to punish those who commit unforgivable, hateful, or illicit acts.
- A magician is permitted to use their powers only once or twice in their lifetime; exceeding this limit is believed to result in madness or death.

Beyond magic, the Thai people also use talismans (*bằng phẫn*), including:

- Protective charms to ward off illness (*bít nạng*)
- Love talismans (*khoắm mấn*)

Due to the scope of this study, researchers focus solely on love talismans (*khoắm mấn*).

(b). *Love Talismans in Thai Folk Culture*

In remote areas, where traditional beliefs remain strong, some still regard love talismans as real. According to folk culture, these talismans influence emotions and psychology, primarily to bring men and women together in love. In regions such as Mộc Châu, Phù Yên, and Bắc Yên, various love talismans and techniques are practiced, including:

1. Bitter fruit charm (*mấn mác khoénh, Mác khạm póm*)
2. Excavation of the back (*tóp xịa lạng*)
3. Salt talisman (*mấn cựa*)
4. Turtle blowing pipes (*páu lốt*)
5. How to recite the spell (*hóc khoam mấn*)

The Thai people have a distinctive perspective on love and marriage. They cherish a life close to nature and value hard work. Deeply spiritual, they believe in supernatural forces and trust that their desires for love can be fulfilled through the magic of talismans.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Methodology

The present study employed two primary research methods: descriptive analysis and quantitative research.

a) Descriptive Method

The descriptive method was utilized to examine the conceptual relationship between the source domain (TALISMAN) and the target domain (FATE OF LOVE). This method involved:

- Constructing mapping diagrams to illustrate how TALISMAN concepts are projected onto FATE OF LOVE.
- Analyzing metaphorical verbal expressions and cultural symbols embedded in Thai love spells.

b) Quantitative Research

The quantitative approach was employed to compile statistical data on the frequency of metaphorical references and verbal expressions. Through statistical analysis, the study:

- Identified key attributes transferred from the source to the target domain.
- Provided insights into the cultural characteristics and cognitive patterns of the Thai people.

B. Document Survey Process

The study followed a systematic document survey process consisting of four steps:

1. Reading and Selection – All 50 love talisman songs were reviewed, and verses reflecting the concept of FATE OF LOVE were identified.
2. Metaphor Identification – Metaphors expressing the mapping of TALISMAN onto LOVE were extracted.
3. Quantitative Analysis – Key attributes of the mapped source domain were statistically analyzed to quantify recurring themes.
4. Descriptive Analysis – The descriptive method was applied to:
 - Outline key conceptual attributes.
 - Construct projection diagrams.
 - Analyze metaphors within the conceptual framework of *LOVE IS A TALISMAN*.

C. Data Sources

The study is based on 50 love charms collected from *Mantras, Talismans in Folklore*, and the ancient Thai book *Koām Mān Muōn Tāy*, compiled by Hoàng and Ca (2016).

IV. RESULTS

A. Mapping the Conceptual Metaphor FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN

(a). Target Domain: FATE OF LOVE

The conceptual metaphor FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN consists of the target domain (FATE OF LOVE) and the source domain (TALISMAN). The Thai people's understanding of love and fate is deeply rooted in their environment and cultural beliefs. From a cognitive perspective, the systematic nature of this concept can be expressed as follows:

FATE OF LOVE ← AFFECTION ← HUMAN

The concept of FATE OF LOVE belongs to the broader category of AFFECTION, which, in turn, falls under the overarching category of HUMAN. Since love and marriage are intrinsic to human life, they are perceived as predestined forces. The Thai people hold spiritually profound yet simple beliefs regarding love. They believe that offerings and spells can secure a lover's devotion, ensuring that the desired person remains faithful. This belief system has influenced Thai cultural practices, including love spells and worship rituals, which have been preserved across generations, even after their migration to Vietnam.

(b). Source Domain: TALISMAN

The source domain (TALISMAN) occupies a significant place in Thai culture. The Thai people maintain a strong belief in supernatural forces, and talismans are deeply intertwined with their spiritual and everyday life. The concept of TALISMAN encompasses the following key attributes:

1. Bestowing delight through its power – A talisman is believed to bring happiness by fulfilling desires.
2. Bringing great joy or satisfaction – Talismans are seen as tools of emotional fulfillment.
3. Exercising control or influence, as if by magic – Talismans are perceived as having the power to manipulate emotions and relationships.

Due to these attributes, a talisman is not merely a physical object but also a metaphorical representation of mystical influence, capable of affecting human emotions and actions.

(c). *Mapping From the Source Domain (TALISMAN) to the Target Domain (FATE OF LOVE)*

The conceptual mapping of TALISMAN onto FATE OF LOVE highlights the way the Thai people cognitively structure their understanding of romantic relationships. This mapping will be analyzed in further detail in the following sections.

TABLE 1
MAPPING SCHEME OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN

Target domain FATE OF LOVE	Mapping	Source domain TALISMAN
Create love	←	The act of casting a talisman
Catalyst to love each other	←	Material for creating talisman
Love status	←	The effectiveness of talisman

Source: Author generalizes from documents

These three mapping rays illustrate the Thai people's cognitive perception of love. They maintain a deep-rooted belief in the mystical power of talismans, which are deeply integrated into their daily lives. For them, magic is not solely derived from the ritualistic act of creating talismans but also from the materials used in their construction. These materials, in turn, are perceived as manifestations of magic itself.

This perspective highlights how the Thai people's understanding of love is closely intertwined with their everyday experiences. Anything that is familiar and intimately connected to their lives can be transformed into a talisman, believed to possess the power to influence love and relationships.

B. *Metaphor Analysis of the Concept Fate of Love Is Talismans*

(a). *The Act of Creating Talismans Maps the Creation of Fate of Love*

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TABLE 2
METAPHORICAL EXAMPLE OF THE ACTION OF CREATING A TALISMAN

Ordinal	Metaphorical Vehicle		Number of Appearances/50 Love Charm Songs	Percentage/121
	Thai Transcription	English		
1	<i>Kin</i>	<i>eat</i>	26	21.5
2	<i>Pák</i>	<i>speak</i>	25	20.1
3	<i>Tóp</i>	<i>clap</i>	13	10.7
4	<i>Kín</i>	<i>drink</i>	11	9.1
5	<i>Hin/ xím</i>	<i>throw</i>	5	4.1
6	<i>Páu</i>	<i>blow</i>	5	4.1
7	<i>Vì hũa</i>	<i>comb</i>	5	4.1
8	<i>Pók mák</i>	<i>peel</i>	5	4.1
9	<i>Khót câu (upside down) Khót phôm (down)</i>	<i>bun</i>	5	4.1
10	<i>Hóm phã</i>	<i>cover with</i>	4	4.1
11	<i>Pủ xĩa</i>	<i>to unwind</i>	4	4.1
12	<i>Kàng dẫn</i>	<i>hang a net</i>	3	2.7
13	<i>Nung xĩa</i>	<i>wear</i>	3	2.7
14	<i>Xuôi nã</i>	<i>washing face</i>	3	2.7
15	<i>Bíp</i>	<i>press</i>	2	2.7
16	<i>Kẹo hát pũ</i>	<i>stick</i>	2	1.6
17	<i>Pắc bók</i>	<i>fasten</i>	2	1.6
18	<i>Tạk</i>	<i>measure</i>	2	1.6
19	<i>Chốc xỉng</i>	<i>scratch</i>	2	1.6
Total			121	

Source: Statistics from documents

The examples in the table above represent everyday actions that are deeply rooted in lived experiences. Activities such as putting up a mosquito net, covering with a blanket, scratching the back, washing the face, tying the hair, holding the head, and getting dressed are integral components of daily routines. These actions are so familiar that, within the Thai belief system, talismans are thought to harness their power to ensure a lover or spouse remains faithful forever.

Among these actions, the most frequently referenced in talismanic spells include eating (26 occurrences), speaking (25 occurrences), clapping (13 occurrences), drinking (11 occurrences), throwing (5 occurrences), tying hair (4 occurrences), peeling fruit (4 occurrences), and covering with a blanket (4 occurrences). The most commonly appearing verbs—eat, wear, sleep, talk, pat, and drink—reflect fundamental aspects of Thai communal and cultural life.

Additionally, the expressions “spread the mattress” and “cover the blanket” frequently appear in talismanic texts, reinforcing love and loyalty between couples.

The following analysis will focus on the most frequently occurring actions in talisman creation, offering deeper insight into the distinctive cognitive patterns of the Thai people.

Eat¹

Sacred! Sharp knife with black handle.

I brought it home and peeled the fruit for her to eat

Elephants eat a big, peeled fruit - owner

The person who eats the fruit I peel - my lover

Sacred! Sacred - Spiritual! Sacred

Ôm! Mịt nọi mịt dằm dằm

Kằm àu mã pók mák

Chạng đậy kìn mák kf pók chạng hờn

Kôn đậy kìn kôn mặc

Ôm !... Xốp kù dằm! Koãm kù khót... Ôm...

This example illustrates a blended metaphor, where two metaphorical mappings occur simultaneously. In this verbal expression, the actions of peeling and eating are metaphorically linked to the creation of a talisman. The underlying meaning is that if one eats the fruit that has been peeled by another, they will become enchanted and fall deeply in love with that person.

The mystical nature of this talismanic ritual is reinforced through lexical choices such as *sacred* and *miraculous*. Here, metaphorical extension is evident in the act of eating the fruit, which symbolically translates into loving the person who prepared it. This belief reflects a deeply ingrained yet somewhat naive faith among the Thai people in Vietnam.

Speak²

My mouth is holy - My words are effective

Elephant love gathers - never separates

I cast a spell on the person I love so tightly

Charm the trees in the forest to grow thorns

A spell on a girl sticks to me like plastic

Ôm khóp!...ôm dằm

Koãm xét chạng kù len xồn xồn

Xét xáu kôn báu hờn xida đậy

Mãn xáu mạy nắng pá tài khuỵ

Mãn xáu xào phủ đi hầu chập pàn tăng

This case exemplifies a blended metaphor, where a single verbal expression incorporates multiple metaphorical mappings.

First, the spoken words, combined with the sacred atmosphere evoked by the term *sacred*, emphasize the mystical power of prayer. Second, the concept of seduction through the talisman, represented as an action rather than an object, conveys the supernatural influence exerted on individuals.

This metaphor can be structured as follows:

- Casting a talisman on a lover ensures their unwavering attachment.
- Placing a talisman on a tree causes forest trees to grow thorns.
- Using a talisman on a girl makes her cling to you like resin.

Understanding this conceptual metaphor requires insight into Thai cultural cognition. Residing in Vietnam's Northern Midlands and Mountainous regions, the Thai people naturally associate supernatural forces with their environment. For instance, they believe a talisman's power can cause trees to develop more thorns, making them stronger. This imagery metaphorically represents the idea that lovers remain inseparable, devoted, and resistant to separation.

Furthermore, the intensity of love induced by the talisman is mapped onto the adhesive quality of tree resin, a natural binding agent in the forest. This association reinforces the idea of unwavering attachment and deep passion in love.

Pat³

Sacred, *patting*...love love

My hand pats the elephant's back - the elephant stops

Patting someone's back - lover

Ôm! Tốp tốp...ôm! Mặc mặc...

Mữ kù tốp xỉng chạng hầu hờn

Tốp xỉng kôn hầu mặc

The efficacy of the talisman in this context derives from the belief that patting exerts a supernatural influence. When applied to an elephant, it is thought to render the animal motionless; when used on a person's back, it is believed to evoke feelings of love and attachment.

¹ Talisman for peeling fruit to feed - Koãm pók mák

² Elephant love words 2 - koãm xét chạng 2

³ Elephant love words 1 - koãm xét chạng 1

This belief system encapsulates two layers of metaphor:

1. Physical force as a supernatural agency – The act of patting is perceived as a conduit of mystical power.
2. Physical force as a medium of emotional influence – Tactile contact is conceptualized as a catalyst for love and affection.

This verbal expression epitomizes the intuitive cognitive framework of the Thai minority in Vietnam.

(b). *The Materials Used to Create Talismans as Catalysts for Love*

For the Thai people, talismans are concrete artifacts deeply embedded in their daily lives and natural surroundings. These objects, drawn from familiar materials, carry profound cultural and spiritual significance. Based on an extensive survey, the most commonly used materials in the creation of Thai amulets are compiled in the following table:

TABLE 3
MATERIALS USED TO CREATE TALISMAN OF THE THAI PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

Ordinal	Metaphorical Vehicle		Number of Appearances/50 Love Charm Songs	Percentage
	Thai Transcription	English		
1	<i>Chạng</i>	elephant	23	19.0
2	<i>Mák</i>	fruit	18	14.8
3	<i>Báư</i>	leaf	13	
4	<i>Phã</i>	blanket	10	10.7
5	<i>Xúa</i>	shirt	9	7.4
6	<i>Káy</i>	chicken	9	7.4
7	<i>Nộc</i>	bird	8	6.6
8	<i>Bók</i>	flower	5	4.1
9	<i>Kéo</i>	pearl	3	2.7
10	<i>Dà lợk</i>	Fairy medicine	3	2.7
11	<i>Cò khâu</i>	rice	2	1.6
12	<i>Pũ</i>	mountain	2	1.6
13	<i>Pá</i>	forest	3	2.7
14	<i>Cán phức</i>	ocrea	3	1.6
15	<i>Bán</i>	bulb	2	2.7
16	<i>Bườn</i>	moon	2	1.6
17	<i>Hòm búa khèo</i>	green onion	2	1.6
18	<i>Kí</i>	loom	2	1.6
19	<i>Xáy</i>	egg	2	1.6
Total			121	

Source: Author's statistics from documents

The materials used to create talismans originate from the natural world and are deeply intertwined with the daily lives of the Thai people. These include plant-based elements such as leaves, sheaths, bulbs, and green onions, as well as animal-related components like elephants, chickens, birds, and eggs. Additionally, talismans incorporate elements from the surrounding environment, such as mountains, forests, and the moon, along with household objects like looms, blankets, and shirts.

Among the metaphors within the category of fishing-related talismans, the most frequently occurring symbols include elephant (23), fruit (18), leaves (13), blanket (13), shirt (9), chicken (9), and bird (8).

The Thai people select these materials based on two fundamental principles. First, humans tend to conceptualize abstract ideas through familiar, tangible objects readily available in their surroundings. Second, as an ethnic minority, the Thai people rely on an intuitive cognitive framework, wherein the power of talismans emerges from ordinary materials imbued with sacred significance.

Elephant⁴

Sacred! People say love elephants

I say love people

I cast a spell on the elephant - the elephant retreats

Charm on someone - lover

Ôm! Tan xa xét chạng, kù va xét kôn

Kù măn xáu chạng hầu hờn

Măn xáu kôn hầu kôn mặc

Mừn chấp kù pàn tẳng

In Thai cultural perception, the elephant embodies the strength of the green forest, symbolizing a force that is extremely difficult to subdue. This challenge is metaphorically associated with the difficulty of winning someone's affection. Just as taming an elephant demands considerable effort, gaining a person's love is perceived as equally arduous—thus necessitating the use of talismanic magic. It is believed that casting a talisman on an elephant can make it retreat, while casting one on a person can transform indifference into love. This conceptualization of talismanic power, rooted in the strength and resistance of elephants, reflects the intuitive and distinctive cognitive framework of the Vietnamese Thai people.

⁴ Love people - *xét kôn*

Fruit⁵

Sacred! *Fruit of the seven sacred trees*
 The fruit is smooth, and the stem is pink
 Whoever eats the fruit of the seven trees loves me
 Whoever eats the smooth, pink-stemmed fruit loves me

Ôm! *Mák chết tôn vãn vi*
 Mák kôn đôm, kôn mỗn vãn vi
 Phàu kìn mák chết tôn vãn vi, háu mặc
 Phàu kìn mák kôn đôm, kôn mỗn vãn vi, háu pãnh

The seven-tree fruit holds profound spiritual significance for the Thai people. Although the tree itself does not physically exist, it has become a powerful talisman through worship and belief. Regarded as sacred, its fruit is thought to enchant anyone who consumes it, compelling them to fall in love with its owner. This belief reflects an intuitive cognitive framework, where the mystical atmosphere, reinforced by the connotations of the word "sacred," enhances the talisman's supernatural allure.

Blanket⁶

Sacred! *Pink flower blanket*
 Wide cotton blanket lined with white
 Lying with my husband, I brought it out and covered it
 He felt warm and hugged me tightly

Ôm nả phã bók đảnh òn
 Lóp phã khào bàn mók
 Nãng chí chặt phã đi hóm nầu
 Chắc phã châu hóm phừa

In the verbal expression above, *nả phã*, *lóp phã* (blanket) becomes an object imbued with talismanic power. This talisman ensures that a woman's husband remains deeply devoted to her, symbolizing unwavering love and fidelity. When he covers her with a blanket, he is believed to embrace her tightly and never let go. Here, the act of covering with a blanket metaphorically signifies the deep and steadfast bond between husband and wife, reflecting the Thai woman's aspiration for a harmonious and enduring relationship.

The cultural foundation of this expression is deeply rooted in Thai traditions. Notably, one of the materials traditionally used to make fishing nets is a cotton blanket. As previously mentioned, bedding serves as a cultural artifact, embodying the traditional lifestyle of Thai people in Vietnam. From the ages of 13 to 14, Thai girls are traditionally taught embroidery and sewing, and an essential component of their dowry includes blankets and mattresses crafted from rice flower cotton. The quantity and quality of these items symbolize the girl's skill, resourcefulness, and family wealth.

In the context of talismanic practices, the imagery of "quilting" intertwined with "blanket-making" not only highlights the materials used in love talismans but also encodes a deeper "symbolic language"—a manifestation of cultural memory and lived experience. In contrast to other ethnic communities, such as the Kinh, Thai women ascribe a unique emotional and cultural significance to bedding, which plays a central role in their traditions and expressions of love.

Shirt⁷

Sacred! Get up, get dressed, go get dressed
 I wore it for a walk through the countryside
 For everyone to love
 Demons stay away
 Youth sees the desire for love

Ôm! Lọc dỡ mày, pày dỡ xừ
 Uống ừa tan đừ đi
 Phì hên phì dân
 Xngạn hê len pại
 Kôc tênh lài hên châu mặc

The shirt worn becomes an object imbued with talismanic power. Rooted in the belief in the talisman's magical efficacy, merely wearing the shirt is thought to attract admiration from those who see it, while young individuals who notice it will feel an urge to develop affection for the wearer. This perception reflects an intuitive and deeply ingrained cognitive pattern among the Thai people.

The metaphorical mapping lies in the mystical properties of the love spell associated with the shirt—seeing the shirt symbolizes love, while malevolent forces are repelled. In Vietnamese spiritual beliefs, a shirt worn by the Buddha is often regarded as a symbol of good fortune. For instance, a garment once worn by the Buddha, when bestowed upon someone, is believed to bring blessings. Similarly, the notion of a love talisman embedded in a shirt embodies the cultural experience of the Thai community in particular and Vietnamese society in general.

Moreover, within the traditional costume culture of all Vietnamese ethnic groups, the shirt serves as both a functional garment and a culturally significant artifact. As an essential item that covers the body and integrates seamlessly into daily life, the shirt has acquired a symbolic value beyond its practical use. Drawing from their lived experiences with clothing, both the Thai and other Vietnamese communities have ascribed to the shirt an extended meaning—one that encompasses not only physical protection but also the power of attraction and love.

(c). *The Effectiveness of the Talisman as a Reflection of the State of Love*

⁵ Charm on fruit to feed - *Koãm kìn mák*

⁶ The words of covering the blanket - *Koãm* is proud

⁷ Words to wear clothes - *Koãm nung xừa*

In Thai belief, the efficacy of a talisman is manifested in an individual's state of love. Their distinctive cognitive framework is evident in both their verbal expressions and their perception of the power of love spells. The following table presents key verbal expressions that illustrate these effects.

TABLE 4
EFFECTIVE METAPHORS OF WITCHCRAFT

Metaphorical Vehicle			Number of Appearances/50 Love Charm Songs	Percentage/121
Ordinal	Thai Transcription	English		
1	<i>Niêu cơ tăng</i>	Sticky like plastic	13	10.7
2	<i>Chàng nôi hặc nôm</i>	Little elephants love to suckle	12	9.9
3	<i>Ái bóc hân</i>	Scent of turmeric flowers	8	6.6
4	<i>Lục mặc nôm me</i>	children love breast milk	8	6.6
5	<i>Bươm mặc bóc</i>	Butterflies love flowers	7	5.7
6	<i>Ốn nôi mặc tâu nôm</i>	Babies love breasts	7	5.7
7	<i>Ốc chấp ốc</i>	Chest to chest	6	4.9
8	<i>Èm hặc lục ón</i>	Mom loves her child	6	4.9
9	<i>Phông lật hìm nậm</i>	Waves roll against the shore	6	6.6
10	<i>Cáy mặc hộc</i>	Chickens love the brooder	6	4.9
11	<i>Pók ngôn lạo xong</i>	Double screw silver ring	5	4.1
12	<i>Đốt mây xuôi</i>	Bobbin thread	5	4.1
13	<i>Khà cái khà</i>	Thigh rests thigh	5	4.1
14	<i>Me cây phặc</i>	The hen incubates eggs	5	4.1
15	<i>Kẹo khâu é cừn</i>	Chewing rice likes to swallow	5	4.1
16	<i>Cáp lạng ôm mạy</i>	The areca sheath hugs the tree	5	4.1
17	<i>Cần phúc pần cò</i>	The sheath hugs the tuber stem	5	4.1
18	<i>Huống khâu còm mùa nào</i>	Rice fields are heavy in the cold season	4	3.3
19	<i>Hong nậm lây tiêu</i>	Fast current	4	3.3
20	<i>Lườn mặc bốn nôm</i>	Pythons love their place to lie down	3	2.7
21	<i>Pà chất lông pưng</i>	Fish chattering away	3	2.7
Total			121	

Source: Author's statistics from documents

Statistical analysis reveals that metaphors illustrating the effectiveness of love talismans primarily fall into fundamental categories, predominantly derived from natural elements such as trees, leaves, and animals. Specifically, these metaphors include imagery such as areca sheaths embracing tree trunks, sheaths wrapping around tubers, rice ears heavy with grain, fast-flowing streams, hens incubating eggs, pythons clinging to their resting place, chickens nestled in their coops, silver rings twisted in half, and waves rolling against the shore.

Beyond natural imagery, these metaphors also extend to human relationships, such as a mother's love for her child, a child's attachment to breastfeeding, and hair tied into buns—expressions deeply rooted in daily life. These representations highlight familiar connections that naturally coexist, reinforcing a worldview in which love and attachment are mirrored in everyday experiences.

A defining feature of Thai cognitive patterns is the extensive use of comparison. Researchers have identified 121 verbal expressions conforming to this structure, underscoring a distinctive characteristic in both the language and cognitive style of the Thai ethnic group. The following examples illustrate this pattern:

Curtains⁸

Sacred! I will open the four corners of the curtain
Let it spread its fish tail
I will pull two corners of the blanket
Let it taper to a turtle's tail
I used a mosquito net to sleep with him
He hugs me like an areca pod hugs a tree
Like the sheath hugging a tuber

Ôm! Năng chí chặc xí chè dẫn
Hầu mắt pính hàng pà
Năng chí chặc xí chè phã
Hầu mắt kôm hàng tấu
Kàng dẫn xú nầu phùa hặc kù nôm
Hầu mắt kết kô kù báu páy
Hầu mắt mặc kù xường tón xành

The talismanic action in this context involves drawing a curtain, which, being infused with a talisman, compels the husband to fall deeply in love. The talisman's effect ensures that he embraces his wife as tightly as an areca sheath clings to a tree or a betel nut sheath wraps around a tuber.

The Thai people often perceive the world through visual imagery derived from everyday life, particularly objects that naturally coexist, such as areca sheaths and tubers. This cognitive approach reflects a thinking pattern rooted in direct visual observation. By mapping familiar objects onto human emotions, they establish cognitive connections that reinforce their belief in the power of talismans.

The corresponding metaphorical expressions include:

⁸ The words of the curtain - *Koām kang dẫn*

1. He hugged me.
2. The areca sheath hugs the tree.
3. The sheath hugs the tuber stem.

These inevitable associations between natural elements and the passionate emotional state of a couple highlight a fascinating cognitive mechanism. The perceived effects of love spells metaphorically mirror the interconnectedness of the natural world within the Thai people's living environment.

Elephants 2⁹

A spell on a girl sticks to me like plastic
 Please love me with all your heart and soul
She loves me like a little elephant loves to suckle
She treasures me like the hair on her head is treasured in a bun
She likes me like chewing rice likes to swallow
Sleeping at night, restless and longing
Missing me is like a narrow, fast-flowing stream
Like a lonely fish wandering around

Mãn xáo xào phủ đi hâu chấp pàn tăng
 Hâu mẫn khâu chà khâu kô báu lá
 Mặc kù xướng chạng nộ mặc nôm
 Xướng phôm dú hùa mặc kâu
 Khâu dú xóp mặc kìn
 Nôn kìm é thòng kù khăm khăm
 Xướng nậm đàng lầy hát lầy tiêu
 Xướng chát tổ điều lỏng pững

In this verbal expression, the characteristics of the source domain **TALISMAN** are conveyed through various comparative images:

1. Sticky like plastic.
2. Love with all your heart.
3. Love like a young elephant nursing.
4. As precious as hair tied in a bun.
5. Like chewing rice and swallowing it.
6. Remember like a narrow stream with a fast current.
7. Like a lonely fish drifting aimlessly.

The cultural imprint of Northern Thai traditions is vividly reflected in their language. One of the most distinctive customs is Sanghau, a practice unique to the Black Thai people. A bun worn on the top of a bride's head serves as a central symbol of beauty, marriage, and commitment. For a Tang Crane (a Black Thai woman), thick, black, and glossy hair represents the ideal standard of beauty. To achieve this, hair fillers are often used. From childhood, Thai women consciously collect their fallen hair in preparation for their future bun.

One of the most meaningful gifts a mother-in-law bestows upon her daughter-in-law at marriage is a bundle of hair—gathered from her own shedding since becoming a daughter-in-law herself. This bundle, carefully tied and groomed, symbolizes the continuity of tradition and the bond between generations. When the time comes for the bride to “put up a bun,” the groom's family sends two young, married women to accompany her, carrying a ceremonial offering known as “curing” (asking for a bun), which includes a padded bundle of hair.

Once married, a woman's hair must remain in a bun, never to be let down—except in the event of her husband's passing, at which point she unties it and wears it behind her as a sign of widowhood. This custom embodies the essence of traditional Thai culture and its moral values, emphasizing loyalty and the protection of marital happiness. As a result, the expression “as precious as the hair in your bun” serves as a powerful affirmation of love and fidelity between husband and wife.

Other metaphorical expressions reinforce this sentiment. Comparisons such as “little elephants that love to suckle” and “chewing rice that loves to swallow” depict inevitable, instinctive occurrences in nature, symbolizing an unbreakable attachment between couples. Similarly, imagery such as “narrow water, fast-flowing water, and a single fish wandering in schools” conveys the intensity of love. In narrow streams, water rushes forward with great speed and force, just as a solitary fish relentlessly seeks a mate. Drawing from these natural laws, the Thai people project these vivid images onto human emotions, expressing the passionate and enduring nature of love.

Moreover, words signifying emotional states—such as remember, cherish, love, and treasure—appear frequently, reinforcing the connection between talismans and the deep emotions of love. These linguistic patterns create a powerful resonance, strengthening the conceptual mapping between traditional talismans and romantic devotion.

Fragrant Love¹⁰

Sacred! The scent of rice flowers along the fields
The scent of sunflowers along the village
The scent of rice flowers along the roadside
She loves me like a fragrance
 The scent sticks to the skin and the flesh does not leave
 The fragrance penetrates into the heart and liver without leaving

Ôm! Nguyệt phắc kát liệt nã
 Nguyệt phắc xà liệt bản
 Nguyệt hìm thắm pì kài
 Xào lầy mặc kù kơ nguyệt chấp
 Nguyệt chấp nựa kàu kùa báu vãng
 Báu vãng xướng káy đàng phắc

⁹ Words of Love for Elephants 2 - Koām xét chạng 2

¹⁰ Love is Like Loving a Fragrance - Koām xét nguyệt

Don't give up, like a hen incubating eggs
She loves me like a child loves her breast

Mững mặc kù xưỡng ẽ nọi mặc nỏm
Kĩnh kỏm mững tử tang kù xủ

This verbal expression contains multiple metaphorical references, particularly through the use of flowers—such as rice flowers and sunflowers—as materials for creating charms. The effects of the talisman can be understood as follows:

1. She loves me.
2. She will never leave me.
3. She cannot leave me.

The materials used in talismans are drawn from the familiar natural world of plants and trees, which are deeply intertwined with the daily lives of the Thai people. One such example is the flower of the Dac Xa tree (phắc xà)—a wild tree commonly found in mountainous forests. Another is the rice flower (hĩnh thẳm), a woody plant that thrives in highland regions. When the rice flowers wither and turn white, Thai people often collect them from the forest to use as bedding. These familiar and abundant plants are imbued with symbolic meaning, transforming them into powerful talismans.

The primary effect of this talisman is to ensure unwavering love and fidelity. This deep desire for an unbreakable bond is poetically emphasized through hyperbolic expressions: “Perfume sticks to the skin. Perfume penetrates the heart and liver.”

(nguyệt chấp nựa kủa báu vãng / báu vãng xưỡng káy đàng phắc)

Additionally, the wish for lasting love is metaphorically compared to the effect of fishing nets—capturing and holding affection. The metaphors “a hen incubates eggs” and “a child loves the udder” (xưỡng ẽ nọi mặc nỏm, tử tang kù xủ) reinforce the idea of an inseparable, sacred connection. These images evoke natural instincts—maternal care and nourishment—symbolizing enduring and unconditional love.

V. CONCLUSION

The conceptual metaphor **FATE OF LOVE IS A TALISMAN** reflects how the Northern Thai people of Vietnam perceive and express romantic relationships. In Thai belief, love talismans are crafted from familiar, everyday objects and are thought to foster affection between men and women, ensuring lasting emotional bonds across generations.

A particularly intriguing aspect of this metaphor is its reflection of the cultural identity of Vietnam’s Northern Thai community. Living in vast, mountainous landscapes, the Thai people develop a simple and intuitive worldview. Their deep connection to nature and their social customs are clearly manifested in their use of talismans. The language associated with love talismans embodies this perspective, drawing directly from their lived experiences and natural surroundings.

At its core, the concept of a predestined relationship is a universal idea, forming the foundation of love, marriage, and family continuity. However, among the Thai people, love is perceived through a distinctive lens—one shaped by childlike innocence and direct observation of the world around them. The metaphor **LOVE IS A TALISMAN** underscores their profound relationship with nature, encapsulating both natural laws and the emotional essence of human connection.

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Quynh Thi Huong Pham, born in 1982 in Thai Binh, Vietnam, is a researcher at the Institute of Linguistics, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam. With extensive experience in linguistics, her research primarily focuses on cognitive linguistics, particularly conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy. She has led numerous research projects at both institutional and

ministerial levels and has authored multiple monographs and scholarly articles on these topics. Additionally, Dr. Pham has contributed to language education research, including teaching English to Vietnamese learners, teaching Vietnamese to foreign students, and teaching Vietnamese language and literature in high schools. She has also presented numerous scientific reports at academic conferences.

Tam Thi Hao Dang, born in 1965 in Hanoi, Vietnam, is an Associate Professor at Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam. Her primary research interests lie in cognitive linguistics, with a particular focus on cognitive semantics. She has conducted extensive research projects at institutional, ministerial, and provincial levels, publishing numerous articles on cognitive semantics. Her work includes studies on metaphor in Vietnamese Thai. Beyond her research, Dr. Dang is actively involved in language education, specializing in teaching vocabulary and cognitive linguistics to undergraduate and graduate students. She is also a co-author of several Vietnamese textbooks for elementary school students and has presented her research at various academic conferences.

Hang Thu Pham, born in 1980 in Ca Mau, Vietnam, is a university lecturer at Tay Do University in Can Tho, Vietnam. She teaches and conducts research in linguistics and is currently pursuing a PhD at Hanoi National University of Education to further expand her expertise in linguistic theory and research. Over the past 15 years, she has authored and published several scholarly articles, making significant contributions to the academic study of language.