

# Vietnamese Concepts of Love Through Idioms: A Conceptual Metaphor Approach

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**Abstract**—Love (romantic love) is an abstract concept that requires explanation. In addition to the universality of the concept, each nation has their own constructs of love, which can be expressed through idioms. Idioms represent special linguistic units because they contain cultural characteristics and national views. Idioms also reflect the colour and variety of human social activities and thus play an important role in the linguistic ontologisation of love. This paper aims to explore the Vietnamese concepts of love through idioms from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Conceptual metaphor theory (introduced by Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003) is a tool that allows the abstract target domain (LOVE) to be understood through more tangible source domains. To collect the data, a hand search of Vietnamese idiom dictionaries was conducted to establish a corpus of 126 entries, from which nine common conceptual metaphors were identified. Results from this study show that Vietnamese people regard LOVE as a predestined fate, in which the beauty of love in conjunction with nostalgia, passion, compatibility and closeness is praised, faithfulness in love is appreciated and revered, and inappropriate relationships and betrayal in love are opposed and condemned.

**Index Terms**—conceptual metaphors of love, Vietnamese concepts of love, target domains, source domains, idioms of love

## I. INTRODUCTION

Love (romantic love) is considered to be one of the most complex human emotions. Indeed, it can neither be understood nor correctly or entirely explained by even the most experienced lovers. The concept of love is a never-ending story related to the experiences of life. It seems that love actually resides in our hearts, where the memories of the soul are kept, and these memories require interpretation. The aim of this article is to elucidate the concept of love and how it is expressed through Vietnamese idioms.

Idioms are special linguistic units that have attracted the attention of a number of linguists. Chau (1981) and Menh (1986) consider idioms to be available linguistic units with stable structures, typical meanings and nominative functions. Dan (1986) observes that an idiom is ‘a fixed group of words having a complete meaning and descriptive value’. He adds that idioms express concepts based on distinct images, which is the reason idioms usually have their own figurative meanings. Hanh (2008, p. 31) states that an idiom is a fixed group of words that is firm in terms of structure, complete and figurative in terms of meaning and widely used in daily communications. The fixed properties of an idiom can be apprehended in two typical features: firstly, the words of an idiom are generally fixed (i.e. the component parts forming an idiom are unvaried in usage); secondly, the fixed characteristic of the structure of an idiom is expressed in the fixed order of the component parts that form the idiom.

Most of the authors studying Vietnamese idioms consider idioms to be fixed linguistic units whose meanings are unpredictable. Although one may know the meaning and syntactic properties of each component of which an idiom is comprised, it is still not possible to grasp the meaning of the idiom. In other words, the meaning of an idiom cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents.

From a cognitive perspective, Giang (2018) states that most Vietnamese idioms are analysable and their meanings can be at least partly explained through structural components. The formation of idiomatic meanings is generally motivated by external semantic cognition including metaphors, metonymies and conventional knowledge (Gibbs, 1990, 1995). Idiom formation is a natural process involving human perceptions of the surrounding world. Therefore, idioms are regarded as a form of a language that reflects cultural and national mentalities. For this reason, studying idioms about love is one of the best ways to uncover Vietnamese people’s ideas about love.

Trao (2009) and Tien (2012) are two authors who have used conceptual metaphors to explain idiomatic meanings in English and Vietnamese. They examined emotion idioms related to HAPPINESS, SADNESS, ANGER, DISGUST, FEAR and DESIRE, from which several conceptual metaphor models are derived such as HAPPINESS IS INSANITY, SADNESS IS PAIN, ANGER IS FIRE, DISGUST IS DISLIKE OF FOOD, FEAR IS PHYSICAL WEAKNESS and so on. Giang (2020) regards conceptual metaphors to be a tool for analysing idiomatic sense. He explains how strict conceptual metaphors are applied to the semantic description and analysis of idioms. To this end, the present research focuses on the role of conceptual metaphors representing the basic emotional concepts to which love belongs. Here the studies by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) and Kövecses (2010) should be mentioned. These authors provide some

common conceptual metaphors, hence, the idioms concerning love are classified and elucidated in this study in a corresponding manner.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual metaphor theory was initiated by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Since its introduction this theory has flourished, and conceptual metaphor is not seen simply as a decorative device in language but also as a conceptual tool for structuring, reconstructing and even creating reality. This model was confirmed by Gibbs (2006) and Kövecses (2010) when they both recapitulated this theory within their work.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) do not consider metaphors to simply be an imaginative mode that is poetically expressed or a simple device that uses language in an unusual way with little or no connection to human action and thinking. Rather, they present a ground-breaking view of basic metaphor theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors are constantly present in our daily lives, not only in language but also in thinking and acting. The expansive nature of metaphors derives from our common conceptual system, which is basically metaphorical, and the concepts that govern our thinking, not just our intellects, but all our daily functions. These are the concepts that structure what we perceive and even how we relate to others. This means that conceptual systems play a crucial role in defining everyday reality. Thus, it is obvious that the metaphorical nature of the conceptual system, with metaphors constantly present in the way that we think, represents what we experience and what we do every day.

The new metaphorical thinking presented by Lakoff and Johnson has inspired several linguistic researchers, notably Gibbs and Kövecses. Kövecses (2010) argues that conceptual metaphor means understanding an experience domain (usually abstract) in another sense (usually concrete). Indeed, conceptual metaphor is a way of perceiving one concept through another concept. For example, love is an abstract concept which will be perceived by different people in different ways, such as LOVE IS AN OBJECT, LOVE IS A GAME, LOVE IS AN ANIMAL, LOVE IS A JOURNEY, or LOVE IS PAIN. In this case, LOVE is the abstract target domain and OBJECT, GAME, ANIMAL, JOURNEY, and PAIN are source domains which are less abstract and more concrete.

### B. Conceptual Metaphors of Love

According to Kövecses (2010), conceptual metaphors and their role in emotion concepts often have specific cultural characteristics. However, the question is whether conceptual metaphors constitute cultural models associated with emotions or whether they only reflect those cultural patterns. Kövecses argues that the feasibility of conceptual metaphors – along with other factors – actually governs how emotional concepts are formulated.

As previously mentioned, a source domain that is easier to understand is used to define more complicated domains in conceptual metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) posit that the concept of LOVE is primarily structured using metaphorical terms. In their research, these two authors provide several conceptual metaphors for love such as LOVE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS MADNESS, LOVE IS MAGIC and LOVE IS A GAMBLING GAME.

Kövecses (1990, pp. 144-159) states that container metaphors are central to metaphors of love as well as to understanding any emotion. With regard to emotions, container metaphors work in two ways: either the emotion is the container, LOVE IS A CONTAINER, or the emotion can be contained within the human body, LOVE IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER. Kövecses (2002, 2010) also provides a number of conceptual metaphors for love. The typical examples are LOVE IS CLOSENESS, LOVE IS RAPTURE, LOVE IS A NUTRIENT, LOVE IS FLUID IN A CONTAINER, and LOVE IS A UNITY OF PARTS. On that basis, some conceptual metaphors can be devised to expand the domains they utilise. For example, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT becomes LOVE IS LIGHT; EMOTION IS HEAT is altered to LOVE IS A SOURCE OF WARMTH, whereas RELATIONSHIPS ARE PLANTS becomes LOVE IS A PLANT.

Conceptual metaphors of love in the present study are mainly based on the models suggested by Lakoff and Johnson and Kövecses. However, the investigation and classification of conceptual metaphors are concretised according to groups to highlight Vietnamese concepts of love through idioms.

### C. Idiomatic Meanings and Conceptual Metaphors

Subsuming several possible idioms under the same conceptual metaphor is an important step in idiomatic analysis. Doing so enables the expansion of the explanatory basis. For example, Vietnamese idioms such as *trên chín tầng mây* 'on nine layers of cloud' [feel so happy and excited], *nhảy cẫng lên* 'jump up' [jump up for joy], *nhảy chân sáo* 'leap leg mynah' [feel so happy and leap], which all belong to the conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP, are analysed separately in the framework of traditional lexicology because of their different status in the taxonomy of lexical units. The cognitive approach allows us to surmount these taxonomic differences and analyse related lexical units from a perspective of semantics and pragmatics, ignoring the boundaries between taxonomic classes (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2006). Several conceptual metaphor models to which many idioms belong are presented in the following.

SAD IS DOWN: *rũ như tàu lá chuối* 'droop like a leaf banana' [become droopy because of sadness], *tui ngừu như chó cúp đuôi* 'crest-fallen like a dog droops its tail' [become droopy because of sadness] and *hoa sầu liễu rủ* 'flower sorrowful willow hang down' [be crippled by sadness].

SADNESS IS PAIN: *đau như cắt* ‘painful like a cut’ [experience intense sadness], *đau như xát muối* ‘painful like rubbing with salt’ [experience intense sadness], *xé ruột xé gan* ‘rend intestine rend liver’ [experience intense sadness] and *đứt ruột đứt gan* ‘ruptured intestine ruptured liver’ [experience intense sadness].

SADNESS IS AN ANIMAL THAT HAS PAIN: *tâng hăng như chó bị mất dái* ‘struck with grief like a dog lost its testicle’ [be struck with grief], *đứt ruột tằm tơ* ‘silkworm intestinal rupture’ [experience intense sadness], *tiu nghiu như mèo cụt tai* ‘struck with grief like cat with cut ears’ [be struck with grief].

A HAPPY PERSON IS AN ANIMAL THAT LIVES WELL: *cả rồ gặp mưa rào* ‘anabas met with showers’ [feel extremely happy], *gà sống chuồng* ‘chicken released from a cage’ [feel free and happy], *như chim sổ lồng* ‘like birds released from a cage’ [feel free and happy], and *như cá gặp nước* ‘like a fish that meets water’ [feel comfortable and happy].

Groups of idioms like these provide a good foundation for semantic analysis. From this point of view, the idea of conceptual metaphor as a cognitive foundation for idioms is an efficient instrument of analysis. However, it is evident that idioms based on the same conceptual metaphor often reveal semantic differences that cannot be explained on the basis of rather abstract metaphoric models. For example, the two idioms *chạm phải gai* ‘accidentally touch thorn’ [grow angry when self-esteem is affected] and *đóng cửa đi ăn mày* ‘close the door and go begging’ [pretend to be poor to ask for help] activate the same two conceptual metaphors at the same time, namely MIND IS A CONTAINER and IDEAS ARE PHYSICAL ENTITIES, so an explanation for the above differences in meaning has to be sought in another domain. Evidently, these differences are caused by mental images corresponding to the idioms under consideration (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2006). *Chạm phải gai* invokes the image of an unwanted and unintentional action, while *đóng cửa đi ăn mày* refers to an image associated with an individual's wishes and intentional action. Hence, the explanatory power of metaphoric models increases if the corresponding source domain is oriented towards a basic level of classification rather than being modelled in abstract terms such as CONTAINER or PHYSICAL ENTITIES (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2006). For the description of the semantic properties of idioms inherited from the visual structure, the basic conceptual level, where rich mental images are found, is more important than the high-level meaning, which is consistent with the relevant generalisation (Dobrovol'skij, 2000).

The discussion above shows that it is not possible to fully describe all idioms using only conceptual metaphors. The reason for this is that conceptual metaphors have not been developed with the aim of analysing the unusual semantic and pragmatic features of idioms. However, emotion idioms including idioms of love are associated with common cognitive mechanisms that govern people's emotions, and conceptual metaphors are still regarded as an efficient tool for analysing this kind of idiom (Giang, 2020).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Approach

This is a descriptive study since it seeks an in-depth discussion of the conceptual metaphors of love through Vietnamese idioms. According to Wisker (2001, p. 118), descriptive research aims to learn more about a phenomenon and to capture the phenomenon with detailed information. Often the description is only true for that moment in time, but it still helps us to understand and know more about the phenomenon. In addition, descriptive research attempts to determine, describe or identify what is, that is, descriptive research uses description, classification, measurement and comparison to describe what phenomena are (Wisker, 2001, p. 120). The present study presents the theoretical foundation of idioms in general and idioms for love via the conceptual metaphor approach in particular, which are then illustrated using examples along with explanations and discussion, and reaching conclusions by means of deductive reasoning.

#### B. Data Collection

The data for this study derives from standard current dictionaries, which are valuable instruments for the scientific research of languages (Anshen & Aronoff, 1999) due to their ‘objective and readily verifiable references’ (Neumann, 2001, p. 126). These dictionaries were selected for several specific reasons. Firstly, they are quite popular and currently available. Secondly, they cover a large number of idioms that people are likely to encounter in everyday Vietnamese. Finally, the dictionaries satisfy the diachronic perspective because the examples used for illustrations are mostly from literary works, magazines and newspapers. The collected data represents a corpus of 126 idioms for love, which are stored under different conceptual metaphor models in a Word file.

#### C. Data Analysis

After the data was collected and classified, the conceptual metaphor models to which the idioms for love belong were described and analysed. These conceptual metaphors of love are based on the models suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) and Kövecses (2010). Nine typical conceptual metaphor models were found in the corpus. In each model, comments are illustrated by examples with an explanation and discussion. In this study, the Vietnamese idioms first had to be translated into English. It should also be noted that there are several Vietnamese idioms for which English equivalents could not be found. In order to maintain consistency in translation, the translation strategies used are (i) word-for-word and (ii) paraphrase (Baker, 1992).

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study more than 4,000 Vietnamese idioms were investigated, and 126 idioms for love were collected. Within this corpus, thirteen conceptual metaphors of love were identified. However, LOVE IS FOOLISHNESS (e.g. (1) *khôn ba năm dại một giờ* ‘wise three years silly one hour’ [make mistakes in love]), LOVE IS JEALOUSY (e.g. (2) *ghen bóng ghen gió* ‘jealous shape jealous wind’ [be jealous in love]), LOVE IS AN EXCHANGE (e.g. (3) *trao xương đổi thịt* ‘exchanging bones for meat’ [be madly in love with somebody]) and LOVE IS MARRIAGE (e.g. (4) *kết tóc xe tơ* ‘plait hairs spin silk’ [get married]) are conceptual metaphors that are neither common nor typical, hence, they are not described and analysed in the present study. Table 1 shows the results for Vietnamese idioms classified according to conceptual metaphors of love, consecutively arranged from the largest number of idioms to the least. It can be seen that LOVE IS FAITHFULNESS, LOVE IS A UNITY, LOVE IS AN INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP, and LOVE IS CLOSENESS are the conceptual metaphors expressed in the largest percentages of idioms (19.05%, 18.25%, 15.08% and 13.50%, respectively). LOVE IS BETRAYAL has the lowest percentage of idioms, at 3.17%. The conceptual metaphors containing the largest number of idioms are detailed in the following sections.

TABLE 1  
CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF LOVE THROUGH VIETNAMESE IDIOMS

No	Conceptual metaphors of love	Number of idioms	%
1	LOVE IS FAITHFULNESS	24	19.05
2	LOVE IS A UNITY	23	18.25
3	LOVE IS AN INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP	19	15.08
4	LOVE IS CLOSENESS	17	13.50
5	LOVE IS A PASSION	15	11.90
6	LOVE IS A CHOICE	8	6.36
7	LOVE IS NOSTALGIA	6	4.76
8	LOVE IS FATE	6	4.76
9	LOVE IS BETRAYAL	4	3.17
10	OTHERS	4	3.17
Total		126	100

## A. Love Is Faithfulness

Basically, ‘faithfulness’ means that something is the same before and after. In love, faithfulness is a concept that is not easy to express in words. The value of faithfulness is the greatest measure of true love. There are several idioms in Vietnamese such as (5a) *có thủy có chung* ‘have faith have faith’ [be faithful in love], (5b) *một lòng một dạ* ‘one mind one soul’ [be faithful in love], (6) *tình sâu nghĩa nặng* ‘deep love intense gratitude’ [endless love] and (7) *nát đá vàng phai* ‘broken stone and faded gold’ [an oath of fidelity in love], which recognise the conclusive role of faithfulness in love. The above idioms also indicate that LOVE is understood in terms of the source domain of FAITHFULNESS, which produces the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS FAITHFULNESS. Faithfulness in love can be expressed in a variety of ways through idioms such as the following:

– A promise or an oath:

- (8) a. *hẹn non thề biển*  
‘promise mountain swear sea’  
[an oath of fidelity in love]  
b. *thề non hẹn biển*  
‘swear mountain promise sea’  
[an oath of fidelity in love]

– Overcoming the difficulties together:

- (9) a. *chia bùi sẻ ngọt*  
‘share the buttery share the sweet’  
[overcome all the difficulties together]  
b. *chia ngọt sẻ bùi*  
‘share the sweet share the buttery’  
[overcome all the difficulties together]  
c. *đồng cam cộng khổ*  
‘share difficulties share hardship’  
[overcome all the difficulties together]  
(10) a. *chung lòng chung sức*  
‘share mind share strength’  
[join forces and rely on one another]  
b. *chung lưng chung sức*  
‘share backs share strength’  
[join forces and rely on one another]  
c. *chung lưng đău cật*

- ‘share backs join rattan’  
[join forces and rely on one another]
- d. *chung lưng đầu sức*  
‘share backs join strength’  
[join forces and rely on one another]
- e. *chung lưng góp sức*  
‘share backs contribute strength’  
[join forces and rely on one another]
- Being together forever:
- (11) a. *đầu bạc răng long*  
‘grey hair shaken teeth’  
[live happily together forever]
- b. *mãn đời trọn kiếp*  
‘end life whole incarnation’  
[live happily together forever]
- c. *tóc bạc răng long*  
‘grey hair shaken teeth’  
[live happily together forever]
- Going everywhere together:
- (12) *cuối đất cùng trời*  
‘end of land end of sky’  
[go everywhere together]
- Waiting:
- (13) *năm đợi mười chờ*  
‘five years wait ten years wait’  
[wait for someone in a faithful way]

When in love, lovers in Vietnamese culture often make a vow to confirm their love and faithfulness. The mountain and the sea are eternal witnesses helping lovers declare their commitment to staying together by agreeing to marry and remain faithful (an oath). Such an act also shows the lovers’ efforts to remain in love no matter how difficult life subsequently becomes, as in (8a-b).

The idioms in (9) indicate faithfulness in love through sharing everything. Vietnamese people see their romantic partners as their closest friends with whom they can share or communicate all things, including positive things (e.g. sweetness) and even negative things (e.g. bitterness). Lovers in Vietnamese are expected to give and take. They do not care about how much they gain in a love relationship or about how much they give to their partner as in (9a-c). (10a-e) show that lovers try their best to overcome all difficulties together to cultivate happiness and love.

In traditional Vietnamese culture, love is regarded as an important life event and is expected to last forever. Separation is something that is extremely difficult to accept, resulting in considerable pressure from parents, relatives, neighbours and even friends of the lovers. The long-lasting relationship in (11) is therefore achieved through the active and conscious efforts of the two lovers, which refers to ‘lovers’ lifetime commitment to each other’. Love lasts a long time as the two lovers move forwards. The relationship between the two lovers in (11) is sustainable until death parts them. The commitment ties the two lovers together and forms the foundation on which the relationship can grow.

Traditionally, a Vietnamese woman who marries follows her husband. It means that wherever the husband goes, the wife is beside him, which is regarded as a sign of her loyalty. (12) indicates that the two lovers are always together wherever they are. In fact, loving each other does not always mean being together. There are many couples who have to love from a distance. However, the person waiting is usually a woman. They wait for their lover or husband in many different circumstances such as when their lover works away from home, when their lover takes part in military service or when their lover goes on a business trip. Waiting in love is also an act of faithfulness, which is shown in (13). Thus, the value of faithfulness in love is mentioned in idioms concerning several aspects of daily life. In addition to sweet words, love requires waiting, sharing and, above all, believing in the faithfulness of both lovers.

### B. Love Is a Unity

LOVE is conceptualised as a UNITY. The word ‘unity’ derives from the Latin word ‘unus’, meaning ‘one’ (Kövecses, 2000b), which refers to being in harmony with each other to form a unified whole. Unity in love represents one of the extremely important conditions that lead to sustainable love. In Vietnamese culture, to have lasting love, lovers need to be of compatible ages. In other words, lovers should be around the same age. The idioms in (14) refer to young couples who are of the same age and worthy of each other.

- (14) a. *bằng đôi bằng lứa*  
‘same couple same age’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- b. *vừa duyên phải lứa*  
‘fit charm fit age’

- [boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- c. *vừa đôi phải lứa*  
‘fit couple fit age’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- d. *vừa lứa phải đôi*  
‘fit age fit couple’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- e. *vừa lứa xứng đôi*  
‘fit age fit couple’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- f. *xứng đôi vừa lứa*  
‘fit couple fit age’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]
- g. *trai tơ gái lứa*  
‘boys young girls young’  
[boys and girls who are of the same age and positions fall in love with each other]

In addition to unity of age, some Vietnamese idioms also relate to the unity of circumstances, which can be living environments, family backgrounds or educational conditions. (15) *Môn đăng hộ đối* ‘family same household same’ is an idiom which means ‘the similarity of the social background between the bride and bridegroom’s families’. Earlier in Vietnamese society, the conditions of the families had to be equal in a marriage. Therefore, the relationships of young people were influenced by family circumstances. It was very difficult or impossible for a person from a poor family to love a person from a rich family and vice versa.

Nonetheless, those who possess the same circumstances and the same fate often find each other and their love is also built on the unity of those situations. The idioms in (16) refer to couples who love each other when both share troubled pasts which make them formidable and rebellious.

- (16) a. *gã giang hồ trai tứ chiếng*  
‘girl gangster boy gangster’  
[boys and girls who have troubled pasts love each other]
- b. *trai tứ chiếng gã giang hồ*  
‘boy gangster girl gangster’  
[boys and girls who have troubled pasts love each other]
- c. *tứ chiếng giang hồ*  
‘gangster gangster’  
[boys and girls who have troubled pasts love each other]

In contrast, a talented boy falls in love with a beautiful girl, which creates perfection in love. This perfection is the result of the unity of talent and beauty. The meanings of the idioms in (17) refer to perfect couples.

- (17) a. *gái nhàn tài tử*  
‘the beautiful the talented’  
[boys and girls who are good-looking and talented love each other]
- b. *tài tử gái nhàn*  
‘the talented the beautiful’  
[boys and girls who are good-looking and talented love each other]
- c. *trai tài gái sắc*  
‘the talented the beautiful’  
[boys and girls who are good-looking and talented love each other]
- d. *trai thanh gái tú*  
‘the gentle the beautiful’  
[boys and girls who are good-looking and talented love each other]
- e. *trai thanh gái lịch*  
‘the gentle the gentle’  
[boys and girls who are good-looking and talented love each other]

However, love is not only concerned with unity of age, circumstances, and talent but also of thoughts. More specifically, it is the harmony of lifestyles, viewpoints and even habits and hobbies. Two people who love each other completely understand and sympathise with each other, as shown in (18).

- (18) a. *tâm đầu ý hợp*  
‘minds compatible ideas compatible’  
[be completely compatible]
- b. *ý hợp tâm đầu*  
‘ideas compatible minds compatible’  
[be completely compatible]

- c. ý hợp tâm đồng  
 ‘ideas compatible minds same’  
 [be completely compatible]

### C. Love Is an Inappropriate Relationship

Love is a special relationship between two people. However, this relationship is not always good or encouraged. An inappropriate relationship in love is a relationship that disobeys the acceptable customs, the moral values or the provisions of the law. LOVE IS AN INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP is described by several idioms in different states and levels. The nature of true love is faithfulness. A person falls in love with only one person. When a person flirts or falls in love with two people at the same time, the relationship is called (19) *bắt cả hai tay* ‘catch fish two hands’. (20) *Ăn cơm trước kẻng* ‘eat rice before gong’ is an idiom that can be paraphrased as ‘boys and girls having sex before marriage’. Two people who do not get married but live together as husband and wife are referred to as (21) *già nhân ngãi non vợ chồng* ‘too mistress nearly couple’. An old man who marries a young woman is demonstrated in the meaning of (22) *già chơi chống bỏi* ‘old play paper tambourine’.

Within a marriage, a person (a wife or a husband) conducting an extramarital relationship (adultery) is mentioned in several idioms associated with image components such as *chồng* (husband), *vợ* (wife), *phượng* (phoenix), *mày* (eyebrows), *mắt* (eyes), *trai* (boy), *gái* (girl), *mèo* (cat), *chó* (dog), *gà* (chicken), *chăn* (blanket) and *gối* (pillow). Although the idioms are based on these different images, all of them describe inappropriate relationships, as shown in (23) and (24). These relationships contravene the laws of marriage and are condemned by the whole society.

- (23) a. *chồng chung vợ chạ*  
 ‘husband share wife share’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]  
 b. *loan chung phượng chạ*  
 ‘phoenix share phoenix share’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]  
 c. *gian phu dâm phụ*  
 ‘tricky husband lustful wife’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]  
 d. *mèo mả gà đồng*  
 ‘cat wanton dog wanton’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]  
 e. *nhân tình nhân ngãi*  
 ‘human love human faithfulness’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]  
 f. *mèo đàng chó điếm*  
 ‘cat wanton dog wanton’  
 [engage in extramarital relations with another]
- (24) a. *trai trên gái dưới*  
 ‘boy on girl below’  
 [engage in extramarital sex with another]  
 b. *mây mưa chăn gối*  
 ‘cloud rain blanket pillow’  
 [engage in extramarital sex with another]

In fact, there are situations in which both the husband and wife engage in extramarital relationships. In other words, the wife has an affair, and the husband then does the same, or vice versa. This situation is denoted in the idioms in (25).

- (25) a. *chồng ăn chả vợ ăn nem*  
 ‘husband eat grilled chopped meat wife eat meat roll’  
 [both husband and wife engage in extramarital relations with others]  
 b. *ông ăn chả bà ăn nem*  
 ‘he eat grilled chopped meat she eat meat roll’  
 [both husband and wife engage in extramarital relations with others]

(26a) *Vợ lẽ con thêm* ‘wife extra children more’ and (26b) *vợ nọ con kia* ‘wife more children extra’ are the idioms that condemn men who have additional wives and children. Naturally, this situation is illegal, however, it still exists in Vietnamese society, whereby a man has only one official wife but one or more unofficial wives. The relationship between the man and his unofficial wives and children is often hidden.

### D. Love Is Closeness

Love requires closeness, which refers not only to the physical aspects of love but also the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects. In other words, closeness is a couple sharing a whole life. Sexual activity, which is one of the ways of showing this closeness, is not directly referred to in Vietnamese idioms. Instead it is referred to in a delicate and gentle way through the images of sharing common objects such as beds, blankets and pillows, as in (27).

- (27) a. *chung chăn chung gối*  
 'share blanket share pillow'  
 [the intimate activities of a couple]  
 b. *chùng chiếu chung giường*  
 'share sedge mat share bed'  
 [the intimate activities of a couple]  
 c. *chung gối chung chăn*  
 'share pillow share blanket'  
 [the intimate activities of a couple]

(28) *đầu áp tay gối* 'heads hatch hands pillow' is a Vietnamese idiom that directly describes the intimate activities of a couple. The idiom refers to the close relationship between the husband and the wife.

Closeness in love gradually becomes a habit. Couples grow used to each other's voice, breath, and even smell. In fact, very few people like the breath and smell of others. However, when falling in love, one tends to love everything about the other person. Vietnamese idioms are very subtle in describing this feature of love, as in (29).

- (29) a. *bén tiếng quen hơi*  
 'attach voice used breath'  
 [become familiar with and attached to another]  
 b. *quen ăn bén mùi*  
 'used eat attach smell'  
 [become familiar with and attached to another]  
 c. *quen hơi bén tiếng*  
 'used breath attach voice'  
 [become familiar with and attached to another]

As mentioned above, love requires closeness, and this is understood as no distance. Distance in love is a significant obstacle that many couples cannot overcome. Indeed, it makes love fade. This situation is expressed by (30) *xa mặt cách lòng* 'far face apart mind', which can be paraphrased as 'out of sight, out of mind'.

#### E. Love Is a Passion

Passion is considered to be one of love's highest emotional levels. There are several verbs such as *mê* (adore), *say* (infatuate), *chết* (die), and *đắm* (infatuate) which are often used in Vietnamese idioms to express this emotional level, as in (31) and (32).

- (31) *chết mê chết mệt*  
 'die craze die tiredness'  
 [fall in love in a passionate way]  
 (32) a. *đắm nguyệt say hoa*  
 'wrecked moon drunk flowers'  
 [be infatuated with someone]  
 b. *mê như ăn phải bùa*  
 'adore like eat charms'  
 [be infatuated with someone]  
 c. *mê như điếu đổ*  
 'adore like hookah fall'  
 [be infatuated with someone]  
 d. *say hoa đắm nguyệt*  
 'drunk flowers wrecked moon'  
 [be infatuated with someone]  
 e. *say như điếu đổ*  
 'passionate like hookah fall'  
 [be infatuated with someone]

When two people fall in love with each other, the passion manifests in the desire to be together, and the fact that they are always together, like a pair of chopsticks, a shape and its shadow, or glue and paint, is shown in (33). These pairs are the idiomatic images that show the strong attachment in love. The attachment lasts forever as a truth, and that is the nature of true love.

- (33) a. *như đũa có đôi*  
 'like chopsticks have pair'  
 [be in love and always together]  
 b. *như hình với bóng*  
 'like shape with shadow'  
 [be in love and always together]  
 c. *như keo với sơn*  
 'like glue with paint'

[be in love and always together]

Love appears to generate a special feeling called 'passion'. This passion seems to be free of all restraints. The couple are not governed by will or calculation. People living in love seem to forget everything, even the fact that they are ordinary people. This explains the appearance of (34a) *như điên như dại* 'like mad like silly' and (34b) *như con thiêu thân* 'like a mayfly', which can be paraphrased as 'be crazy about somebody'. Indeed, there are few who are not crazy or foolish when in love. Passion in love is also associated with spells, poison and anaesthetic, which make people senseless, and that state is the exuberance of love.

- (35) a. *bùa mê bả độc*  
         'spell   poison'  
         [fall in love in a passionate way]  
       b. *bùa mê thuốc lú*  
         'spell   anaesthetic'  
         [to fall in love in a passionate way]  
       c. *phải bùa phải bả*  
         'get spell get poison'  
         [fall in love in a passionate way]

According to Vietnamese superstition, *bùa/bùa mê bả*, and *thuốc lú*, as in (35a-c), can contain magic powers that bewitch people. It is believed by Vietnamese people that people under the influence of spells will lose their faculties, be misled and out of control. The idioms in (35) show that love in Vietnamese culture is associated with bewitchment. Love wields the magnetism of sexual attraction over another, and the lovers are fascinated with their partners. Love in Vietnamese culture enters one like a magic spell, which evokes a sense of powerlessness in the lovers (Trao, 2009).

#### F. Love Is a Choice

Choice is also very important in love. If we make the right choice, we will have fulfilling love, but if it is the wrong choice, we will not be satisfied. (36) *Lấy vợ xem tông* 'marry wife see descent' is meant to remind a boy that when he falls in love with a girl, in addition to learning about the girl, he should also learn about the girl's relatives. Then, he should decide whether he wants to continue this romantic relationship or not (marry the girl or not). *Xem* (learn) in (36) is not concerned with whether or not the girl's family is rich, but whether the girl's relatives are disciplined, reliable and faithful. (36) implies that the boy's family needs to know the background of the girl's family, that is, whether or not they are respectable. In addition, it is also necessary to ascertain the pasts of the girl's parents (whether or not they are well brought-up). If all the members of the girl's family are well-behaved, it is great and perfect for a marriage. According to the Vietnamese concept, a girl brought up in a good family will become a good wife. Therefore, the advice here is that one should not rush into marriage but rather take the time to get to know one's future wife.

Conversely, (37) *Lấy chồng kén giống* 'marry husband see descent' simply means that a girl who wants to get married needs to learn whether her future husband's family have been acceptable for generations. It means that all the relatives in the boy's family must be respectable and healthy. The Vietnamese believe that a hero always produces a hero. Naturally, there are exceptions, but most people follow that rule. Therefore, it is necessary to marry a healthy man to have healthy children. For Vietnamese people, choosing a partner is very important because marriage is the most significant job in life. Choosing a life partner seriously and carefully is also to ensure that one will have a happy family in the future.

Vietnamese people are also very practical when choosing a lover or spouse. Choosing people who are local to us will help us have a better understanding of each other. In other words, people living in the same environment will experience similar circumstances and thus understand each other better than those from a different environment. (38) *Trâu ta ăn cỏ đồng ta* 'our buffalo eat our grass field' is an idiom often used to refer to couples coming from the same hometown. Couples from the same hometown are also very convenient in terms of visiting and caring for parents later in life.

As previously mentioned, not all relationship choices are right or appropriate. (39) *đũa mốc (mộc) chời mâm son* 'chopsticks musty reach tray lacquer' is a typical idiom, which can be paraphrased as 'be presumptuous enough to follow a superior person'. In love, one also needs to know where one is from and who one is to make the right choice of partner. Many people who do not realise their positions fall into the situation of (40) *cao không tới thấp không thông* 'high not reach low not satisfy'. This idiom refers to women finding that there is nobody suitable with whom they can fall in love and marry. This situation renders the women lonely and unmarried.

Many people, especially girls, often set too many criteria for choosing a lover or husband. In reality, no-one meets those criteria, but if they do, the girls increase the criteria, as in (41).

- (41) a. *đứng núi này           trông núi nọ*  
         'stand on this mountain look at another mountain'  
         [to be never satisfied with one's present love]  
       b. *đứng núi nọ           trông núi kia*  
         'stand on that mountain look at another mountain'  
         [to be never satisfied with one's present love]

- (42) *già kén kén hom*  
       'ripe cocoon stuck bamboo frame'

[the choosy do not often get the best]

(42) indicates that girls or boys who are fastidious usually remain unmarried. This idiom originates from conventional knowledge (Giang, 2018). According to Hanh (2008), *già kén kén hom* is an idiom derived from the silkworm feeding trade. The silkworm feeding trade requires a step known as *making wattles for silkworm cocooning*. Hanh (2008, p. 149) describes this step as follows: ‘Wattles with standing legs are made of bamboo, but they are sparsely woven to create square boxes with straws set for silkworm cocooning. They are called *n é* Bamboo slats used to weave *n é* are *hom*. Adult silkworms are put on *n é* where they can find a suitable place to cocoon by themselves’. Examining this description, it becomes evident that a worm that is going to be dead is still spitting out silk. If the cocoons on *n é* are large and the density is thick (gì à k á), they will be stuck in *hom* and very difficult to remove (kén hom). This fact is considered to be correlated to a similar fate in love. In this case, the homonymous relationships between *k á* in *kén chọn* and *k á* in *kén tầm*; *hom* in *hom n é* and *hom* in *hom hem* are used to interchange the concepts. As a result, the phrase *già kén kén hom* is separated from its origins. The story is not about the silkworm feeding trade but a person’s fate: The person is so picky that they cannot avoid falling into a slump and worrying. It means that they fall into a deadlock between the values of two choices (the high and the low) and ultimately means they remain alone.

### G. Love Is Nostalgia

It cannot be denied that love is always associated with nostalgia. No matter what the stage of love is, when commencing, when in love, when marrying, nostalgia is always perpetual. Nostalgia expressed in Vietnamese idioms is not fierce, but gentle, deep and painful, as in (43).

- (43) *niềm thương nỗi nhớ*  
‘feeling loved feeling missed’  
[miss somebody]

Indeed, the Vietnamese, especially in the past, have tended to hide their feelings. It is the reason why idioms concerning nostalgia in love are also discreet and timid. The idioms in (44) have different forms that can all be paraphrased as ‘fall in love with someone secretly’.

- (44) a. *thầm yêu trộm nhớ*  
‘secretly love secretly miss’  
[fall in love with someone secretly]  
b. *yêu trộm nhớ thầm*  
‘love secretly miss secretly’  
[fall in love with someone secretly]  
c. *yêu thầm nhớ trộm*  
‘love secretly miss secretly’  
[fall in love with someone secretly]  
d. *yêu thầm nhớ vụng*  
‘love secretly miss secretly’  
[fall in love with someone secretly]  
e. *yêu vụng nhớ thầm*  
‘love secretly miss secretly’  
[fall in love with someone secretly]

The components of the idioms such as *thầm* (silently), *trộm* (secretly) and *vụng* (furtively) represent the concealment of love, which is nostalgia. This hiding of nostalgia in love can be due to the prohibition by the lovers’ parents and relatives, or even the objections of the society in which the couples live.

Love does not always develop from both sides. When love develops from only one side, we call it ‘unilateral love’ or ‘one-sided love’. (44a-e) show that when someone declares their love to the other but it is not accepted, they have to hide their nostalgia. The above idioms also present the situation of someone who is already in love, but for some reason (being afraid of not being accepted, a fear of rejection) does not dare to confess their love and keeps their nostalgia in their heart. Their love is a secret that no-one else knows.

### H. Love Is Fate

Fate is an abstract concept originating from the Chinese language. This category refers to the invisible connections between people and the possibilities and opportunities they have to meet naturally. According to the Vietnamese concepts, fate is determined by heaven. If there is no predestined affinity, how is it possible for people to meet each other and become a part of each other’s lives? In life, we may meet many people, but the number of people who can become friends or couples must be due to the predestined relationships from their previous lives. When two people who are strangers meet, then fall in love and become a couple, they must be meant for each other, as in (45).

- (45) a. *phải duyên phải kiếp*  
‘meet charms meet incarnation’  
[meet, get along and fall in love]  
b. *phải duyên phải số*  
‘meet charms meet fate’

[meet, get along and fall in love]

In love, fate brings two people from two strange places together to harmonise their heartbeats and share love and longing. The idioms in (46) and (47) praise the beauty and harmony in love through the images of *duy ên* (charm), *phận* (destiny) and *chỉ hồng* (pink thread).

- (46) *duy ên ưa phận đẹp*  
 ‘charms fit condition nice’  
 [a highly compatible couple]
- (47) a. *duy ên thắm chỉ hồng*  
 ‘charms carmine thread pink’  
 [a highly compatible couple]
- b. *xe duy ên chỉ thắm*  
 ‘join charms thread carmine’  
 [a highly compatible couple]

### I. Love Is Betrayal

LOVE IS BETRAYAL is a conceptual metaphor that sounds absurd but makes perfect sense in the situation when two people are in love and one of them finds a new partner, thereby betraying their current love. In order to have a new love in whom they are more interested, one partner must betray their other half. LOVE IS BETRAYAL expresses this aspect through idioms.

In Vietnamese idioms, the former lover is often associated with *điều cũ* (old thing), *bát đản* (platter), *đèn* (lamp), and the new lover often with *điều mới* (new thing), *bát sứ* (porcelain bowl) and *trăng* (moon). These images in (48) create contrasting pairs of values: old – new; platters – porcelain bowls; lamp – moon. Indeed, ‘new’ is usually more interesting and more attractive than ‘old’. The porcelain bowl is a bowl made of white clay, glazed, light and elegant, while the platter is a bowl made of coarse porcelain and is not as good as the porcelain bowl. The moon is also higher and brighter than the lamp.

- (48) a. *có mới nới cũ*  
 ‘have new leave old’  
 [betray one’s lover to follow someone new]
- b. *có bát sứ tình phụ bát đản*  
 ‘have porcelain bowl leave platter’  
 [betray one’s lover to follow someone new]
- c. *có trăng phụ đèn*  
 ‘have moon leave light’  
 [betray one’s lover to follow someone new]

(49) *tham vàng bỏ ngãi* ‘lust gold leave love’ is an idiom denoting another form of betrayal. This idiom refers to those who are greedy for money and thus have unfaithful hearts. *Vàng* (gold) is a precious thing that symbolises money and *ngãi* (love) is love. Vietnamese people use the above idioms to criticise those with materialistic and unfaithful lifestyles.

### V. CONCLUSION

Idioms are special linguistic units that reflect national cultures and perspectives. Therefore, the idiomatic concepts of love in each language are different. The findings of this study reveal that there are nine common and typical conceptual metaphors for love in Vietnamese idioms. Accordingly, the abstract target domain LOVE is explained using nine tangible source domains (LOVE IS FAITHFULNESS, LOVE IS A UNITY, LOVE IS AN INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP, LOVE IS A PASSION, LOVE IS A CHOICE, LOVE IS CLOSENESS, LOVE IS NOSTALGIA, LOVE IS FATE and LOVE IS BETRAYAL). These idioms indicate that love is fated, that two strangers meeting, falling in love and marrying is a predestined fate. Vietnamese people praise the beauty of love in conjunction with nostalgia, passion, compatibility and closeness. They appreciate and revere faithfulness in love, while opposing and condemning inappropriate relationships and betrayal in love.

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