Perception of Women Through Conceptual Metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS": A Case Study of 20th-Century Vietnamese Literature

Giang T. Pham[*]
Faculty of English, Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam

Chung T. T. Nguyen
Faculty of English, Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam

Abstract—**Based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the article elucidates the conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" in 20th-century Vietnamese literary works. Through the analysis of low-level metaphors, the study focuses on determining the number and frequency of metaphorical linguistic expressions, hence shedding light on cultures and thinking of the Vietnamese community in a correlation between universality and distinctive characteristics of this ethnic group. Different perspectives on women are also revealed.**

Index Terms—**conceptual metaphor, literature, plants, women, mapping**

I. INTRODUCTION

The CMT originating from Lakoff has expanded his reputation beyond the confines of pure linguistics and injected a fresh perspective into the development of metaphor theory. In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson published the book *"Metaphors We Live By"*, which presents the CMT and has been considered a cornerstone for subsequent metaphorical research. They approached and studied metaphors through various experiential domains, asserting that metaphors are cognitive phenomena rather than purely linguistic ones, and English metaphorical expressions reflect the presence of metaphors existing in layers of concepts. Therefore, the essence and function of cognitive linguistics in general and conceptual metaphors in particular involve studying how humans perceive and evaluate the world through the lens of language and cultural context (Lakoff, 1986; Kövecses, 2000, 2005, 2010).

In recent years, research on cognitive linguistics in general and CMT in particular has tended to emphasize practical applications. Regarding the application of conceptual metaphors, according to Croft and Cruse (2004), Lakoff's primary goal in developing the CMT is to understand the mappings between source and target domains and interpret them through the logic and behavior of humans, therefore applying this theory in specific fields. Lakoff and Johnson themselves consistently strived to refine their CMT and expanded its application to various domains. So far, the CMT has been employed in various areas such as literature, economics, mathematics, politics, etc.

Research on WOMEN metaphors has exploited various source domains including PLANTS, ANIMALS, OBJECTS, FOOD, NATURAL RESOURCES, SUPERNATURAL FORCES, COMMODITIES, BUILDING MATERIALS, MACHINES, etc. among which, PLANTS is considered a common domain infused with various kinds of plants, attributes and their uses and benefits (Tarkela, 2016; Zhou, 2017; Ahmed, 2018; Bassi, 2019). Regarding mappings, gaps in mappings are highlighted, wherein only a specific type of plant (flowers) is used, while other plant species are never mapped onto women (large trees, plant parts like leaves or branches). Some prominent features of plants (photosynthesis, pollination) are hidden in the construction of conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" (Takada et al., 2000). In terms of underlying meanings, plants are used to symbolize women's beauty, appearance, virtue and feelings (Rui-rui, 2022; Zhao, 2023). As for cultures and thinking, studying plant metaphors in different languages facilitates better understanding of similarities and differences between cognitive thinking and cultural connotation of these communities (Zhao, 2023) while investigating plant words in one language helps to interpret the thinking process of people of that culture, hence exerting a great influence on different aspects of the later generations such as the thinking, culture, cognition and others (Rui-rui, 2022).

In all, these studies have investigated the conceptual metaphor of WOMEN with the source domain PLANTS, but have not delved into low-level metaphors and deep layers of meaning associated with these metaphors. This research uncovers the low-level metaphors through the analysis of mapping mechanisms and the use of metaphorical expressions, thereby providing a more thorough and profound understanding of the conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS". Moreover, the study contributes to shedding light on this conceptual metaphor and its low-level ones in the

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[*] Corresponding Author

interrelationship of language, culture, and national thinking.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphor is the understanding of one domain based on another domain. The aspects of conceptual metaphor can be expressed through the formula: "CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B", wherein the target domain is represented by "conceptual domain A" while the source domain is symbolized by "conceptual domain B" (Kövecses, 2010, p. 4). Conceptual metaphor is a 'transfer' or a 'mapping' of the structure and intrinsic relationships of a field or a cognitive model from a 'source' domain to a 'target' domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to these authors, the core of metaphor lies in comprehending and encountering a particular entity through the lens of another and the method of metaphor is used to structure concepts, activities, and even language.

B. Mapping

Mapping is the process of projecting from the source domain to the target domain. A mapping diagram is a fixed system of conceptual correspondences between elements constituting the source and target domains (Kövecses, 2010, p. 7; Steen, 2008), or "systematic metaphorical correspondences between closely related ideas" (Grady, 2007, p. 190). In other words, features and attributes of the source domain are projected onto the target domain, or "certain attributes of a metaphor vehicle are associated in a systematic way with ('mapped onto') comparable attributes of the topic" (Ritchie, 2013, p. 9). Mapping from the source domain to the target domain helps establish image schemata, serving as tools to perceive and explain the target domain more easily. In all, establishing a mapping diagram between a pair of source and target domains is the key to understanding conceptual metaphor.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach

The research adopts a cognitive linguistics approach based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to identify conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS". Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach is also employed. From a modern perspective, metaphor is not only a linguistic mechanism for meaning transference but also a mode of cognition. Therefore, metaphor is related to various factors such as culture, society, history, psychology, etc. The interdisciplinary approach helps to comprehensively and deeply understand metaphor based on the interrelation among language (lexicon, metaphorical linguistic expressions, metaphorical statements), literature (images, representations, symbols of women), and culture (thinking patterns and cultural characteristics: geography, history, customs, traditions).

B. Research Methods

A number of methods are adopted in this research.

Firstly, the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) for identifying metaphorical expressions, as developed by the Pragglejaz group (2007), is utilized. This procedure consists of four steps and is specifically applied to the research corpus as follows:

(1) Read the whole novel to grasp the overall idea expressed in the literary work.
(2) Identify the vocabulary elements utilized in the work.
(3) (a) Analyze the surrounding words of each lexical item to determine their linguistic context; (b) Determine whether each lexical item carries a basic contemporary meaning in a context other than the context of the literary work under consideration; (c) If the lexical item does not have a basic contemporary meaning in a context other than the context being considered, then examine if the contextual meaning is contrasting but still understandable compared to the basic meaning.
(4) Mark the lexical item if it is metaphorical. (Pragglejaz group, 2007, p. 3)

Secondly, the descriptive method is employed to analyze and describe the structural and semantic features of the conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" in the corpus. The descriptive method utilizes statistical techniques to provide necessary quantitative information for describing, commenting on, and evaluating metaphorical expressions as well as their frequency of occurrences in literary works. The classification method is used to categorize subtypes of metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS".

C. Research Corpus

The research covers Vietnamese literary works in the 20th century, including 94 Vietnamese novels, short stories, or medium-length stories (excerpted from anthologies) by native Vietnamese authors. Many of these works revolve around the lives of women. These works are carefully selected to ensure a diverse representation from different authors, rather than focusing on a few authors and across various periods of the 20th century to elucidate the conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS".

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

In Vietnamese culture, within the belief system of "Vạn vật hữu linh" (All things have souls), many regions have customs of worshipping tree deities. Rooted in the agrarian civilization and influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, Vietnamese people have a deep connection with nature, particularly with plants, flowers, and grass. Consequently, the way of thinking about plants and their relation to humans has become entirely natural and deeply ingrained in the Vietnamese subconscious, akin to a daily habit (Nguyen, 2015).

The conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" involves a rich mapping mechanism with seven attributes of the source domain. Table 1 provides statistics of metaphorical statements based on the attributes of the source domain, PLANTS. The mapping schema for this metaphor is illustrated in Table 2 below.

TABLE 1
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SUBTYPES OF METAPHOR "WOMEN ARE PLANTS"

Attributes of the source domains	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Number of metaphorical statements
Types of plants	28	60	
Parts of plants	39	151	
Growth and development stages of plants	35	87	
Characteristics and states of plants	53	155	
Colors of plants	34	93	
Scent of plants	8	11	
Activities with plants	21	28	
Total	**218**	**585**	**407**

TABLE 2
MAPPING SCHEMA OF METAPHOR "WOMEN ARE PLANTS"

SOURCE DOMAIN: PLANTS	Mapped onto	TARGET DOMAIN: WOMEN
Types of plants	⟶	Types of women
Parts of plants	⟶	Body parts of women
Growth and development stages of plants	⟶	Physical or mental development stages of women
Characteristics and states of plants	⟶	Characteristics and states of women
Colors of plants	⟶	Colors of body parts, mood of women
Scent of plants	⟶	Scent of women's body and inner states
Activities with plants	⟶	Activities with women

The metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" appears in 407 metaphorical statements with 218 linguistic items and 585 occurrences (see Table 1). This metaphor comprises 7 sub-metaphors.

First, the metaphor "TYPES OF WOMEN ARE TYPES OF PLANTS" involves the adoption of 28 metaphorically used words with 60 occurrences. For example:

(1) *Ả **phù dung** của một kẻ thất vọng vì tình.* (A **confederate rose** of a man of desperation for love.) (Vu, 2015, p. 162)

(2) *"Không phải tôi thô, nhưng tôi động mạnh vào **cây; lá hổ ngươi khép** lại rồi, anh ạ!"* ("It's not me being rude, but I vigorously touch the plant; the shameplant leaves close up!") (Xuan)

(3) *Thì một hôm, cô nhận được phong thư. Đập ngay vào mắt cô là tập dày những hai trăm đô-la. Hắn mời cô dùng bữa cơm thân mật với hắn ở khách sạn X. Cô có nghĩ đến cái ý "**tầm gửi** lấn ngành".* (One day, she received a letter. Upon opening it, she found a thick wad of two hundred dollars. He invited her to an intimate dinner at Hotel X. She wondered about the "intimate **mistletoe**". (Nguyen, 1975, p. 176)

The traits of blooming in the morning and fading in the evening of *phù dung* (confederate rose) are associated with the short life, fading beauty or the changeable emotions of women (example 1). A *shameplant* (*cây hổ ngươi*) has a unique feature: when someone touches it, its leaves instantly fold up and droop, likened to a timid, embarrassed, or bashful young woman (example 2). In example (3), the author describes the dependent and submissive nature of a woman through the imagery of *tầm gửi (mistletoe)*, a parasitic plant that extracts water and nutrients from its host. In the Vietnamese corpus, vulnerable women are also compared to *cây bồ liễu (willow tree)* that sheds its leaves earliest in the winter. Beautiful women, women with plump bodies or dull personalities are associated with various plant images like *bông hồng (rose)*, *quả dưa chuột (cucumber)*, or *cái cây (tree)* respectively. This metaphor reflects the vivid ethnic thinking that provokes the close connection between Vietnamese people and nature, plants.

The second metaphor is "BODY PARTS OF WOMEN ARE PARTS OF PLANTS" created with 39 lexical items occurring highly frequently (151 times).

For a long time, Vietnamese people have unconsciously used words denoting plant parts in their everyday language. The Vietnamese language contains many words constructed through meaning transference based on the similarity between plant parts and women's body parts, with stable meanings in the dictionary, such as *quả tim* (the heart is likened to a fruit), *lá gan* (the liver is compared to a leaf), etc. Here is a typical example of this metaphor:

(4) *Khi cô đào trẻ tuổi đến đứng bên cụ phán, bên lên nâng cốc rượu thì nhanh như cắt, quan Bố đã nắm lấy một bên cánh tay cụ phán mà quệt một cái vào ngực cô ả, để rồi cười nức nở cắt nghĩa: Này thì đây: xin dang tay giật phịch **quả đào tiên**! (...)* (When the young girl stood next to the old man and coyly raised her wine cup, lightning fast, Lord Father

*reached out and pinched the old man's arm, squeezing her breast, and then laughed heartily, saying in a playful manner: "Look here, I've just plucked a **fairy peach**! (...))* (Vu, 1939, p. 157)

The use of various plant parts like *hột nhãn (longan stone)*, *quả chuối ngự (plantain fruit)*, *múi cà chua (tomato segment)*, *lá răm (coriander leaf)*, *lá đề (Mock Bodhi leaf)*, *quả mướp (sponge gourd)*, *quả đào tiên (fairy peach)* is connected accordingly to female body parts such as eyes, nose, lips, eyebrows, and breasts. The reason for this convention is the resemblance between shapes (round, elongate, crescent-shaped, coriander leaf-shaped, Mock Bodhi leaf-shaped, etc.) and colors of these plant parts and women's body parts. The use of richly visual and descriptive metaphors enhances literary discourse impressively.

Flowers are perhaps the most beautiful and vibrant parts of plants, and thus, they often symbolize the beauty of women. *Hoa (Flower)* is the most frequently used metaphorical expression (47 occurrences) in the construction of this metaphor. Writers also often transfer some attributes of flowers to the beauty of women, such as using the round shape of a flower bud to describe lips: *nụ cười (a smile)* or *nụ hôn (a kiss)*. Flowers with pistils still have their fragrance intact, just like a virgin girl, while a flower losing its pistils is likened to a woman losing her value, being underestimated, or becoming devalued. The time when a woman gives birth is seen as *mãn nguyệt khai hoa (blossom when the moon is full)*. For example:

(5) *Long chỉ mơ màng rằng Tuyết với Loan sẽ là hai cái đồ chơi của mình cho đến **nhị rữa hoa tàn**, cho đến **liễu chán hoa chê**, cho đến mưa gió tơi bời.* (*Long dreamily imagined that Tuyết and Loan would be his toys until **stamens rotted, flowers faded**, until they grew **bored with willows and tired of flowers**, until rain and wind wore them out.*) (Vu, 1936, Chapter 11)

However, flowers are not always synonymous with beauty. In the example below, the phrase *trăm hoa đua nở (hundreds of flowers race to bloom)* is metaphorically referred to pockmarks on a woman's face.

(6) *Em này bị rỗ huê Có thể, Mao Trạch Đông đã phát động chiến dịch **trăm hoa đua nở** trên mặt chị.* (*This woman has pockmarks. Perhaps, Mao Zedong has launched a campaign of **"hundreds of flowers race to bloom"** on her face.*) (Duyen, 1970)

The third metaphor is "DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF WOMEN ARE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF PLANTS" consisting of 35 metaphors with 87 occurrences.

In the biological life cycle of plants, the germination stage is the early stage of a seed's life. This stage is mirrored to the beginning of women's thoughts, emotions, and attitudes, such as rebelliousness, playful thoughts, unfaithful thinking, youthfulness, good desires, hope, love, etc., through the use of metaphorical linguistic expressions like *nảy (sprout)*, *nảy nở/ nảy nở (sprout and blossom)*, etc. For example:

(7) *Một người vợ sắp phụ tình hoặc đã ngoại tình rồi, lắm khi lại thình lình có những phút cảm hứng đột ngột khó hiểu để yêu chồng nồng nàn hơn khi **mầm** phản gián **nảy** ra trong óc.* (*A wife who is about to make or has already made an extramarital affair sometimes has sudden, inexplicable moments of intense love for her husband when rebellious thoughts **sprout** in her mind.*) (Vu, 2005, p. 122)

In the next stage, plants begin to sprout, grow vigorously, and root into the soil. Similarly, the close-knit family bonds of a woman also take root deep in her hearts, creating close and intimate relationships, as in the following example:

(8) *Tình cha con, vợ chồng anh em, những quy tắc luân lí bất thành văn, **bám rễ sâu** vào huyết mạch.* (*The bonds between father and child, husband and wife, and siblings, irrational ethical rules, **take root deep** in their blood.*) (Ma, 1985, p. 48)

The *đến thì (flowering)* stage refers to the time when a girl reaches adolescence, the most beautiful period in her life with abundant vitality. In the world of plants, *ra hoa (flowering)* and *kết trái (fruiting)* are considered the stages of greatest development, beauty, and fulfillment. Therefore, the knowledge of the flowering stage of plants (*nở hoa*) is transferred to women's beauty, full-body development, or joy. Moreover, *nở (blooming)* is used to describe a woman's smile or kiss based on the similarity between the opening of flower petals and a smiling or kissing mouth. Inherent to the final stage of a plant's life are attributes such as *rụng (shedding)* and *tàn lụi (withering)* which are projected to describe aging women whose beauty may no longer exist, desires may cease, and desire to become a mother may come to an end. For example:

(9) *Sắc đẹp của chị cứ lặng lẽ **nở**, lặng lẽ **tàn** chẳng ai cần tới, kể cả chị.* (*Her beauty quietly **blooms** and quietly **withers** away, with no one in need of it, including herself.*) (Vo, 1992, p. 152)

(10) *Nhu cầu làm vợ của cô ta trở nên mòn mỏi. Hơn thế nữa nhu cầu làm mẹ của cô ta đã vĩnh viễn **lụi tàn**. (Her desire to become a wife has faded away. Furthermore, her desire to become a mother has permanently **withered**.)* (Pham, 1998, p. 259)

The various functions of plant parts, which are essential for metabolic processes and the continuous transformation of life, remind us of the metaphorical representation of women. Plant leaves contain chlorophyll and perform the process of photosynthesis, producing nutrients for the plant. As they develop to a certain stage, the chlorophyll in the leaves undergoes transformation, metabolizing into different substances. In this withering stage, the color of the plant's leaves may change from green to yellow, eventually falling to the ground, completing a life cycle. In their continuous life cycle, plants sprout, grow vigorously, produce leaves, flower, shed leaves, and replace them over time. With the

distinctive attributes related to the biological processes of leaves, in contemplating human life, the process of substance transformation in leaves can be likened to the aging process of women, as seen in the statement mentioned above.

The fourth metaphor is "CHARACTERISTICS AND STATES OF WOMEN ARE CHARACTERISTICS AND STATES OF PLANTS" with the highest number of lexical items (53) and occurrences (55).

Firstly, positive attributes denoting the development of plants represent the vitality and robust development of women's body, their physical or inner beauty through metaphorical linguistic expressions such as *mơn mởn* (*lush blossoming*), *tươi* (*fresh*), *nõn nà* (*tender and soft*). For example:

(11) *Lão đi đi lại lại như cuồng chân, như con hổ trong cũi sắt, nghĩ đến những cái má hồng* **mơn mởn**, *những cánh tay trắng như ngà ngọc của mấy cô đào ở Hà Nội.* (*The old man walked madly back and forth, like a tiger in an iron cage, thinking of* **lush blossoming** *rosy cheeks, jade-white arms of some young singers in Hanoi.*) (Vu, 1936, Chapter 1)

Conversely, knowledge of negative attributes of plants such as *khô héo* (*withered*), *mục nát* (*decayed*), *cằn cỗi* (*barren*), *nẫu* (*rotten*), etc. is used to portray women who have lost their vitality, are aged, or no longer possess beauty. Typical examples are as follows:

(12) *Cơ thể (Hạnh) lâu ngày* **khô héo** *bỗng rạo rực ngập tràn hưng phấn.* (*Her body* **withered** *for a long time suddenly became vibrant and filled with enthusiasm.*) (Duong, 1991, p. 91)

(13) *Dây thân ái thắt chặt thêm một vòng, kéo cả một chân khách lên đùi già* **nẫu** *của chủ.* (*The bonds of love tightened another loop, pulling the guest's leg onto the host's* **rotten** *old lap.*) (Nguyen, 1934, p. 24)

A woman's life is understood in association with an awareness of plants in various states. The *withering* (*khô héo*) state of plants corresponds to the woman's mood when she is lonely or when her life is about to decline. In example (12), the *withered* (*khô héo*) body represents a life lacking vitality when a woman experiences prolonged loneliness and a lack of love. A *withered* (*khô héo*) heart, on the other hand, is construed in association with a woman's love that has faded away, or when she no longer feels affection for any men. Additionally, based on the typical feature of the fruit's state *chín nẫu* (*overripen, rotting*) - when the seeds inside the fruit have reached full development, leading to a soft, mushy state so that the fruit can be easily squeezed out, writers vividly depict the aging and wrinkled appearance of both the body and soul of women. Therefore, following the biological cyclic law of plants, women's mood becomes withered and gloomy when they are sad, and lively and radiant when they are happy. A woman's life also operates according to the natural growth laws of all living beings.

Fifthly, the metaphor "COLORS OF WOMEN'S BODY PARTS OR MOOD ARE COLORS OF PLANTS" is found with 34 lexical items with a very high frequency (93 times). Colors of plants are assigned to colors of women's skin, lips or hair. Colors of plants also correspond to women's age or mood. For example, the green color of leaves can be used to describe women positively or negatively. On one hand, green is not only assigned to women's visible body parts such as: skin, eye, hand, face, etc. Even their spiritual values that cannot be observed, such as their mood, sadness or happiness, also bear shades of green, with different levels like *xanh nhợt* (*pale green*), *xanh* (*green*), *xanh bủng* (*pale green and yellowish*), *xanh xao* (*pale green*), *xanh mướt* (*lush green*). With this approach, the green symbolizes the fragility, poor health, or sadness of women. For example:

(14) *Sáng hôm nay em lấy gương soi thấy mặt gầy gò* **xanh mướt**, *em ứa nước mắt một mình.* (*This morning, I looked in the mirror and saw my* **lush green**, *skinny face. I shed tears alone.*) (Hoang, 1922)

(15) *Bà cảm ơn bằng một nụ cười héo hắt,* **xanh nhợt hàm tiếu** *trên cặp môi chưa kịp bôi sáp.* (*She expressed her gratitude with a frail smile, her lips were of* **pale green of a flower bud** *without any lipstick.*) (Nguyen, 1934, p. 22)

In example (15), the green colour of flower buds (*xanh nhợt hàm tiếu*) is likened to a sad smile. On the other hand, the green attribute of leaves is used to depict women's youth and vitality. Following the natural order of all things, leaves change over seasons and over time. Green leaves represent a period of abundant vitality, while yellow leaves signify the absence of life and their imminent fall. The life cycle of plants is also metaphorically extended to the life of a woman.

(16) *Nhưng đối với những người còn* **xanh** *mái tóc mà đã trải qua đủ mùi đau khổ như nàng, mà cuộc đời từ lúc bé tới giờ chỉ là một thiên lệ sử.* (*But for those who still have* **green** *hair and have gone through all kinds of suffering like her, life from childhood until now is just a historical miracle.*) (Vu, 1932, p. 32)

In addition, other colors of plants are also utilized to describe women, such as the color of *ebony wood* (*gỗ mun*) being used to evoke the image of black hair.

Sixthly, 8 linguistic items including *hương* (*fragrance*), *vô hương* (*oderless*), *thơm* (*fragrant*), *thơm tho* (*sweet-smelling*), *ngan ngát* (*immensely fragrant*), *mùi xoài chín* (*scent of ripe mangoes*), *hương sắc* (*aroma*), *mùi hương* (*scent*) appeared 11 times, creating the metaphor "THE SCENT OF WOMEN'S BODY AND INNER STATES IS THE SCENT OF PLANTS".

Flowers often have a fragrance. Each type of flower has a different scent that cannot be mixed. The fragrance is the essence of a flower. That is why those who make a living from the body of women engage in *trading fragrances and selling powder* (*buôn hương bán phấn*). For example:

(17) *Thầy tính cho cái đời tôi bây giờ phải* **buôn hương bán phấn**, *nay người nầy, mai người khác hay sao?* (*Do you know that I have to* **trade fragrances and sell powder**, *today with this person, tomorrow with another, what else?*) (Ho, 1938, p. 42)

(18) *Đoá hôn* **ngan ngát** *màu hơn hớn.* (*The kiss is* **immensely fragrant** *and colourful.*) (Xuan)

Fragrance creates allure, the enchanting power of flowers, captivating both bees and butterflies as well as admirers. Women are not an exception; they also captivate others with the fragrance of their bodies or souls.

Women's delicate lips emit a subtle fragrance, enhancing their allure. Their breath may carry the scent of ripe fruit (*mùi xoài chín*): rich and seductive.

Seventh, the metaphor "ACTIVITIES WITH WOMEN ARE ACTIVITIES WITH PLANTS" is illustrated through 21 lexical items with 28 occurrences. For example:

(19) *Tôi tiếc nàng, tiếc vì đóa hoa yêu quí của tôi mà lại rơi vào tay người khác, nghĩ đến khi **bẻ cành cấu cuống** thì thấy trong lòng hiện ra một thứ tính tình cạnh tranh.* (I feel sorry for her that my beloved flower falls into someone else's hands, thinking that when they **break the branch and cut the stem**, I feel a kind of competitive streak emerge in my heart.) (Hoang, 1922)

(20) *Tại sao tôi không nghĩ đến việc **gieo và gặt** nhỉ? Có lẽ tôi chủ quan cho rằng một người phụ nữ chưa từng có gia đình, chưa từng có cưới hỏi, sẽ không bao giờ dám để có con.* (Why don't I think about **sowing and reaping**? Perhaps I subjectively assumed that a woman who has never had a family, has never been married, would never dare to have a child.) (Pham, 1998, p. 267)

The actions of *breaking branches and cutting stems* (*bẻ cành cấu cuống*), *burying flowers and crushing willows* (*vùi hoa giập liễu*) create an association with actions of taking over, bullying, brutally treating, and oppressing/ suppressing women, making them suffer humiliation. Two examples of *sowing* (*gieo*) - throwing down seeds to create plants and *reaping/ harvesting* (*gặt*) - cutting ripe crops to harvest - are used to create quite an interesting image of impregnating so that women can have children, thereby creating a powerful effect on the reader. In addition, women's relationships, love, emotions, and emotional states are also understood via typical features of plants and subjected to actions such as *planting* (*cấy trồng*), *sowing deeply* (*gieo sâu*), *sowing* (*gieo*), and *sawing* (*cưa*).

B. Discussion

The metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" are understood based on three criteria as follows.

Regarding the number and frequency of metaphorical expressions, the highest number and frequency of lexical items (53 items appearing 155 times) are employed for the construction of the low-level metaphor "WOMEN'S CHARACTERISTICS AND STATES ARE CHARACTERISTICS AND STATES OF PLANTS", followed by the metaphor "WOMEN'S BODY PARTS ARE PLANT PARTS" (39 items used 151 times). Characteristics and states of plants as well as parts of plants are popular attributes to depict women.

Regarding the mapping mechanism, the source domain attributes are projected onto the target domain, vividly portraying women through plant imagery. In addition, it can be seen that some properties of the source domain such as *photosynthesis* (*quá trình quang hợp*), *chlorophyll* (*diệp lục*), *tap roots* (*rễ cọc*), *knobby roots* (*rễ sần*), etc. are not mapped onto the target domain WOMEN. This reflects the hiding and partial mapping properties of metaphors.

Regarding cultural characteristics, the large quantity and frequency of lexical items reflect the cultural mindset of the Vietnamese people. First, the abundance of linguistic expressions demonstrates the richness of language and the close relationship between plants and Vietnamese people related to cultural beliefs and longstanding agricultural traditions in Vietnam. Second, Vietnamese authors exploit a number of idioms related to plants such as *Mãn nguyệt khai hoa* (*Blossom when the moon is full*), *Vùi hoa dập (giập) liễu* (*Bury flowers and crush willows*), etc. This indicates the deep integration of plant concepts into the daily life of Vietnamese people. Third, the Vietnamese discourse is very specific and detailed. For example, when mapping plant parts onto women's body parts, Vietnamese authors use specific and small parts such as *gân xanh* (*green vein*), *búp* (*bud*), *nụ* (*flower bud*), *tàu lá* (*leaf base*), *đài hoa* (*flower sepal*), *cuống* (*stalk/ stem*), *nhị* (*stamen*), *nhụy* (*pistil*), *mầm* (*sprout*), etc. This may stem from the cultural emphasis on collectivism and community awareness of Vietnamese people, making them keen observers (Tran, 1999), thus emphasizing the description of intricate parts such as *gân* (*vein*), *nhị* (*stamen*), *nhụy* (*pistil*) as listed above. Fourth, the high symbolism in the language of Vietnamese writers is expressed through the use of symmetrical parallel structures to create symmetry in expressions such as: *Bẻ cành/ cấu cuống* (*Break branches/ cut stems*); *Vùi hoa/ dập (giập) liễu* (*Bury flowers/ crush willows*); *Hoa tàn/ nhị rữa* (*Flowers wither/ stamens rot*), etc. The reason may lie in the synthetic thinking of all factors, the lifestyle of preferring stability and good relationships with everyone leading to a tendency towards balance and harmony in language of Vietnamese people (Tran, 1999, p. 161). Fifth, the lexical units of the metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" in Vietnamese are rich in expressive connotations. This is an inevitable outcome of the culture emphasizing emotions (Tran Ngoc Them, 1999, p. 163) or the feminine culture of the Vietnamese according to Hofstede's cultural model (Hofstede, 2001). In addition to the neutral root word, there are also lexical variations with expressive connotations. For example, besides neutral colors like *xanh* (*green*), *tươi* (*fresh*), Vietnamese authors also use variations such as *xanh mướt* (*lush green*), xanh xao (*pale green*), *xanh nhợt* (*pale green*), *xanh tốt* (*lush green*), *xanh rớt* (*pale green*) hay *tươi rói, tươi rờn, tươi thắm* (*different levels of fresh*). In addition, many metaphorically used words are reduplicative which mean *fragile* (*mỏng manh*), *lush blossoming* (*mơn mởn*), *open slightly* (*chúm chím*), etc. with highly expressive nuances. Sixth, some lexical words describe typical plant species that are closely associated with the lives of Vietnamese people due to the geographical and climatic features of the country. Vietnamese writers tend to choose plants that are familiar and simple to the lives of Vietnamese people such as *quả chuối* (*banana*), *quả chuối ngự* (*plantain fruit*), *cà chua* (*tomato*), *lá dăm* (*coriander leaf*), *lá đề* (*Mock Bodhi leaf*), *quả mướp* (*sponge gourd*), *liễu bồ* (*willow*), *tầm gửi* (*mistletoe*), *mai* (*apricot blossom*), *sen* (*lotus*), *lim* (*ironwood*), *phù dung* (*confederate*

rose), *lá hổ ngươi* (*shameplant leaf*), *lá trúc* (*bamboo leaf*), *hoa đào* (*peach blossom*), *hạt cau* (*areca core*), *hột nhãn* (*longan stone*), *mo cau* (*areca spathe*), etc.

Through the plant imagery, women are vividly described in terms of appearance, characteristics, mental states, emotions, and activities. Women are conceptualized as beautiful flowers: *nụ hồng* (*rosebud*), *bông hồng* (*rose*), *hoa sen* (*lotus*), *hoa đào* (*peach blossom*), *hoa mai* (*apricot blossom*), which is easily understandable because women are inherently referred to as the fair sex. However, within the Vietnamese corpus under investigation, women are perceived as plants which are fragile and delicate (*liễu/ liễu bồ* -*willow*), dependent on the host plant (*tầm gửi* - *mistletoe*), with beauty that easily fades (*phù du* - *confederate rose*) or always hesitant, shameful, and lack autonomy (*cây hổ ngươi* - *shameplant*), thereby affirming their vulnerability and dependence on others or their unstable fate. Moreover, their private parts are often noticed and described, such as their breast being likened to a *peach* (*quả đào*) or *sponge gourd* (*quả mướp*). Through the analysis of activities with plants, it can be observed that women are sometimes regarded as objects for men to play with: *gieo* (*sow*), *gặt* (*reap/harvest*), *chơi hoa* (*play with flowers*), *ong bướm đi về* (*bees and butterflies fly back and forth*), easily susceptible to harm and suppression: *vùi hoa dập liễu* (*bury flowers and crush willows*), *liễu chán hoa chê* (*bored with willows and tired of flowers*), *bẻ cành cấu cuống* (*break branches and cut stems*). These metaphorical linguistic expressions actually have a strong sense of teasing and degrading. To some extent, the use of conceptual metaphors indicates the skewed perspectives of the Vietnamese community on the roles and positions of women in society, which may be considered a lingering influence of feudal ideology in Vietnam, hence deepening the gender inequality, wherein women are seen as a weaker and inferior sex.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has contended that the CMT by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is a sturdy and dependable framework for evaluating the deeper meaning of literary discourses. A set of low-level metaphors related to the conceptual metaphor "WOMEN ARE PLANTS" are identified and explicated in terms of number and frequency of metaphorical linguistic expressions, mapping mechanism and national cultural thinking. The investigation highlights the mapping of a series of correspondences from the source domain of PLANTS to the target domain of WOMEN.

The research results share similarities with the findings of Takada et al. (2000), demonstrating that certain attributes of plants are obscured when mapped onto women. However, the research results differ from some previous studies by revealing that parts of the plant, such as branches, leaves, etc., are still projected to represent corresponding parts of women.

In all, the metaphors may not only aid our cognitive and conceptual process of thinking and talking about the concept of WOMEN in association with the concept of PLANTS, but they also facilitate our understanding of feminine gender, since they describe the concept in ways that present it in concrete rather than abstract terms.

APPENDIX

TABLE 3
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "TYPES OF WOMEN ARE TYPES OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Liễu/ Liễu ngõ (Willow)	7	Mai (Apricot blossom)	1
Đào tơ/ Tơ đào (Peach silk)	6	Rau (Vegetable)	1
Đào (Peach)	3	Lá trúc vàng (Yellow bamboo leaf)	1
Bông hồng/ Đoá hồng nhung/ Đoá hồng (Rose)	6	Cánh hồng (Rose petal)	1
Giàn nho/ Nho/ Quả nho (Grape)	5	Bồ liễu (Willow)	1
Hoa tường (Flowering vine)	2	Liễu bồ (Willow)	1
Chanh cốm (Small, newly grown lime)	2	Măng sữa (Bamboo shoot)	1
Lim (Iron wood)	1	Hoa đào (Peach blossom)	1
Phù dung (Confederate rose)	1	Cỏ cây (Grass and plant)	1
Cây cổ thụ (Old tree)	1	Cỏ (Grass)	1
Lá hổ ngươi (Shameplant leaf)	1	Sến (Mahua tree)	1
Sen (Lotus)	1	Quả dưa chuột (Cucumber)	1
Tầm gửi (Mistletoe)	1	Chiếc dây leo (Vine)	1
Cam (Orange)	1	Cái cây/ Cây (Tree)	9
Total (1) + (3)		**28**	
Total (2) + (4)			**60**

TABLE 4
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "BODY PARTS OF WOMEN ARE PARTS OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Hoa/ Bông hoa/ Đoá hoa/ Đoá (Flower)	47	Tuyết nhuỵ (Stamen)	1
Quả/ Trái (Fruit)	11	Chiếc lá (Leaf)	1
Hạt (Seed/ Core/ Stone)	1	Chiếc lá vàng (Yeallow leaf)	1
Nụ (Bud)	8	Cành hoa (Flower stem)	1
Gốc tích/ Gốc/ Gốc gác (Stock)	6	Nhị đào (Peach blossom pistil)	1
Cánh hoa/ Cánh (Petal)	5	Cỗi rễ (Root)	1
Mầm (Sprout)	4	Cội nguồn (Root)	1
Dây (Liana)	3	Bầu (Ovary)	1
Vỏ cây/ Vỏ (Sheath)	2	Núm (Knob)	1
Búp măng/ Măng (Bamboo shoot)	5	Tơ vương (Dodder)	1
Nhị (Pistil)	2	Sợi dây tơ (Dodder)	1
Nhuỵ (Stamen)	2	Trái xoan (Chinaberry fruit)	13
Gai (Thorn)	2	Lá dăm/ Lá răm (Coriander leaf)	8
Ngọn/ Ngọn cây (Top of the tree)	2	Mo (Areca spathe)	3
Hột nhãn (Longan stone)	2	Quả đào tiên (Fairy peach)	2
Dọc dừa (Coconut palm leaf stem)	1	Quả mướp/ Mướp (Sponge gourd)	2
Cái vỏ ngoài (Bark of the tree)	1	Hạt cau (Areca core)	1
Nhựa (Sap)	1	Cà chua/ Múi cà chua (Tomato/ Tomato segment)	3
Mật (Nectar)	1	Lá đề (Mock Bodhi leaf)	1
Quả chuối ngự (Plantain fruit)	1		
Total (1) + (3)		**39**	
Total (2) + (4)			**151**

TABLE 5
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF WOMEN ARE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Nở (Blossom/ Blooom)	14	Lả (Wither)	1
Tàn (Wither)	13	Mất phấn (Lose pollen)	1
Nảy nở/ Nẩy nở (Sprout and blossom)	8	Nở bung (Bloom widely)	1
Chúm chím (Open slightly)	6	Bám rễ sâu (Take root deep)	1
Rũ (Droop)	5	Mọc rễ (Grow roots)	1
Rụng (Shed)	3	Đương thì (In full bloom)	1
Phai/ Phai lợt (Fade)	3	Ngả vàng (Turn yellow)	1
Nảy/ Nẩy (Sprout)	3	Kết (quả) (Bear fruit/ Fruit)	1
Ăn sâu (Go deep)	2	(Lá hổ ngươi) Khép lại (Shameplant leaf - close)	1
Đổ (Fall)	2	(Cây) Bị gục (Tree – fall)	1
Tàn lụi/ Lụi tàn (Wither)	2	Quấn (Wind round)	1
Đến thì (Flower)	2	Trăm hoa đua nở (Hundreds of flowers race to bloom)	1
Chúm (Open slightly)	2	Chớm hé (Start to bloom)	1
Nảy mầm (Sprout)	1	Khai hoa (Blossom)	1
Chớm nở (Bud)	1	Mãn nguyệt khai hoa (Blossom when the moon is full)	1
Hé nở (Bud)	1	Tàn héo (Wither)	1
Trổ (Bloom)	1	Hút (Suck)	1
(Lá vàng) Rơi (Yellow leaf – fall)	1		
Total (1) + (3)		**35**	
Total (2) + (4)			**87**

TABLE 6
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "CHARACTERISTICS AND MENTAL STATES OF WOMEN ARE CHARACTERISTICS AND STATES OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Non/ Non choèn (Unripe)	20	Héo rũ (Withered)	1
Tươi (Fresh)	19	Tươi ròn (Fresh)	1
Mơn mởn (Lush blossoming)	17	Tươi rói/ Tươi roi rói (Fresh)	4
Khô héo (Withered and dried-up)	8	Ủ (Withered)	1
Khô/ Khô khô (Dry)	7	Héo quắt (Withered)	1
Tốt tươi/ Tươi tốt (Fresh and vibrant)	7	Quắt queo (Withered)	1
Nõn nà (Tender and soft)	6	Heo héo (Withered)	1
Chín (Ripe)	5	Nhăn nheo (Shrivelled)	1
Lép/ Kẹp lép (Small and flat)	4	Muỗi (Fully ripe)	1
Nõn (Tender)	4	Đầy nhựa (Full of resin/ sap)	1
Nẫu (Over-ripe/ Rotten)	4	Thẳng đuỗn (Perfectly straight)	1
Ủ rũ (Withered)	2	(Lá non) Mũm mĩm (Young leaf – tender and plump)	1
Nỏ (Dry)	2	Mẫm (Plump)	1
Cằn cỗi (Stunted/ Barren)	2	Dòn (Brittle)	1
Héo hon (Withered)	2	Trĩu (Heavily laden)	1
Rữa (Rotten)	2	Hay hạt (Seed-rich)	1
Khẳng khiu (Scrubby)	2	Rã rời (Fall apart)	1
Xơ xác (Denuded)	2	Thối/ Thối nát (Rotten)	3
Mỏng manh (Fragile/ Delicate)	1	Mòng mọng (Succulent)	1
Muồn muột (Tender and soft)	1	Chín tới (Ripe)	1
Mơn trớn (Fondle)	1	Chín nẫu (Over-ripe)	1
Cằn (Stunted)	1	Chín muỗi (Ripe)	1
Vẻ nhung (Velvety texture)	1	Sắc ướt (Dewy color)	1
Vẻ ngọt (Sweet appearance)	1	Mục nát (Rotten and decayed)	1
Mềm (Soft)	1	Nhẹ (Soft)	1
Dầy (Thick)	1	Thô (Coarse)	1
Khô cứng (Dry and stiff)	1		
Total (1) + (3)		**53**	
Total (2) + (4)			**155**

TABLE 7
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "COLORS OF WOMEN'S BODY PARTS OR MOOD ARE COLORS OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Xanh (Green)	27	Xanh bủng (Pale green and yellowish)	1
Xanh xao (Pale green)	10	Xanh rớt (Very pale green)	1
Rực rỡ (Striking colour)	10	Xanh lọc (Pale green)	1
Thắm (Deep colour)	9	Xanh trong (Pale green)	1
Tươi thắm (Vibrant with lovely hues/ Fresh and colourful)	3	Xanh tốt (Lush green)	1
Đỏ thắm (Deep red)	2	Xanh búng (Pale green)	1
Xanh nhợt (Pale green)	2	Xanh nhợt hàm tiểu (Pale green of a flower bud)	1
Xanh mướt (Lush green)	2	Xanh xám (Pale green)	1
Màu mun (Ebony wood colour)	2	Biêng biếc xanh (Subtle green)	1
Sắc màu (Colour)	2	Màu hơn hớn (Very vibrant colour)	1
Màu đào (Peach colour)	1	Mướt mượt (Lush green/ Fresh green)	1
Màu hoa đào (Peach blossom colour)	1	Màu tươi (Bright colour)	1
Thắm hồng (Rosy pink)	1	Hồng đào (Peach pink)	1
Thắm thắm (Deep red and vibrant/ fresh)	1	Hồng nõn (Blush pink)	1
Vàng ễnh (Yellow)	1	Đen lay láy hạt huyền (Deep black like custard apple seed)	1
Đỏ tía ria (Crimson and violet-tinged)	1	Phơn phớt đỏ (Slightly red)	1
Phơn phớt (Slightly pink)	1	Xanh lướt (Pale green)	1
Total (1) + (3)		**34**	
Total (2) + (4)			**93**

TABLE 8
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "THE SCENT OF WOMEN'S BODY AND INNER STATES IS THE SCENT OF PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Hương (Fragrance)	2	Mùi xoài chín (Scent of ripe mangoes)	1
(Mùi) Thơm (Fragrant)	2	Hương sắc (Aroma)	1
Mùi hương/ Mùi hương quyến rũ (Scent/ Seductive fragrance)	2	Vô hương (Oderless)	1
Ngan ngát (Immensely fragrant)	1	Thơm tho (Sweet-smelling)	1
Total (1) + (3)		**8**	
Total (2) + (4)			**11**

TABLE 9
METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE METAPHOR "ACTIVITIES WITH WOMEN ARE ACTIVITIES WITH PLANTS"

Metaphorical expressions	Frequency	Metaphorical expressions	Frequency
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gieo/ Gieo sâu (Sow (deeply))	4	Đánh bật hết rễ (Uproot completely)	1
Bẻ cành/ Bẻ (Break branches/ Break)	2	Tô lục chuốt hồng (Color with green and pink) = Apply lipstick and powder	1
Chôn sâu (Bury deeply)	2	Ngửi (Sniff)	1
Hái (Pick/ Pluck)	2	Cấy trồng (Plant)	1
Giật phịch (Pluck)	2	Chăm sóc (Take care of)	1
Cấu (cuống) (Cut stems)	1	Cưa (Saw)	1
Giằng đứt (Break off)	1	Vun (Nurture)	1
Gặt (Reap/ Harvest)	1	Ong bướm đi về (Bees and butterflies fly back and forth)	1
Vùi (hoa) (Bury flowers)	1	Chơi hoa (Play with flowers)	1
Giập (liễu) (Crush willows)	1	Liễu chán hoa chê (Bored with willows and tired of flowers)	1
Hút (nhuỵ) (Sip nectar)	1		
Total (1) + (3)		**21**	
Total (2) + (4)			**28**

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Giang T. Pham was born in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 1981. She earned her PhD in Contrastive Linguistics from Graduate Academy of Social Sciences in 2023.

She is a lecturer of English and also Head of Department of English Theory, English Faculty, Thuongmai University. Her main research interests include ELT, linguistics and applied linguistics. Email: phamthuygiang@tmu.edu.vn

Chung, T. T. Nguyen was born in Bac Giang, Vietnam, in 1980. She got her PhD in Contrastive Linguistics from Graduate Academy of Social Sciences in 2021.

Currently, she is a lecturer of English and also Deputy Head of English Faculty, Thuongmai University. She pursues research interests in ELT, pragmatics, semantics and contrastive linguistics. Email: chung.ntt@tmu.edu.vn