

Conceptual Metonymy of COVID-19 Pandemic in Vietnam's Online Newspapers

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Abstract—Conceptual metonymy which is based on the contingent relationship between a source concept and a target concept helps people perceive the world. The article discusses the concept and principles of conceptual metonymy and analyses the conceptual metonymy of COVID-19 pandemic used in official online newspapers published in Vietnam. 100 articles were selected for analysis. The study focuses on the "PLACE FOR EVENT" metonymy with the aim of shedding light on the Vietnamese's cognitive ways of thinking. Vietnamese people tend to use the geographical location where the COVID-19 pandemic occurs as a substitute for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Index Terms—conceptual metonymy, cognitive linguistics, COVID-19 pandemic, PLACE FOR EVENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Conceptual metonymy is one important method of cognition that helps humans perceive things based on contiguity or association. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of lives worldwide posing a great threat to humanity. People have perceived this new phenomenon based on contingent relationships between related entities. This method of cognition is called conceptual metonymy. This study explores conceptual metonymy of COVID-19 pandemic using a corpus of 100 articles collected from official online newspapers in Vietnam. The results of this research provide insights into how Vietnamese people perceive the COVID-19 pandemic metonymically.

II. METHODOLOGY

The corpus includes 100 articles on the COVID-19 pandemic published in official online newspapers in Vietnam, namely baochinhphu.vn, vnexpress.net, vov.vn, www.qdnd.vn, covid19.gov.vn, tuoitre.vn, vietnamnet.vn, vtv.vn, and ncov.moh.gov.vn. To ensure data reliability, the chosen websites are official information channels in Vietnam, including the government's newspapers and pandemic-related information websites.

The data collection process involves the following steps:

Step 1: Reading articles on the selected online newspapers.

Step 2: Selecting linguistic expressions containing information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Step 3: Identifying linguistic expressions about the COVID-19 pandemic which have contingent relationships.

Step 4: Analyzing metonymic linguistic expressions.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. What Is Conceptual Metonymy

Traditional linguists hold that metonymy is a way of naming one thing, phenomenon or concept by the name of another which is closely associated with it to make linguistic expressions more lively and effective. For example:

(1) How many *hands* do women have?

How many *faces* did women have in the past and how many *livers* do they have nowadays?

(Nguyen Du's poetry)

The words "*hands*", "*faces*" and "*livers*" do not carry their literal meanings which are physical body parts; they are used metaphorically to represent human beings. This is a figurative use of metonymy, with the body parts symbolizing the entire person. These temporary meanings are understood given specific communication contexts.

(2) That is a brilliant *mind*.

In this statement, the word "*mind*" is a metonym for intelligence. Since the brain is a vital part of the human body which controls all human activities, this metonymic linguistic expression is created based on the relationship between a body part and its function or position in the body. This type of metonymy falls under the category of vocabulary

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metonymy, whose meaning shift is based on the mechanism of metonymy.

Cognitive linguists hold that metonymy is not a substitution of words; it is a way of perceiving the world which operates at the mental level. If traditional linguistics considers metonymy as changes in meaning, a method of word formation, or a rhetorical device, cognitive linguistics holds that metonymy is associated with human thinking and activity.

In essence, a metonymic mapping involves the use of one entity to substitute for another. This type of mapping focuses on a specific aspect rather than the whole entity. For example:

(3) We need a cool *head* to solve the problem.

This metonymic expression not only uses a body part (*head*) to replace the entire person but also chooses a prominent characteristic of a person - his intelligence and problem-solving ability associated with his head for the substitution. Metonymy also helps people perceive things, serving as a tool for structuring thoughts and actions. For instance, the metonymy "FACE FOR PERSON" shows that we mainly collect information about a person through his face, rather than his posture, appearance, or anything else. This demonstrates that the face is a central part of the whole body. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that,

like metaphors, metonymic concepts structure not just our language but our thoughts, attitude, and actions. And, like metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience. In fact, the grounding of metonymic concepts is generally more obvious than is the case with metaphoric concepts, since it usually involves direct physical or causal associations. (p. 39)

Conceptual metonymy influences our way of thinking and speaking through the systemization of knowledge of the associations between things. The relationship between the substitute (A) and the substituted (B) is based on their association. The mapping between A and B is always unidirectional which can be modeled as follows:

A is the substitute

B is the substituted

A and B have a contingent relationship. The substitution process occurs as A has the most prominent feature in a contingent relationship with B, enabling it to replace B.

Presented below are some examples of metonymic concepts:

FACE FOR PERSON

CAUSE FOR EFFECT

LOCATION FOR EVENT

In these examples, FACE/CAUSE/LOCATION is A, and PERSON/EFFECT/EVENT is B. A and B belong to the same conceptual domain from which the most representative and typical feature is selected for the metonymic mapping process. For instance:

(4) Let me lend a *hand*.

"*Hand*" is a concept which falls within the domain of the human body. Body parts such as leg, hand, eye, nose, mouth, and head have their own functions. In this case, a part responsible for activities like holding, grasping, carrying, and throwing is chosen as a typical entity to substitute for the whole person. The choice of which body part to use as a substitute depends on the focus of attention on body function. "*Hand*" is in the domain of human body; therefore, it belongs to the category "PART FOR WHOLE".

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), "Metonymy is primarily used for reference: via metonymy, we refer to an entity by means of another in the same schema" (p. 103). This concept indicates that metonymic domains share the same cognitive structure. More specifically, in the same cultural context, the substitute and the substituted are interchangeable allowing us to perceive one thing by means of another without any confusion. This helps us receive information and gain a good understanding of the world. "Metonymy is a cognitive phenomenon, a "figure of thought," underlying much of our ordinary conceptualization that may be even more fundamental than metaphor. The use of metonymy in language is a reflection of this conceptual status" (Panther & Radden, 1999, p. 410). As Littlemore (2015) puts it, "Metonymy is a type of figurative language used in everyday conversation, a form of shorthand that allows us to use our shared knowledge to communicate with fewer words than we would otherwise need" (p. 1). Conceptual metonymy thus plays an essential role in shaping our perception of the world.

B. Classification of Conceptual Metonymy

In "Metaphors We Live By", Lakoff and Johnson (1980) consider conceptual metonymy as the second most important cognitive mechanism (after conceptual metaphor), which works by the contiguity or association between objects or concepts. Later authors such as Ungerer and Schmid (1996), Kövecses and Radden (1998), Panther and Radden (1999) argue that conceptual metonymy involves the substitution of a specific object for an abstract one based on the former's prominent feature. Conceptual metonymy involves proximity and prominence. Ungerer and Schmid (1996) classify nine types of metonymy as follows:

PART FOR WHOLE

WHOLE FOR PART

CONTAINER FOR CONTENT

MATERIAL FOR OBJECT

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT

PLACE FOR INSTITUTION
 PLACE FOR EVENT
 CONTROLLED FOR CONTROLLER
 CAUSE FOR EFFECT

The classification of conceptual metonymy is entirely different from that of traditional metonymy for conceptual metonymy is a method of thinking which helps humans understand and perceive the world around them. "The identification of types of metonymic relationships was an issue that underlay much of the traditional research into metonymy. The classification of types of metonymic relationships was largely an attempt to understand metonymic processes" (Kövecses & Radden, 1998, p. 49). There is always a close relationship between language expressions and metonymic thinking. "Like metaphor, metonymy interacts in important ways with morphological structure, but also warns us against a virtually unconstrained conception of metonymy. The central claim here is that word-formation and metonymy are distinct linguistic components that complement and mutually constrain each other" (Brdar, 2018, p. 1). Therefore, cultures have different ways to select prominent features for the metonymy process. For example, in the past, Westerners often used "heart" to express love, while Easterners often used "bowel" to frame the same concept. This explains why the nine types of conceptual metonymy mentioned above have different frequencies of use in different languages.

C. Mechanisms of Conceptual Metonymy

Besides conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy is another important cognitive means for people to know the world and to structure conceptual domains based on certain proximity principles.

Proximity is the guiding principle of conceptual metonymy. In terms of cognition, entities that are close to each other are often considered as one. Consequently, when two entities are closely associated with each other, one entity will be cognitively perceived by means of the other. People tend to use easily recognizable aspects or features of a particular entity to symbolize the whole entity or part of it. This cognitive process is called conceptual metonymy.

Conceptual metonymy is composed of a source concept and a target concept, both belonging to the same conceptual domain. There is a mapping between the two concepts. "Metonymy is a mapping within the same conceptual domain" (Barcelona, 2003, p. 95). The mapping occurs within a single conceptual domain, where one concept symbolizes the other within that domain or the entire conceptual domain.

For example:

(5) *Long face*

(6) *Blushing*

(7) *Shivering*

Expressions like "long face", "blushing" and "shivering" describe states caused by certain impact. Physiological states are usually the results of external physical and psychological factors. "Long face" is an expression of displeasure or dissatisfaction with something. In this example, a negative mood is used to express its cause. "Blushing" is a biological expression of anger. When people are angry, their blood pressure tends to elevate, creating a redder-than-normal face. In this case, the state is used to perceive metonymically its cause. Similarly, "shivering" is a biological reaction of the body which appears when one is too cold or scared. Therefore, *long face/blushing/shivering* is the result, which is used to express the cause. These are instances of the "EFFECT FOR CAUSE" metonymy.

Kövecses (2010) affirms that,

it is a basic feature of metonymically related vehicle and target entities that they are "close" to each other in conceptual space. Thus, the producer is conceptually "close" to the product (because he is the one who makes it), the place of an institution is conceptually "close" to the institution itself (because most institutions are located in particular physical places), gloves are conceptually "close" to baseball players (because some baseball players wear gloves), and so on. In the traditional view of metonymy, this feature of metonymy is expressed by the claim that the two entities are contiguously related, or that the two entities are in each other's proximity. In the cognitive linguistic view, this claim is accepted and maintained but given a more precise formulation; namely, it is suggested that a vehicle entity can provide mental access to a target entity when the two entities belong to the same domain, or as Lakoff puts it, the same idealized cognitive model (ICM). (p. 173)

This proves that metonymic mapping is structured based on the proximity of the two concepts, as illustrated in the above examples. Conceptual metonymy is a perceptual process that enables us to form and express new concepts to acquire new knowledge. Conceptual metonymy is the mechanism whereby we understand concept A based on concept B, which are often associated with each other. This way of thinking is used widely in our daily life.

IV. RESULTS

A. Research Results

The research results prove that conceptual metonymy is a means of perceiving the Covid-19 pandemic. Three subtypes of metonymy found in the corpus are presented in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
SUBTYPES OF CONCEPTUAL METONYMY

Subtype	Number of metonymic expressions	Percentage
PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT	35	27%
CAUSE FOR EFFECT	23	19%
PLACE FOR EVENT	66	54%
Total	124	

As can be seen from the table, the conceptual metonymy "PLACE FOR EVENT" has the highest number, accounting for 54% of the total metonymic expressions examined. The other two conceptual metonymy types "PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT" and "CAUSE FOR EFFECT" account for 27% and 19% respectively. These figures reveal the Vietnamese's habit of associating the geographical location where the COVID pandemic occurs with its level of danger. Below are some typical examples:

Subtype	Examples
PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT	<p><i>Pfizer</i> is effective against the Omicron variant. (https://baochinhphu.vn/thuoc-cua-pfizer-co-the-chong-lai-omicron-102305558.htm) In this example, "<i>Pfizer</i>" – the name of the producer is used to refer to a specific Covid-19 vaccine product. <i>Pfizer</i> is an American pharmaceutical manufacturer of vaccines so this example illustrates the "PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT" metonymy.</p> <p><i>Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson</i> are mostly supplied to wealthy countries. (https://vnexpress.net/pfizer-quyet-tam-bao-ve-cong-thuc-vaccine-covid-19-4392956.html) The U.S. recommends <i>Pfizer and Moderna</i> instead of <i>Johnson & Johnson</i>. (https://vnexpress.net/my-khuyen-nghi-tiem-pfizer-moderna-thay-vi-johnson-amp-johnson-4404339.html) <i>Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson</i> are the names of vaccine manufacturers which are used to make reference to their products. This substitution is commonly used in everyday life.</p>
CAUSE FOR EFFECT	<p>The Battle Against <i>Covid-19</i> at Military Hospital 7A (https://www.qdnd.vn/tren-tuyen-dau-chong-dich/bo-doi-cu-ho-tren-tuyen-dau/cuoc-chien-chong-tu-than-covid-19-o-benh-vien-quan-y-7a-672778) <i>Covid-19</i> causes deaths; therefore, in the linguistic expression above, "<i>Covid-19</i>" is a kind of metonymy in which the cause – <i>Covid-19</i> substitutes for the result – deaths. In this case, the use of metonymy helps us express the consequences of Covid-19 more quickly and clearly.</p> <p>Cases BN8614, BN8616 in Hanoi: F1 cases being isolated. Tested <i>positive</i> for Covid-19 on June 5. (https://covid19.gov.vn/ban-tin-covid-19-trua-6-6-them-102-ca-mac-moi-o-ha-noi-va-5-tinh-than-1717356063.htm) "<i>Positive</i>" is a medical term meaning viral infection. In this instance, this term is used to refer to the state of being infected with Covid-19. This is a kind of metonymy, which uses the cause to make reference to the result.</p>
PLACE FOR EVENT	<p>How to control Covid-19 <i>hotspots</i> in <i>South Korea, Italy, and Iran</i>? (https://tuoitre.vn/toan-cau-doi-mat-sieu-bao-covid-19-20200302074908744.htm) <i>South Korea, Italy, and Iran</i> are the names of locations where Covid-19 spreads quickly with increasing numbers of infected people. They are used in place of the disease itself. This is a type of metonymy in which the location replaces the event.</p> <p>Positive signs from the <i>Chinese infection hub</i>. (https://vnexpress.net/tin-hieu-tich-cuc-tu-o-dich-trung-quoc-4063858.html) Similarly, the use of "<i>Chinese infection hub</i>" is an example of mentioning the location instead of the event. The location where a large and increasing number of people are getting infected with Covid is used to refer to the pandemic itself. Due to this reference, the danger of the Covid-19 pandemic becomes more apparent. It indicates that the disease is spreading widely with a high number of infected people.</p>

From the examples above, it is clear that metonymy helps us perceive new phenomena by means of existing ones. Despite starting only several years ago, Covid-19 pandemic has caused great fear for many people and countries due to its terrible consequences. Based on their past experiences, people have spoken and thought about this pandemic based on associations or contiguity.

The metonymy "PLACE FOR EVENT" will be analyzed in more detail below as this category has the highest number of linguistic expressions.

B. "PLACE FOR EVENT" Metonymy

(a). Mapping Mechanism

In a metonymic mapping, both source and target concepts belong to the same domain, and they are closely related to each other. Due to this contingent relationship, the location where an event takes place can be used as a substitute for the event. The statement "*The White House* has decided to go on with the missile defense program," illustrates the "PLACE FOR INSTITUTION" metonymy where "*the White House*" represents the U.S. government and its activity. Via this projection, the implied meaning can be recognized from the explicit one.

In a "PLACE FOR EVENT" metonymy, locations will be mentioned instead of the events occurring in those locations. The mapping mechanism is shown in the diagram below:

PLACE
(locations where events or phenomena occur)



EVENT
(events, phenomena)

As can be seen from the diagram, the geographical location where a disease outbreak occurs is often used to project onto the disease itself. The name of the location projects onto the spread and danger of the disease. This is understandable because in case of a global scale disease, using locations to refer to the disease is a global way of thinking.

(b). *Metonymic Linguistic Expressions*

The numbers of different types of "PLACE FOR EVENT" metonymy are shown in the following table:

TABLE 2
SUBTYPES OF "PLACE FOR EVENT" METONYMY

Subtype	Number of metonymic expressions	Percentage
Country	34	48%
Province/city	22	31%
Region/area	15	21%
Total	71	

The number of "COUNTRY FOR EVENT" metonymic expressions is the highest, accounting for 48%, followed by "PROVINCE/CITY FOR EVENT" and "REGION/AREA FOR EVENT" at 31% and 21% respectively. Let's examine some examples:

1. *Country*

Example:

In South Korea, there have been 1,261 positive cases of coronavirus with 11 deaths, making it *the world's second-largest Covid-19 infection hub* after China.

(<https://vietnamnet.vn/tiet-lo-ve-hoat-dong-cua-giao-phai-tan-thien-dia-o-o-dich-vu-han-619637.html>)

In this example, "*the world's second-largest Covid-19 infection hub*" refers to South Korea – a country with a high number of Covid cases. This metonymic expression proves that people often associate Covid-19 with a place which is experiencing a rapid spread of the disease and a situation that is beyond control.

Example:

As of October, India – *the world's second-largest Covid-19 infection hub* – has reported over 44.64 million confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2, including nearly 529,000 deaths.

(<https://vtv.vn/the-gioi/an-do-truoc-lan-song-covid-19-moi-do-bien-the-phu-xbb-nguy-co-dich-lan-rong-tai-lao-20221025195310373.htm>)

"*the world's second-largest Covid-19 infection hub*" presents a typical metonymic expression. It reflects the way of thinking in which the most dangerous place is referred to as a "*hub*". Hub refers to a place where there is an outbreak of the pandemic. In this case, India is an example of the "COUNTRY FOR EVENT" type of metonymy.

2. *Province/City*

Example:

The Covid infection hub in Bac Giang is spreading rapidly.

(<https://ncov.moh.gov.vn/>)

In the above example, "*the Covid infection hub in Bac Giang*" refers to the people being infected with Covid-19 in Bac Giang. This is a type of CONTAINER FOR THE CONTAINED metonymy in which the container – the *Covid infection hub in Bac Giang* – replaces the contained – the people infected with Covid-19 in Bac Giang.

Example:

The outbreak of Covid-19 turns *Wuhan infection hub* into a desolate "dead city."

(<https://laodong.vn/the-gioi/virus-corona-hoanh-hanh-o-dich-vu-han-hoang-vu-nhu-thanh-pho-chet-780631.ldo>)

Example:

Many countries try to excavate their citizens from *Wuhan infection hub*.

The term "*Wuhan infection hub*" has become familiar due to the devastating impact that Covid-19 caused globally. During the early stages when there was no vaccine for the Covid-19 virus, Covid-19 was as frightening as the death. Therefore, the term "*hub*" implies a place from which the disease spreads. "*Wuhan infection hub*" – a substitute for the state of people being seriously infected with Covid – belongs to the "PLACE FOR EVENT" metonymy.

3. *Region/Area*

A region/area generally refers to a piece of land or a relatively extensive space characterized by certain natural or societal characteristics making it unique from other surrounding areas. A region/area always indicates a specific geographical space. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, "*infection hub*" – a geographical area where many people are infected with COVID-19 – is used to replace the number of individuals infected with the virus. This is a case

of meaning shift based on proximity. An area with a huge number of infected people is used to replace the state of disease infection.

Example:

A class with only one teacher and one student in the *Covid-19 hotspot of Thai Nguyen*.

(<https://thanhnien.vn/xuc-dong-lop-hoc-chi-co-1-co-1-tro-o-vung-dich-covid-19-thai-nguyen-post1430475.html>)

"*Covid-19 hotspot of Thai Nguyen*" is a specific geographical name of an area currently under attack by the Covid pandemic. This indicates that the geographical area where humans live can be closely linked to all their activities and events.

Example:

What are the criteria for measuring the infection level of a *Covid-19 hotspot*?

(<https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/tin-24h/thay-doi-tieu-chi-danh-gia-cap-do-vung-dich-theo-huong-nao-post920683.vov>)

Although Associate Professor Dr. Tran Dac Phu claimed that it was no longer appropriate to categorize *infection hubs* based on the number of COVID-19 cases, he disagreed with the suggestion to stop daily counting of new cases.

(<https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/tin-24h/thay-doi-tieu-chi-danh-gia-cap-do-vung-dich-theo-huong-nao-post920683.vov>)

Mr. Phu believes that changing the criteria for measuring the infection level of a *Covid-19 hotspot* also aims at "the ability to adapt flexibly and effectively to control COVID-19."

(<https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/tin-24h/thay-doi-tieu-chi-danh-gia-cap-do-vung-dich-theo-huong-nao-post920683.vov>)

The traffic police force and local authorities in Yen Thanh district in Nghe An discovered two coaches carrying 40 people from *COVID-19 outbreak areas* including Hanoi, Bac Giang, and Ho Chi Minh City, who had returned to their hometown without making health declarations.

(<https://vietnamnet.vn/xe-khach-cho-40-nguoi-tu-vung-dich-covid-19-ve-nghe-an-tron-khai-bao-y-te-755898.html>)

"*a Covid-19 hotspot*" and "*COVID-19 outbreak areas*" are examples of a metonymy type in which the location where people live is used to describe the event taking place in that place. Metonymy is formed out of speakers' own experience and culture.

V. DISCUSSION

Metonymy is a cognitive means for people to conceptualize the world around them. Humans perceive the world through their bodily experiences (specifically through senses like vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). In the process of knowing the world, humans tend to connect things that are associated with each other, meaning that one object (object A) reminds us of another (object B). That A and B belong to the same conceptual domain is a basic principle underlying the formation of any metonymic expression. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has occurred recently, people have connected it with things that are closely associated with it. Thanks to this, we can fully comprehend this new phenomenon. Hence, the study of metonymy is crucial to understand the nature of human thinking and cognitive processes.

VI. CONCLUSION

The authors conducted a research on the use of metonymy in official online newspapers in Vietnam. Three categories of metonymy were identified including PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT, CAUSE FOR EFFECT, and PLACE FOR EVENT. The research focuses on the "PLACE FOR EVENT" metonymy. The results show that metonymy is formed out of conceptual domains. The concept of Covid includes everything associated with it; therefore, the location where the pandemic occurs is used to project onto the Covid-19 pandemic and its catastrophic consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic did not exist until 2019; however, humans can still perceive this pandemic based on their past experiences and principles of thinking. This study highlights the principle of thinking based on contiguity relationships in human cognitive mechanism. Thanks to this perception, the COVID-19 pandemic can be perceived with all of its severity, characteristics, and attributes.

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