

LINGUISTICS AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTICS

**CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR
'INFORMATION IS FOOD' IN VIETNAMESE****NGUYEN LUU DIEP ANH***

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to analyze the conceptual metaphor of INFORMATION AS FOOD in Vietnamese, exploring how Vietnamese people perceive INFORMATION through the lens of FOOD. To conduct the research, the study employs the theory of conceptual metaphor from cognitive linguistics, alongside descriptive and semantic analysis methods, as well as statistical and classification techniques to establish and analyze the mapping from the source domain of FOOD to the target domain of MEDIA. By examining 85 samples of metaphorical expressions in online newspaper texts, the study uncovers various underlying cognitive models, including human interactions with information likened to interactions with food and emotional responses to information paralleling those to food. The findings demonstrate that the metaphor INFORMATION IS FOOD is extensively used in Vietnamese, with mappings constructed on the domains of INFORMATION and FOOD.

KEY WORDS: conceptual metaphor; mapping; information; food; source domain; target domain.

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1. Introduction

The concept of "food" holds significant importance in human life, being deeply ingrained and familiar to us all. Consequently, it stands as one of the most prevalent concepts we encounter. Our exploration of this conceptual domain extends from the pages of dictionaries to the colloquial language expressions used in daily interactions and the texts found in Vietnamese online newspapers.

During our research, we encountered previous studies delving into the conceptual metaphor of "Food," such as "A Contrastive Analysis of the Conceptual Metaphor 'IDEAS ARE FOOD' in English and Vietnamese" by Pham Huynh Phu Quy (2016) and the exploration of the Conceptual Metaphor of the "Food" Domain in Vietnamese by Nguyen Thi Bich Hop (2015). However, despite the prominent role of food, no study has yet delved into the idea of "INFORMATION IS FOOD" from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. This paper aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of how Vietnamese people conceptualize INFORMATION AS FOOD. By examining this conceptual metaphor, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of Vietnamese cultural perspectives.

2. Theoretical background and previous studies**2.1. Conceptual Metaphor**

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003, p.5) define conceptual metaphors as conceptualizing one domain in terms of another. Kövecses (2010, p.6) offers a more technical definition, describing them as systematic correspondences between two domains of experience. Conceptual metaphors involve two domains: the concrete and familiar source domain (e.g., JOURNEY, WAR, MONEY) and the abstract and less familiar target domain (e.g., LIFE, DESIRES, LOVE), making the latter more understandable. The correspondences between these domains, where elements of the target domain correspond to elements of the source domain, are called mappings. Conceptual metaphors are culturally significant as they reflect core cultural values, making them a focus of scholarly attention for understanding human perception. The conceptual metaphor is a part of the conceptual system, which is systematic and involves mapping (Huynh Ngoc Mai Kha, 2022). The mappings are understood as the systematic, partial, and unidirectional projections of basic knowledge elements from a source to a target through the TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN structure (Phan Van Hoa & Ho Trinh Quynh Thu, 2023). This paper analyzes the conceptual metaphor "INFORMATION IS FOOD" in Vietnamese, exploring the mapping from the source domain FOOD

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to the target domain INFORMATION, exemplified by the expression "Xuất khẩu nông sản dễ vỡ vì đói thông tin" (Agricultural exports are fragile because they are hungry for information), metaphorically describing the need for information as hunger for food, a concept further explored in this paper.

2.2. Information and Food

In "Media - Theory and Basic Skills" by Nguyen Van Dung and Do Thi Thu Hang (2018, p.151), Information is portrayed as a vital necessity for human and social development, serving as a driving force for progress. As society advances, the demand for information escalates. The definition of 'information' provided by the Oxford Advanced Dictionary illustrates it as facts, told, heard, or discovered about somebody/something; knowledge about a situation, person, event, etc.

Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines 'food' as things that people or animals eat, while the Cambridge Dictionary describes it as something that people and animals eat, or plants absorb, to sustain life. The categorization of food is established based on the dictionary definition, with the central concept being "food," defined as something that people and animals eat, or plants absorb, to maintain life. Thus, we proceed to define subcategories of human activity related to food, as well as the emotional experiences associated with it. In this study, to elucidate the attributes of the concept of the source domain as food, the author divides the term "food" into two main groups: (1) human activities involving food, such as stir-frying, cooking, chewing, digesting, boiling, mixing, devouring, swallowing; and (2) the emotional responses and experiences associated with food, such as hunger, satiety, taste, variety, and so forth.

3. Research methods

The research paper delves into the metaphor "INFORMATION IS FOOD," exploring its implications across Vietnamese online newspapers. To ensure thorough analysis, we gathered 85 Vietnamese samples from various reputable sources such as Dan Tri, Nhan Dan, Thanh Nien, Tuoi Tre, Tien Phong, among others. Employing cognitive linguistics as our theoretical framework, we conducted descriptive and semantic analyses, supplemented by statistical and classification methods to explore the nuances of the metaphor.

To address potential subjectivity in metaphor identification, we followed the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a systematic approach outlined by the Pragglejaz Group. This involved four key steps: (i) Reading to understand the content related to information; next, (ii) identifying words/ phrases that describe or relate to food; then, (iii) examining the words preceding and following it to determine if it has any figurative meaning, contrary to its literal meaning. If so, (iv) that is a metaphorical expression.

4. Findings and discussions

It is clear from the survey that the concept of 'INFORMATION IS FOOD' is a prominent metaphor that regularly appears in Vietnamese online news reports. According to the rule of partial mapping, the attributes from the source domain "trap" are activated and mapped onto the target domain "INFORMATION", causing the target domain to bear some properties of the source domain. From 85 news articles in Vietnamese online newspapers, the conceptual model INFORMATION IS FOOD can be visualized through the mapping structure in Table 1.

Table 1. Mapping structure of Conceptual metaphor INFORMATION IS FOOD

SOURCE: FOOD	Mapped onto	TARGET: INFORMATION
Hunger for food	→	Need for information
Consuming contaminated food	→	Consuming misleading or biased information
Ingredients can be cooked in various ways to change their taste	→	Information can be manipulated to alter its meaning or impact

Meals are prepared and shared among individuals	→	Information is disseminated among people through various channels
Food provides nutrients for physical health	→	Information contributes to intellectual growth and understanding
Food nourishes the body	→	Accurate information nourishes the mind and decision-making process
The body assimilates nutrients from food	→	Individuals assimilate knowledge and insights from information
Overeating	→	Excessive amount of information
The physical discomfort of overeating	→	The cognitive discomfort of processing too much information

In the mapping process, distinct attributes from the source domain are activated and subsequently projected onto the target domain, adhering to the principle of partial mapping. The target domain, embodied by the recipient 'FOOD' selectively assimilates specific attributes from the source domain, thereby acquiring characteristics associated with the source domain of FOOD. Statistical data on metaphorical expressions within the conceptual metaphor "INFORMATION IS FOOD," establishing a connection between these two conceptual domains, can be visually represented through the concept of "INFORMATION IS FOOD," as outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Metaphorical Expression Statistics of Conceptual Metaphor INFORMATION IS FOOD*

The shared attributes between the source and target domains	Lexical units	No. of occurrences
mixing, intensity, transformation,	Xào (stir)	8
	Xào nấu (cook)	7
	Cắt gọt (cut and peel)	1
	Luộc (Boil)	3
	Ngốn (Devour)	3
	Nuốt (Swallow)	3
	Tiêu hóa (Digest)	4
desire, pleasure, need, discomfort and an unfulfilled state	Đói (hunger)	30
	Thèm (crave)	6
	Bội thực (overeating)	16
	Ngộ độc (poisoning)	4

Based on the mapping structure of the conceptual metaphor INFORMATION AS FOOD in Table 1, we establish the cognitive metaphor models of Information, with the source domain being Food, as follows.

Table 3. *The cognitive metaphor models of INFORMATION IS FOOD*

Cognitive metaphor models	Number of expressions	Frequency	Total number of metaphorical expressions
Human activities with information are human activities with food	7	29	85
How people feel with information is how people feel with food	4	56	

The conceptual metaphor "INFORMATION IS FOOD" involves a collection of corresponding mappings from the source domain of FOOD to the target domain of INFORMATION. Drawing from the textual source, we synthesized and categorized 85 metaphorical expressions into two low-level cognitive models: (1) Human activities with information are human activities with food; (2) How people feel with

information is how people feel with food. The target concepts within these models include information, news, knowledge, stories and among others. The most prominent model is "How people feel with information is how people feel with food" (56 occurrences), followed by "Human activities with information are human activities with food" (29 occurrences).

4.1. Conceptual metaphor "*Human activities with information are human activities with food*"

(1) *Bằng cách "nhào nặn", "xào xáo" thông tin, các đối tượng thù địch còn thiết lập trang mạng mạo danh các tổ chức, cá nhân, các đồng chí lãnh đạo Đảng, Nhà nước đăng tải những thông tin méo mó về đất nước và con người Việt Nam, về các tổ chức và cá nhân ("By 'twisting' and 'stirring up' information, hostile elements even set up websites impersonating organizations, individuals, Party leaders, State leaders to publish distorted information about the country and the Vietnamese people, about organizations, and individuals")*

The term "xào xáo" originally refers to stir-frying food, where ingredients are heated and manipulated to alter their properties, flavors, and textures. Metaphorically, "xào xáo" describes the manipulation of information through distortion, fabrication, or selective presentation. In this context, it refers to the deliberate and deceptive actions of hostile entities that create misleading content, impersonate organizations or individuals, and spread false information about Vietnam and its people. This metaphor emphasizes the intentional and transformative nature of information manipulation, likening it to cooking, where ingredients are deliberately altered. Thus, "xào xáo" highlights the deceptive alteration and dissemination of information for malicious purposes.

(2) *"Xào" lại thông tin trên các báo, chủ trang "click49" bị phạt 85 triệu đồng (Rehashing information from the newspapers, the owner of 'click49' was fined 85 million dong)*

In this example, the metaphor of "xào" effectively conveys that the individual took existing news content from various sources, mixed it, possibly altered it, and presented it as new or unique content. This metaphor suggests not just the act of copying but also implies a degree of manipulation and active engagement with the content, akin to the culinary process of stir-frying. The metaphor "xào" captures the essence of how information is actively and sometimes creatively manipulated, much like how a cook works with ingredients. The transfer of meaning is successful due to the shared attributes of transformation, mixing, manipulation, and speed between the two domains. This metaphorical use vividly illustrates the nature of the activity, emphasizing the dynamic and sometimes dubious handling of information.

(3) *Sau kiểu ghi nguồn theo kiểu "lập lòe đánh lận con đen", một số báo điện tử/trang tin còn có màn cắt gọt, sửa tít, sắp một cách vô tội vạ những bài viết sau khi đã "chôm" về ("After citing sources ambiguously, some online newspapers/websites also indiscriminately cut and reshape headlines and summaries of articles after 'stealing' them")*

In the provided sentence, the Vietnamese term "cắt gọt" is used metaphorically. Literally, "cắt gọt" refers to the act of cutting and peeling food. Here, it describes the manipulation of information, specifically the editing or altering of news articles, often in a careless or unethical manner. The metaphor works by mapping the attributes and actions associated with cutting and trimming food onto the process of handling information. Just as unwanted parts of food are cut away, parts of the original article may be removed, leading to a loss of important context or nuance. Both processes involve preparing the item-food or information-for a specific purpose, whether for consumption or publication. The metaphor "cắt gọt" vividly captures how information is meticulously and sometimes unethically altered, much like how food is cut and trimmed. This transfer of meaning is effective due to the shared attributes of reduction, precision, alteration, and preparation between the two domains. It highlights the active and sometimes dubious manipulation of information, emphasizing the careful but potentially harmful changes made to the original content.

(4) *Diễn trò thế nào để khán giả "nuốt" thông tin đầy một cách ngon lành mới là cái khó ("The challenge is how to perform so that the audience can 'swallow' the information deliciously")*

The phrase "khán giả 'nuốt' thông tin" (audiences 'swallow' information) likens the act of consuming information to eating food. Just as food is ingested for nourishment, information is taken

in for understanding. When we eat, our bodies digest the food to extract energy and nutrients. Similarly, when we consume information, we process it mentally to gain knowledge. Food consumption satisfies physical hunger, while information consumption satisfies intellectual curiosity. The quality of food depends on taste, nutritional value, and presentation. Likewise, the quality of information depends on relevance, credibility, clarity, and engagement. The phrase "nuốt thông tin một cách ngon lành" (to swallow information in a delicious and smooth manner) describes an ideal way of consuming information—engaging with it effectively, finding it enjoyable and easy to understand. This metaphor effectively conveys the process of information consumption, emphasizing the importance of presenting information in an appealing and digestible way to engage audiences.

(5) *Giờ đây, khi báo thời sự đã ra hàng ngày, báo vùng cao một tháng 2 kỳ, báo điện tử từng phút "ngốn" thông tin, nếu không có sự "tiếp sức" của các CTV, Báo Yên Bái sẽ rất khó khăn trong thực thi nhiệm vụ tuyên truyền ("Nowadays, with daily news reports, regional newspapers publishing twice a month, and online newspapers devouring information every minute, without the support of collaborators, Yên Bái Newspaper would face great difficulties in fulfilling its propaganda mission")*

The metaphor "ngốn" (devour) describes how electronic newspapers voraciously consume information. Just as food is consumed for sustenance, individuals or entities absorb information to stay informed, make decisions, or be entertained. This metaphor underscores the rapid intake of information, akin to quickly devouring a meal when very hungry. In the digital age, the pace of information consumption is swift, with continuous updates reflecting the fast-paced nature of the era. Just as insufficient food hampers functioning, a lack of information flow poses challenges for entities like the Yên Bái Newspaper in fulfilling their communication mission. Collaborators assist in this process, akin to providing support in food consumption. This metaphor highlights the insatiable appetite for information in today's digital landscape and the importance of keeping up with it for effective communication and news dissemination.

(6) *Điều này hoàn toàn trái ngược với những nhà báo chuyên đi "luộc" hoặc "tán" lại tin tức xõ bõ trên mạng ("This is completely opposite to journalists who specialize in 'boiling' or 'rehashing' chaotic news from the internet")*

In Vietnamese, "luộc" typically means boiling or cooking food, but metaphorically, it describes distorting or manipulating information, especially in journalism. Both food and information require preparation before consumption, involving gathering, processing, and presentation. Quality in both cases can be influenced by various factors. Just as cooking methods affect food quality, how information is gathered, verified, and presented affects its quality. Using "luộc" implies a negative connotation, suggesting journalists or media manipulate information for agendas. This metaphor underscores the importance of integrity in journalism, likening information manipulation to tampering with valuable goods. Just as one expects food integrity, one should demand the same for information meant to inform and educate the public.

4.2. Conceptual metaphor "how people feel with information is how people feel with food"

(7) *Đừng để đảng viên "đói" thông tin chính thống ("Don't let party members 'starve' for official information")*

(8) *Xuất khẩu nông sản dễ vỡ vì "đói" thông tin (Agricultural exports are fragile because they are hungry for information")*

The metaphor "đói thông tin chính thống" (starving for official information) vividly conveys a deep hunger for vital information, akin to the urgency of physical hunger. Just as food nourishes the body, information nourishes the mind. This metaphor underscores the fundamental human need for information, paralleling the need for sustenance. When individuals lack essential information, they experience intellectual dissatisfaction akin to physical hunger. Adequate information is vital for personal and societal growth, decision-making, and problem-solving. Without it, individuals and organizations struggle to adapt and progress effectively.

Expanding this metaphor to encompass agricultural exports, as in "Xuất khẩu nông sản dễ vỡ vì đói thông tin" (Agricultural exports are fragile because they are hungry for information), highlights

the broader implications of information scarcity. The metaphor of "đói" equates the traditional concept of hunger for food with a lack of information, emphasizing how both share attributes like necessity and impact. Just as the body needs food for sustenance, the mind requires information for functionality. This metaphor effectively illustrates how information scarcity can harm agricultural exports, emphasizing the critical role of information in economic success.

Together, these examples stress the importance of giving out official information promptly. It helps meet intellectual needs, encourages informed participation and decision-making, and sheds light on the wider societal and economic impacts of lacking information.

(9) *Bây giờ, chúng ta chỉ còn việc chờ đợi những con người thông thái, uyên bác tiêu hóa thông tin và đưa ra các giải pháp xuất chúng. ("Now, we just have to wait for wise and knowledgeable people to digest the information and come up with outstanding solutions")*

In the sentence, wise and knowledgeable people are metaphorically described as those who can "digest" information. This implies that just as the body requires a healthy digestive system to properly break down and utilize food, society relies on experts to process complex information effectively. The experts' ability to "digest" information suggests their skill in analyzing, understanding, and applying knowledge to derive solutions. The metaphor emphasizes the importance of expertise in managing and making sense of vast amounts of information. By using the metaphor of digestion, the sentence conveys the idea that just as digestion converts food into essential nutrients, intellectual processing converts raw information into valuable insights and solutions, thus underscoring the crucial role of experts in this transformative process.

(10) *Đảng viên về hưu như bác thèm thông tin lắm, vẫn tham gia sinh hoạt chi bộ địa phương, nhưng việc trao đổi, cung cấp thông tin thảng có, thảng không, mặt khác khi có thông tin thì cũng không còn tính thời sự nữa ("Retired party members like you crave information very much, still participating in local branch activities, but the exchange and provision of information is sporadic, and when there is information, it is no longer timely")*

The metaphor "thèm" in the sentence "Đảng viên về hưu như bác thèm thông tin lắm" equates a strong craving for information to the intense desire for food. It portrays the retired party member's psychological need for information, akin to the physiological need for food. Both hunger and the desire for information are essential needs, with obtaining information fulfilling the need for knowledge and engagement, analogous to how consuming food satisfies hunger. This shared attribute underscores that information nourishes the mind and soul, similar to how food nourishes the body. Just as fresh food is preferable to stale food, timely and up-to-date information is deemed more valuable and fulfilling. The phrase "khi có thông tin thì cũng không còn tính thời sự nữa" emphasizes the importance of current information, akin to preferring fresh over stale food. By highlighting these shared attributes, the metaphor effectively transfers the concept of craving from the domain of food to information, illustrating the retired party member's deep longing for information and the necessity of regular access to it for intellectual and emotional satisfaction.

(11) *"Bội thực" thông tin người đẹp Việt thi nhan sắc quốc tế ("Overwhelmed with information about Vietnamese beauties participating in international beauty contests")*

When people consume too much food, they experience a physical discomfort known as "bội thực" (overstuffed or overeating). This involves sensations of heaviness, fullness, and sometimes even nausea, leading to a general state of discomfort and unease. Similarly, when people are exposed to an excessive amount of information, particularly repetitive or trivial information, they experience cognitive and emotional overload. This can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, mentally fatigued, and even a loss of interest or engagement with the content. The metaphorical use of "bội thực" to describe information overload relies on these shared attributes and experiences between the two domains. Both food and information have an optimal range of consumption. Beyond this range, the experience turns negative. The physical discomfort of overeating mirrors the cognitive discomfort of processing too much information. Both domains highlight the need for moderation to maintain health

and functionality. In this context, "bội thực" effectively conveys the overwhelming and saturating experience of being inundated with information about a specific topic (Vietnamese beauties in international pageants). It draws on the familiar physical sensation of overeating to explain a complex cognitive and emotional state, making the concept more relatable and understandable.

(12) *Bởi chỉ cần một dòng tin tức hay một quan điểm lệch lạc, không đơn giản chỉ nghệ sĩ gặp rắc rối với phát ngôn mà khán giả cũng sẽ bị “ngộ độc tin tức”. (“Because just a piece of news or a biased viewpoint, not only artists face trouble with statements, but the audience will also suffer from ‘news poisoning’”)*

In Vietnamese, "ngộ độc" is a metaphor that literally translates to "information poisoning" or "news poisoning." This metaphor is used to describe the negative effects of consuming misleading or biased information, similar to how consuming contaminated food can lead to poisoning. Both food and information are consumed by people. In the case of food, consumption can lead to physical nourishment or harm if the food is contaminated. Similarly, consuming information can lead to mental nourishment or harm if the information is misleading or biased. Just as consuming contaminated food can lead to physical illness or discomfort, consuming misleading information can lead to mental distress, confusion, or a distorted worldview. Both scenarios result in a negative impact on well-being. People expect the food they consume to be safe and nutritious. Similarly, people expect the information they receive to be accurate and reliable. When food or information fails to meet these expectations, it can lead to feelings of betrayal or disappointment. The quality of food and information can influence people's behavior. Consuming unhealthy food may lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices, while consuming misleading information may lead to misguided actions or beliefs. By drawing parallels between the consumption of food and the consumption of information, the metaphor of "ngộ độc" effectively conveys the idea that exposure to misleading or biased information can have harmful effects on individuals and society, much like consuming contaminated food can harm one's health.

5. Conclusion

The research findings reveal the widespread use of the metaphor INFORMATION IS FOOD in within Vietnamese online discourse, indicating the familiarity of the concept of food in the minds of Vietnamese people. This metaphor highlights the partial mapping mechanism between the source domain of food and the target domain of information, emphasizing distinct attributes while concealing others. Specifically, it links aspects of human interaction with food and emotional responses to it to various forms of information, including news, knowledge, ideas, and information. An in-depth analysis of the lexical units employed in constructing these metaphorical expressions uncovers cultural values within Vietnam. Linguistically, the abundance of terms used to convey a single concept reflects the descriptive nature of Vietnamese discourse, influenced by the country's cultural nuances. For instance, numerous lexical variations exist to describe eating, including "nuốt", "ngốn" and "tiêu hóa" and food processes, such as "xào xào", "xào xầu," and "xào", illustrating the nuanced ways in which Vietnamese culture shapes language expression and perception. Through the examination of 85 metaphorical expressions of INFORMATION IS FOOD, the study identifies and analyzes two lower metaphorical models: (1) Human activities with information are human activities with food (29 occurrences); (2) *how people feel with information is how people feel with food* (56 occurrences). This underscores the prevalent use of food-related terminology to discuss information matters in Vietnamese online newspapers, providing insight into the Vietnamese perspective on information. While this study focuses specifically on the cognitive aspect of metaphors with the source domain of food on electronic news websites, it lays the groundwork for future investigations into other metaphorical domains, such as "INFORMATION IS HUMAN BEING" or "INFORMATION IS WEAPON", which promise to enhance our understanding of how Vietnamese speakers conceptualize information.

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Ẩn dụ ý niệm "THÔNG TIN LÀ THỨC ĂN" trong tiếng Việt

Tóm tắt: Bài viết tập trung phân tích ẩn dụ ý niệm THÔNG TIN LÀ THỨC ĂN trong tiếng Việt nhằm tìm hiểu cách tri nhận của người Việt về THÔNG TIN thông qua lăng kính THỨC ĂN. Để tiến hành việc nghiên cứu, bài viết sử dụng Thuyết ẩn dụ ý niệm của ngôn ngữ học tri nhận cùng với các phương pháp phân tích miêu tả và ngữ nghĩa, kết hợp với thủ pháp thống kê và phân loại để xác lập và phân tích ảnh xạ từ miền nguồn THỨC ĂN đến miền đích THÔNG TIN. Khảo sát 85 mẫu biểu thức ẩn dụ trong các ngôn bản trên báo điện tử, nghiên cứu đã khám phá được hai mô hình tri nhận thứ cấp, bao gồm: tương tác của con người với thông tin là tương tác của con người với thức ăn và cảm giác của con người với thông tin là cảm giác của con người với thức ăn. Các khám phá của nghiên cứu chứng minh rằng phép ẩn dụ THÔNG TIN LÀ THỨC ĂN được sử dụng rộng rãi trong tiếng Việt, với cơ chế ảnh xạ được xây dựng trên các miền THÔNG TIN VÀ THỨC ĂN.

Từ khóa: ẩn dụ ý niệm; ảnh xạ; thông tin; thức ăn; miền nguồn; miền đích.