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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO CONCEPTUAL
METAPHORS OF “FIRE” IN AMERICAN
AND VIETNAMESE 20th CENTURY POETRY**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

In the ground-breaking work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) Lakoff and Johnson showed that metaphor is a fundamental, structuring mechanism in the way we interact with and perceive the world around us and a common and easily accessible linguistic phenomenon that we often do not notice is in fact a metaphor. In daily life, we are ruled not only by our understanding but also our perception.

Metaphor has universality as well as variation characteristics. Unrelated languages can share the same metaphor. However, there remains differences in the range of conceptual metaphors that languages and cultures have available for the conceptualization of particular domains due to the cultural heritages.

Fire plays an important role in the formation and evolution of the universe. It has been a part of our planet from its inception, along with water, air, and earth. Fire is considered as a vivid cultural symbol: “*an element which operates in the center of all things*”. The significance of fire can be demonstrated by the numerous stories about fire in mythology, religion as well as literature. For example:

In American:

The warm bodies

shine together

in the darkness
 the hand moves
 of the flesh,
 the skin trembles
 in happiness
 and the soul comes
 joyful to the eyes.

(Allen Ginsberg, *Song*)

In Vietnamese:

Anh chạm vào em

Đá chạm vào đá.....

Từ em những đốm lửa ra đời

Mang sức cháy của anh trong cốt tủy.

(Trần Nhuận Minh, *Đá cháy*)

Fire appears as the result of the friction of two flints like heat is created by the friction of two bodies. There is connection between the concept of fire and the concept of sexuality from the examples above. The poets used the image of fire to talk about sexuality.

“Fire” appears in many poems in both American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry. However, most of students of English, including Vietnamese students find hard to deeply realize and analyze what exist behind the words denoting fire in these cases. Therefore, the research entitled: **“An Investigation into Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry”** was conducted.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

This study is aimed to clearly identify the conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry, similarities and differences in linguistic and cultural features of fire through its conceptual metaphors used in the poetry of the two countries; then we can apply to teaching and learning English language poetry.

1.2.2. Objectives

- to analyze conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry.
- to find out similarities and differences between conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry.
- to present suggestions for English teaching and learning about conceptual metaphors of “fire” in the 20th century poetry in English and Vietnamese languages in particular, in English and Vietnamese languages in general.

1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is hoped to be a practical work and will be a good reference for further studies about conceptual metaphors. It can help learners and teachers have a good understanding about how fire is metaphorically conceptualized in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry?
2. What are the similarities and differences between conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry?

1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study mainly focused on the findings of conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES RELATED TO THE RESEARCH

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed that metaphor is not just a matter of language, but it governs our ordinary conceptual system. Since then, research on metaphor has headed towards a new direction. In recent years, conceptual metaphor has occupied an important position in discussions within the field of cognitive linguistics: Gibbs (1994) with *“The Poetics of Mind”*, Kövecses (2002), (2005) with *Metaphor: “A Practical Introduction”* and *“Metaphor in Culture”* respectively.

In Vietnam, Lý Toàn Thắng (2005) mentioned the history of cognitive linguistics and the differences in the world image from different cultures. Nguyễn Thị Tú Trinh (2011) investigated the linguistic features of conceptual metaphors of three concepts: “life”, “death” and “time”. Trần Nữ Thảo Quỳnh (2013) focused on the conceptual metaphors Expressing Love and Hatred, etc.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Cognitive Semantics

a. Definition of Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics is defined as the study of the relationship between experience, embodied cognition and language.

b. Tenets of Cognitive Linguistics

Gardenfors presented cognitive semantics in six tenets:

1. *Meaning is conceptualization in a cognitive model.*
2. *Cognitive models are mainly perceptual determined.*
3. *Semantic elements are based on spatial or topological objects.*
4. *Cognitive models are primarily imaged-schematic.*
5. *Semantics is primary to syntax and partly determines it.*
6. *Concepts show prototype effects.*

2.2.2. Metaphor

a. Traditional Theories of Metaphor

Generally, there are two main approaches in the study of metaphor: the traditional approach, which includes many different theories but shares some fundamental presumptions, and the cognitive approach, which, despite being very recent, has become the most influential theory of metaphor.

b. Conceptual Metaphor

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. We can set the formula for this view of metaphor that CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B, which is called a conceptual metaphor.

The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called the source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain.

2.2.3. Metaphoric Mappings

Conceptual domain A can be understood by conceptual domain B because there is a set of correspondences or inter-domain mappings of concepts between them. The linguistic expressions used

metaphorically must conform to established mappings, or correspondences, between the source and the target.

2.2.4. Classification of Conceptual Metaphor

a. Structural Metaphor

The cognitive function of these metaphors is to enable speakers to understand target A by the structure of source B.

b. Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphors can be understood as entity and substance metaphors.

c. Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors utilize spatial images such as whole, center, link, balance, in, goal, and front as positive, while their opposites, not whole, periphery, no link, imbalance, out, no goal, and back are seen as negative.

d. Conduit Metaphor

With conduit metaphor, ideas are represented as objects, words as containers, and communication as sending the ideas in the words, so that the addresser may get the ideas out of the words.

2.2.5. Metaphor in Literature

Lakoff and Turner (1989) claimed that the metaphorical expressions produced by prestigious poets can often be seen as novel uses of the conventional conceptual metaphors that also underlie much of our everyday metaphorical language.

Kövecses (2002) mentioned the relationship between the metaphors used in ordinary language and those used in literature, including poetry.

2.2.6. Fire

a. Definition of Fire

Hornby (2005) claimed six distinguished definitions of “fire”:
(1) the flames, light and heat, and often smoke, that are produced when something burns; (2) flames that are out of control and destroy buildings, trees, etc. (3) a pile of burning fuel, such as wood or coal, used for cooking food or heating a room; (4) a piece of equipment for heating a room; (5) shots from guns; (6) very strong emotion, especially anger or enthusiasm.

b. Fire in Culture

According Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), fire has been a mystical and religious symbol of great significance for cultures throughout the world. Different cultures share the similarities and also differences in their belief and thought of fire. These similarities and differences can affect the way people communicate and therefore create various meanings of the notion “fire”.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH METHODS

This paper chooses the descriptive, contrastive, quantitative and qualitative approaches throughout the study.

3.2. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES

In this study, 600 samples of conceptual metaphors of “fire” are collected from American and Vietnamese 20th century poems from the Internet, books, and press.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

All of them are picked out from a lot of poems on different websites, books, and press.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

- Describing qualitatively and quantitatively the data collected
- Analyzing the linguistic features of conceptual metaphors of “fire” based on the schemas of conceptual mappings in the two languages
- Classifying the conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry
- Pointing out the similarities and differences between conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry

3.5. INSTRUMENTS

We use Microsoft Word and Foxit Reader softwares for searching the frequency lists of words denoting “fire” in English and Vietnamese.

3.6. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

- Reviewing the previous studies thoroughly and identifying the research scope
- Collecting American and Vietnamese 20th century poems from books, press and the Internet
- Picking out 600 metaphorical expressions of “fire” from American and Vietnamese 20th century poems for investigation
- Identifying the conceptual metaphors of “fire” used in the poems
- Analyzing and presenting data by using the tables and diagrams
- Withdrawing the similarities and differences in metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry
- Discussing the findings and suggesting some implications for teaching and learning American and Vietnamese poetry.

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The data collection is based on poems that are written by native speakers of American and Vietnamese in the 20th century. The samples are extracted from reliable websites, books, and printings. The data ensure to include variants in each language thanks to the use of descriptive, qualitative and quantitative methods.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF “FIRE”

4.1.1. Metaphoric Mappings of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire”

4.1.2. Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

Table 4.1. A Summary of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF FIRE
- DESIRE (SEXUAL DESIRE, AMBITION, CURIOSITY)
- A CONTAINER
- A PLANT
- A PERSON (A WOMAN, HEART)
- AN OBJECT
- MUSIC
- SOUL
- A TRANSPORT

- AWARENESS
- A HUNGRY ANIMAL
- ILLNESS
- GLORY
- THOUGHT
- REGENERATION
- DESTRUCTION
- CONFLICT

4.2. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF “FIRE” IN AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE 20th CENTURY POETRY

Table 4.2. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

Source Domains		American		Vietnamese	
		Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
1	DESIRE	56	18.54	52	17.51
2	A CONTAINER	28	9.27	18	6.06
3	A PLANT	9	2.98	13	4.38

4	A PERSON	30	9.93	26	8.75
5	AN OBJECT	15	4.97	19	6.40
6	MUSIC	0	0	6	2.02
7	SOUL	21	6.95	22	8.42
8	A TRANSPORT	9	2.98	15	5.05
9	AWARENESS	10	3.31	17	5.72
10	A HUNGRY ANIMAL	15	4.97	0	0
11	ILLNESS	22	7.28	16	5.39
12	GLORY	11	3.64	12	4.04
13	THOUGHT	5	1.66	3	1.01
14	REGENERATION	12	3.97	14	4.71
15	DESTRUCTION	31	10.26	28	9.43
16	CONFLICT	28	9.27	35	11.78
Total		302	100	297	100

Figure 4.1. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American 20th Century Poetry

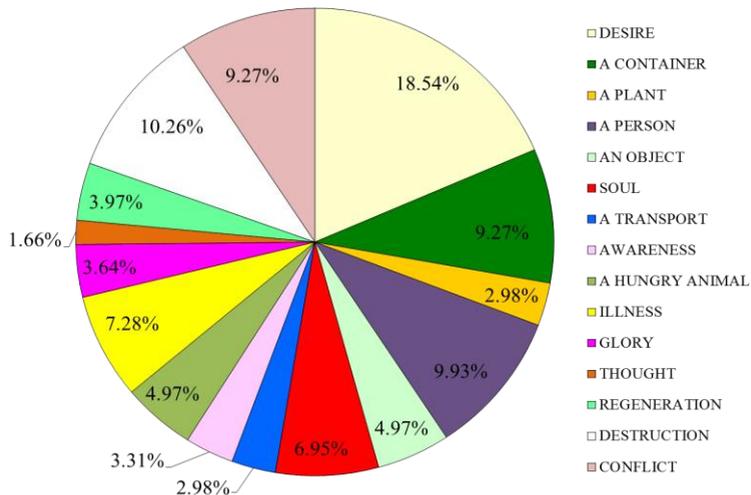
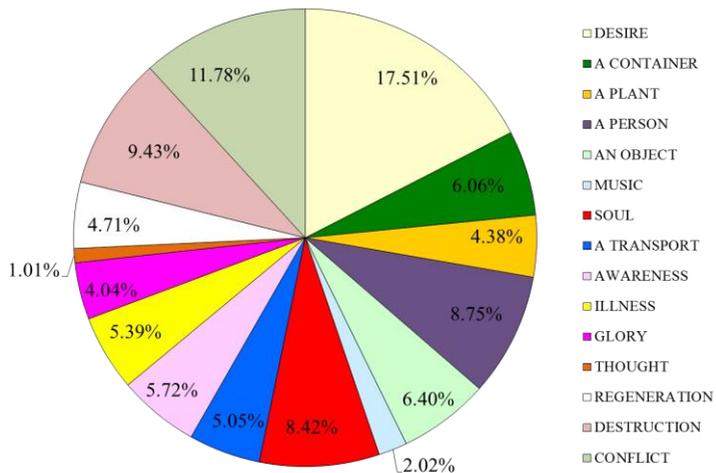


Figure 4.1. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry



4.2.1. Similarities in Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

The two languages share a lot of common source domains for conceptual metaphors of “fire” like DESIRE, A CONTAINER, A PLANT, AN OBJECT, A PERSON, A TRASPOT, ILLNESS, REGENERATION, SOUL, GLORY, THOUGHT, DESTRUCTION and CONFLICT.

The domain DESIRE was mentioned according to the terms of sexual desire, ambition, and curiosity. All of these terms apply to conceptual metaphors of “fire” in the two languages. Besides, the case of FIRE IS DESIRE metaphor was found with the largest number in both languages. It is because “desire” is the of human’s states of emotions including a variety of intensity like *love, anger, lust, ambition, enthusiasm*, etc. What make humans different from the other creatures is that humans have emotions and know how to express emotions every day. Therefore, the concepts of emotion are very familiar to humankind.

Traditionally, fire represents the active and masculine Yang of Vietnamese symbolism. It is most closely related to the sun and the power of change and purification. From the primitive time, fire helped human be awareness and got out of the animal life. Fire helps human control the other entities and protect them. Both American and Vietnamese people use the terms of fire as awareness in everyday communication as well as in poetry.

In addition, “fire” is the bringer of destruction and the symbol of chaos and war. It is an agent of destruction. Therefore, the concept of fire can also be described through the act of destruction and conflict. The two conceptual metaphors FIRE IS DESTRUCTION and FIRE IS CONFLICT are found with the large numbers comparing with the others. Vietnamese tends to use many metaphorical expressions to talk about the war. American uses the concept of fire to infer to war as well as the other manners like argument and controversial.

4.2.2. Differences in Conceptual of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

Firstly, although American and Vietnamese share the FIRE IS DESIRE metaphor, the source domain DESIRE provides a different perspective on sexuality in the two languages. In general, male and female sexual desire is conceptualized by speakers of English equally. In Vietnamese the male sexual desire is concerned rather than female. The difference may have resulted from the differences between American and Vietnamese cultures. Like many western countries, American people have more liberal view in sexuality than Vietnamese.

Furthermore, the differences regarding frequencies of different source domains are also accounted. The Vietnamese culture was born on the background of agriculture. They believe that human beings are created from five elements: fire, water, air, wood, and metal. In addition, from thousands of years ago, fire appears on the

altar of very Vietnamese family. They use fire as a transport to take them to God and ancestors. Vietnamese people also worship the Kitchen God. Therefore, the image of fire are very familiar to them not only their daily life but also in religion. In poetry, “fire” is connected to the notions like person, plant, object, soul, transport, etc. as a result. In American these source domains also occur in conceptual metaphors of “fire” but with the smaller number of data.

Interestingly, some poets use THOUGHT as source domain in the metaphor FIRE IS THOUGHT. They consider the act of thinking consumes much energy so that their mind “burn” with the ideas. In American the number of metaphorical expressions for this conceptual metaphor of fire is larger than in Vietnamese. It is because America is an industrial country where most people appreciate the new ideas and the creation.

Otherwise, A HUNGRY ANIMAL is used as a source domain that maps with the target domain FIRE in American but not in Vietnamese. Like people from other western countries, American people are famous for cowboys or brave hunters. The image of wild animals is so familiar to them.

Surprisingly, the case of conceptual metaphors FIRE IS MUSIC was only collected in some Vietnamese poems. Music and fire are the two important things in many Vietnamese religious ceremonies. Music is also used as fire to transfer the wishes of living people to the God and their ancestors. Music has different intensity of rhythm while fire has different intensity of heat.

In brief, we saw that either reality or framing can provide differential meaning focus for the concept of fire we use in metaphorical conceptualization. This seems to enhance greatly the possibility for our metaphors of fire to vary.

Table 4.3. A Comparison of Conceptual Metaphors of “Fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th Century Poetry

No.	Source Domains	Conceptual Metaphors of Fire	
		American	Vietnamese
1	DESIRE	+	+
2	A CONTAINER	+	+
3	A PLANT	+	+
4	A PERSON	+	+
5	AN OBJECT	+	+
6	MUSIC	-	+
7	SOUL	+	+
8	A TRANSPORT	+	+

9	AWARENESS	+	+
10	A HUNGRY ANIMAL	+	-
11	ILLNESS	+	+
12	GLORY	+	+
13	THOUGHT	+	+
14	REGENERATION	+	+
15	DESTRUCTION	+	+
16	CONFLICT	+	+

4.3. SUMMARY

In Chapter 4, we have presented our findings for conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry in the application to sixteen source domains. We have analyzed, classified and then found out both similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry. From the authentic results above, we hope our study will take concern by many people, who are interested in metaphor, especially the conceptual metaphors of “fire”.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

Based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor (1980), we carried out this study in order to find out some conceptual metaphors of "fire" in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry. With a limited amount of time, we have presented sixteen cases of source domains that apply to conceptual metaphors of "fire" as found in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry. They are DESIRE, A CONTAINER, A PLANT, A PERSON, AN OBJECT, MUSIC, SOUL, A TRANSPORT, AWARENESS, A HUNGRY ANIMAL, ILLNESS, GLORY, THOUGHT, REGENERATION, DESTRUCTION and CONFLICT.

There are some similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors of "fire" in American and Vietnamese. Both languages share a large number of conceptual metaphors of "fire" such as FIRE IS DESIRE, FIRE IS A CONTAINER, FIRE IS A PERSON, FIRE IS DESTRUCTION and FIRE IS CONFLICT.

In addition, like us, "fire" is one of the living – a living, upright creature. It is born, needs nourishment and oxygen, it ages and dies. The conceptual metaphor FIRE IS A PERSON takes the large number of data collection in the two languages. Furthermore, this conceptual metaphor of "fire" mostly deals with the image of a

woman rather than a man. In Vietnamese FIRE IS A PERSON is also related to HEART.

Fire has brought us not only protection, edible food, and tools, but also illumination, in the epistemological sense of the word. In observing flames, in seeing our reflection in them, humans have achieved a valuable awareness of themselves. The evidence for FIRE IS AWARENESS metaphor was found in both American and Vietnamese.

Fire has shown itself not only to have the power to improve our daily lives, but also our mental lives. It is the container of human's mind. In the fire, we have joy, sorrow, hope, or depression. Many religions consider fire as a tool for purification. Thus, in many cases, "container" is used to refer to the concept of fire.

On the other hand, there exists the conceptual metaphor FIRE IS A HUNGRY ANIMAL in American poetry but not in the Vietnamese one. Conversely, the FIRE IS MUSIC metaphor only occurs in Vietnamese but not in American.

Culture greatly influences what complex conceptual metaphors emerge from the primary metaphors. It is commonly believed that different experiences cause different styles of communication. Language and the underlying conceptualization of experience are culture-specific. American and Vietnamese belong to different cultures, which didn't have much contact with each other when conceptual metaphors evolved. Vietnamese commonly marked

as a collectivist culture whereas American is considered to be the individualist one.

In the next part we will discuss more about the implications for learning, teaching and translating conceptual metaphors of “fire” as well as limitations and suggestions for further researches.

5.2. IMPLICATION

“Fire” is organic life and has, ever since its original encounter with humans, often shown itself to depend on our “care” in order to survive. In return, it has lent us a bit of its power and served as a vital tool for us, both physically and mentally.

Fire has always attracted us and fostered insight and contemplation, made us see as though for the first time. And for the careful observer it has also been the very “illustration” of transcendence. In other words, fire is an illuminator— a source of existential understanding, insight, and identification.

Of the four elements— earth, fire, water, and air —fire is the ardent brother. It is the most “holy” of the four elements which is seen early on in mythological narratives and tales of creation from every corner of the world. Until now, “fire” is always a very popular concept that is used metaphorically in everyday communication as well as in literature, especially in poetry.

Therefore, in teaching, teachers should make their students aware of the universal characteristics of conceptual metaphors in our daily life, including conceptual metaphors of “fire”. In the light of

cognitive semantics, the case of conceptual metaphor is being concerned more commonly than ever. Teachers of linguistics should have more lessons to introduce about conceptual metaphors in general, about some common source domains like DESIRE, PLANT, PERSON, OBJECT, etc. for the target domains like FIRE to make their students interested in studying them.

By studying conceptual metaphors, we can learn a lot of metaphorical expressions so that we apply them in our everyday communication and then enrich our verbal skill. Besides, we learn more collocations of a domain through its metaphorical expressions. Especially in poetry, it is meaningless to just read the poems and understand the literal meaning of the words. In the case of “fire”, we have to deal with its conceptual metaphors with apply to various source domains in order to find out the messages behind the words. And that is what the theory of conceptual metaphors can help us.

In addition, with the help of conceptual metaphors of “fire”, many language phenomena that occur in literature or idioms about “fire” are understood much easier. Thus, people share the common stereotypes when communicating and avoid cultural conflict.

For translating, in order to get correct message from conceptual metaphors of “fire” in English to Vietnamese and via versa, the translator should care about cultural elements that affect the using of metaphorical expressions as we mentioned before.

5.3. LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The thesis focuses on conceptual metaphors of “fire” in American and Vietnamese 20th century poetry. Most of the theories used are taken from the theories of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) about conceptual metaphors. We have worked seriously to find out the data and then made a comparison to find out similarities and differences of conceptual metaphor of “fire” in the two languages. However, there are a lot more possibilities for conceptual metaphors of “fire” that we have not discussed. Due to the limited time and references, we just focused on the concept of fire that are used a get domain mapping to sixteen source domains as mentioned before. Here, we suggest some possible cases of conceptual metaphors containing the concept of fire as used as a source domain like ANGER IS FIRE, LOVE IS FIRE, LIFE IS FIRE, DEATH IS FIRE, HAPPINESS IS FIRE, and SADNESS IS FIRE.

What is more, according to Bachelard, a French philosopher and literary critic in 20th century, the four elements - fire, water, earth and air- embody the creative temperament as well as the basic forms of life. It is interesting to explore the meanings of these symbols in literature. The studies on conceptual metaphors of “water”, “earth”, “air” will certainly take a lot concern.

We hope that this thesis will be the inspiration for the others who care about conceptual metaphors, especially the metaphors of “fire” to take more researches to make it better.