

Models of Semantic Extension in the Korean Body-Part Terms 눈, 코, 입: A Contrastive Study with Vietnamese and Implications for Teaching Korean in Vietnam

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Abstract: Among the lexical fields of Korean, the facial body-part terms 눈 (nun, ‘eye’), 코 (ko, ‘nose’) and 입 (ip, ‘mouth’) display one of the strongest and most varied capacities for semantic extension. Drawing on the framework of Cognitive Semantics — specifically the theory of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the radial category model of Lakoff (1987), the Cognitive Grammar of Langacker (1987, 1991), and Kövecses’s (2002, 2010) account of the cultural variation of metaphor — in combination with Lexical Semantics, this article offers a systematic analysis of the semantic-extension models of 눈, 코 and 입 and contrasts them with their Vietnamese counterparts. The analysis rests on a dataset of 68 derived senses and fixed expressions (23 for 눈, 21 for 코, 24 for 입) extracted from the Standard Korean Language Dictionary and the Vietnamese Dictionary, cross-checked against published Korean–Vietnamese contrastive studies. The findings show that conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy, operating on the universal basis of embodiment, are the principal mechanisms governing extension from concrete to abstract meaning. The way in which particular conceptual mappings are selected and conventionalised, however — for instance, why “the height of the nose” is conventionalised as a scale of pride in Korean but not in Vietnamese — may be related to the way each speech community organises its spatial-orientational models and the social-evaluative values attached to the face, rather than deriving necessarily from a single aesthetic standard. On this basis, the article proposes a principle of vocabulary teaching oriented towards “decoding the cognitive schema”, illustrated by a concrete classroom activity.

Keywords: Semantic extension, body-part terms, 눈, 코, 입, conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, Cognitive Semantics, Korean–Vietnamese contrastive analysis, vocabulary teaching.

INTRODUCTION

In the lexical system of every language, body-part terms (also known as somatic terms) constitute a primary lexical stratum, bound up with the direct and universal experience that human beings have of their own bodies. A substantial body of cross-linguistic typological research has identified this as one of the lexical fields with the greatest potential for semantic extension, drawn upon to express abstract concepts belonging to mental life, cognition, emotion and social relations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010).

In Korean, 눈 (nun, ‘eye’), 코 (ko, ‘nose’) and 입 (ip, ‘mouth’) are three items with a complex polysemous structure and a high frequency of occurrence in idioms and conventionalised expressions. Contrastive research on the polysemy of this group of terms in Korean and Vietnamese was given an important foundation by Park Jong Gap (박종갑, 2007), whose detailed classification of derived senses rests on lexicological criteria. Bae Do Yong (배도용, 2001) surveys the mechanisms of semantic extension in Korean body-part terms more generally across an extensive body of data, providing a highly valuable language-internal description of Korean,

although the study does not centre on a systematic bilingual contrastive framework with Vietnamese.

Building upon these two foundational works, the present article seeks to contribute in three further respects: (i) it adds an explanatory perspective on the mechanisms of semantic extension from a cognitive standpoint — that is, it not only establishes *which* derived senses exist but also proposes an account of *why* those conceptual mappings arise, on the basis of the conceptual metaphor and metonymy framework; (ii) it broadens the discussion of Korean–Vietnamese differences by relating them to spatial-orientational models and social-evaluative values, as an approach complementary to traditional lexicological classification; and (iii) it converts the results of linguistic analysis into a concrete teaching principle and classroom activity for learners of Korean in Vietnam.

For Vietnamese learners, acquiring the derived senses of 눈, 코 and 입 is frequently impeded by a tendency to interpret them according to their literal sense or to translate them directly from the mother tongue, which leads to stylistic misuse and contextual misunderstanding. Taking this practical

situation as its point of departure, the article clarifies the semantic-extension properties of the three terms through contrast with *mắt*, *mũi* and *miệng* in Vietnamese, and on that basis proposes a principle for teaching Korean vocabulary in Vietnam that rests on an explicit theoretical foundation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHOD

Theoretical Framework

The article combines Lexical Semantics — used to establish the relationship between basic and derived senses and to conduct componential analysis — with Cognitive Semantics. The theoretical foundation comprises four works of high systematising value in the field. First, *Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Metaphors We Live By*: introduces the notions of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy, and argues that human beings use their own bodies as a source domain from which mappings are projected onto more abstract target domains. This work is also the origin of the notion of orientational metaphor — a type of metaphor that organises a conceptual system around a pair of spatial orientations (e.g. HIGH–LOW) — which is applied directly to the analysis of *코* in Section 3.2.

Second, *Lakoff (1987), Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*: proposes the radial category model, according to which the senses of a polysemous word are not distributed at random but radiate from a central (prototypical) sense along traceable conceptual links. This model helps to explain why the derived senses of *눈*, *코* and *입*, diverse as they are, can nevertheless be reduced to a limited number of principal extension “branches” that lend themselves to modelling.

Third, *Langacker (1987, 1991), Cognitive Grammar*: supplies the notions of *construal* (the manner in which a situation is conceptualised) and *profiling* (the foregrounding of one facet of a conceptual domain), which help to explain why one and the same body part may be profiled along different dimensions in different languages (for instance, Korean profiles the dimension of *length* of the mouth in *입이 짧다*, whereas Vietnamese profiles *eating behaviour* directly, without recourse to an image of the size of the body part).

Finally, *Kövecses (2002, 2010), Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*: adds the perspective of the cultural variation of metaphor, according to which

languages may draw on the same universal embodied experience yet select different facets of that experience for highlighting, owing to differences of cultural and historical context and of value systems. This provides an important theoretical basis for the cautious account of Korean–Vietnamese differences offered here, one that does not reduce them to a single, unverified “cultural standard”.

Drawing these four theoretical sources together, the article establishes three mechanisms, or working concepts, that are used throughout the analysis:

- Conceptual metaphor: the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another, on the basis of perceived similarity.
- Conceptual metonymy: the use of one element of a conceptual domain to stand for the domain as a whole, or for another element contiguous to it within the same domain.
- Orientational metaphor: a subtype of conceptual metaphor that organises concepts along an axis of spatial orientation (e.g. HIGH–LOW), typically employed to map onto scales of value or attitude.

Data And Method

Data sources. Basic and derived senses were collated from the *Standard Korean Language Dictionary* (표준국어대사전, National Institute of Korean Language) and the *Vietnamese Dictionary* (Hoàng Phê, ed., 2003). Idioms and conventionalised expressions containing *눈*, *코* and *입* were compiled manually by the authors from the corresponding entries in these two dictionaries and cross-checked against Park Jong Gap (2007) and Bae Do Yong (2001) in order to verify the currency and general acceptability of each usage; archaic items and items rarely used in contemporary Korean were excluded.

Componential analysis and conceptual modelling. Semantic features were decomposed and the direction of conceptual shift was traced from the centre (the basic, concrete sense) towards the periphery (derived, abstract senses) following the radial category model (Lakoff, 1987). Each step of the shift was labelled with the corresponding cognitive mechanism (metaphor, metonymy or orientational metaphor), and the facet profiled at that step, in Langacker’s sense, was made explicit.

Contrastive method. A two-way Korean–Vietnamese comparison was carried out in order to

identify both universal similarities (arising from shared embodied experience) and points of divergence, with reference to the conclusions of Park Jong Gap (2007) wherever direct comparison was possible. Examples for contrast were selected according to two criteria: (a) the Vietnamese unit must derive from one of the three body parts *mắt* ('eye'), *mũi* ('nose') or *miệng* ('mouth'), or from *mặt* ('face') in cases where the equivalent concept has "migrated" to a different source domain, as with *코*; and (b) the Vietnamese unit must be in common use in contemporary Vietnamese as recorded in Hoàng Phê (2003), avoiding rare expressions and those confined to narrow regional usage.

SEMANTIC EXTENSION IN THE KOREAN TERMS *눈*, *코* AND *입* IN CONTRAST WITH VIETNAMESE

눈 (Nun, 'Eye'): From Organ of Sight to Standard of Evaluation and Cognition

In both languages the basic sense of *눈* and of Vietnamese *mắt* is the organ of sight. The conceptual extension schema of *눈* comprises two successive shifts, consistent with the radial category model (Lakoff, 1987):

EYE (organ of sight) → [metonymy] → GAZE / ATTENTION → [metaphor] → COGNITION / INTELLECT → [metaphor] → STANDARD OF EVALUATION

- **Conceptual metonymy** (the part standing for the action): *눈* shifts from the organ to 'gaze' or 'attention', as in the conventionalised expression *눈을 끌다* (nun-eul kkeulda), literally 'to draw the eye', i.e. to attract attention.
- **Conceptual metaphor** (physical → mental/intellectual): vision is the principal channel through which human beings take in information, and 'seeing' is therefore mapped onto 'knowing' — a mapping that has been recorded as highly universal across languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Examples include *눈이 높다* (nun-i nopda), literally 'the eye is high', i.e. having demanding standards, and *눈이 밝다* (nun-i bakda), literally 'the eye is bright', i.e. perceptive, quick to grasp.

Contrast. Vietnamese exhibits far-reaching parallels (*mắt tinh*, *mắt sắc*, *con mắt nhìn đời*, *mắt cao hơn đầu*), which reflect the universality of the mapping SEEING IS KNOWING. One case calls for particular caution: *눈치* (nunchi), a derived

unit containing the element *눈*, reflects the same cognitive basis in vision and the capacity for recognition (reading a situation or another person's intentions through observation), but is morphologically a compound in its own right rather than a direct sense extension within the semantic structure of *눈* itself. With that caveat, *눈치가 있다/없다* (nunchi-ga itda / eopda), 'to have / to lack the ability to read others' intentions', remains useful evidence that the conceptual basis VISION → SOCIAL COGNITION continues to be exploited in Korean in a neighbouring lexical unit. Vietnamese expresses the equivalent concept chiefly through *tinh ý*, *biết ý* and *biết điều*, which do not take the image of the 'eye' as the centre of the metaphor but shift instead to items of a higher degree of abstraction. This difference in the degree of lexicalisation is a phenomenon worth recording, although the present article does not have sufficient cultural and historical evidence to assert its cause with confidence, and therefore advances it only as a hypothesis requiring further verification through comparative cultural research.

코 (ko, 'nose'): from organ of smell and prominent facial feature to symbol of self-regard

The basic sense of *코* and of Vietnamese *mũi* is the organ of smell and respiration, situated centrally and projecting from the face — a physical property that furnishes the perceptual basis for both directions of extension set out below.

NOSE (organ of respiration / prominent position) → [spatial metaphor] → FOREMOST POSITION / CREST → [orientational metaphor HIGH-LOW] → SELF-REGARD / OUTWARD FACE / PRIDE

- **Spatial metaphor** (based on shape and prominent position, rather than on a binary orientational axis): *코* extends to denote the protruding front part of an object (*신코*, sinko, 'the toe of a shoe') or a nearby location (*코앞*, koap, literally 'right in front of the nose', i.e. very close in space or in time).

- **Orientational metaphor HIGH-LOW** (in the strict sense of *orientational metaphor* in Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): because the nose is the highest point and the centre of the face, Korean exploits the HIGH-LOW axis of orientation to map onto a scale of social attitude: *코가 높다* (ko-ga nopda), 'the nose is high', i.e. arrogant; *코가 납작해지다* (ko-ga napjakaejida), 'the

nose becomes flat', i.e. to lose face, to be brought down; 콧대를 꺾다 (kotdae-reul kkeokda), 'to break the bridge of the nose', i.e. to crush another's conceit.

Contrast and account of the difference. This is the clearest point of divergence between the two languages. Vietnamese does not use 'a high nose' to denote arrogance, but takes the image of *mặt* ('face') as the source domain for social attitude (*vênh mặt, lên mặt, phồng mũi* — the last of these inclining towards pride rather than arrogance) may be accounted for by the combination of the physical property of the nose (high/low), the orientational metaphorical model that associates HIGH with positive values and high status in many languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and the manner in which the Korean speech community instantiates this orientational axis on the body part 'nose' specifically, whereas Vietnamese profiles (in Langacker's sense) a different body part — 'face' — as the conceptual anchor for values of social face and social attitude. This formulation is consistent with Kövecses's (2002, 2010) view of the cultural variation of metaphor: two languages may share a universal conceptual schema (the HIGH-LOW orientational metaphor associated with status and attitude) yet attach that schema to different body parts as its concrete anchor.

By comparison with Park Jong Gap (2007), the present account adds a further layer of explanation: it not only records the *absence* of the 코-arrogance metaphor in Vietnamese, but also shows that the *equivalent concept* (the HIGH-LOW orientational metaphor associated with status and attitude) has not disappeared from Vietnamese but has "migrated" to a different bodily anchor, namely the face. The contrast is thus drawn at the level of the system of conceptual mappings, alongside the level of the individual lexical item.

입 (Ip, 'Mouth'): From Organ of Eating and Speech to Symbol of Utterance and Discretion

The basic sense of 입 and of Vietnamese *miệng* is the body part used for eating, drinking and producing sound.

MOUTH (organ of eating/speech) → [metonymy] → SPEECH / UTTERANCE → [metonymy and property metaphor] → DISCRETION / TASTE / CAPACITY FOR CONSUMPTION

– **Conceptual metonymy** (sound-producing organ → speech): 입이 가볍다/무겁다 (ip-i gabyeopda / mugeopda), 'the mouth is light/heavy', i.e. talkative / discreet; 입을 모으다 (ip-eul moeuda), 'to gather the mouths', i.e. to speak with one voice, to be unanimous; 입이 짧다 (ip-i jjalda), 'the mouth is short', i.e. fussy about food.

Contrast. This is the term with the highest degree of Korean-Vietnamese correspondence, since both languages draw on the metonymy ORGAN OF SPEECH → SPEECH / ATTITUDE TOWARDS SPEECH, a mechanism that is close to universal across languages. Vietnamese has fairly close counterparts in *kín miệng, hở miệng, nặng miệng* and *đắng miệng*. The notable divergence lies in the semantic feature 'fussy about food': 입이 짧다 (literally 'short mouth') has no formal equivalent in Vietnamese. A further point about the nature of the mapping should be made explicit here. In this collocation the adjective 짧다 (jjalda, 'short') does not simply describe the physical length of the mouth, but is used in a *profiling* operation (Langacker, 1987) that foregrounds the concept of a limit upon receptive capacity: a 'short mouth' is understood metaphorically as a container of restricted capacity, which is then mapped onto 'a limited capacity for, or degree of, taking in food', that is, being a fussy eater. Vietnamese opts for a direct mapping by means of verbs denoting behaviour or attitude (*kén, ngán*), without passing through an intermediate image of the size of the mouth. This shows that although both languages select 'mouth' as the source domain for 'attitude towards eating', they differ in the facet profiled in the course of mapping: Korean foregrounds a metaphorically construed spatial property of the mouth (length, and hence capacity), whereas Vietnamese foregrounds the behaviour itself.

Summary Table: Korean-Vietnamese contrast of semantic-extension models

Term	Basic sense (source domain)	Extended senses (target domain)	Korean examples	Mechanism of semantic extension	Vietnamese equivalents
눈	Eye (organ of sight)	1. Gaze / attention 2. Cognition /	눈을 끌다; 눈이 밝다; 눈이 높다	Metonymy (organ → action); metaphor (vision → cognition / mental	con mắt nhìn đời; sáng mắt / tinh mắt; mắt cao hơn đầu

		intellect 3. Standard of evaluation		life)	
코	Nose (organ of respiration / prominent position)	1. Protruding part / short distance 2. Self-regard / pride	신코; 코앞; 코가 높다; 코가 납작해지다	Spatial metaphor (position); orientational metaphor HIGH-LOW (height → social attitude)	ngay trước mũi; phồng mũi; vênh mặt / lên mặt
입	Mouth (organ of eating / speech)	1. Speech / utterance 2. Discretion 3. Taste / capacity for consumption	입을 모으다; 입이 무겁다; 입이 짧다	Metonymy (organ → product / action); property metaphor of the CONTAINER type (long/short → receptive capacity)	cùng một miệng nói ra; kín miệng / hờ miệng; kén ăn (no counterpart to “short mouth”)

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF KOREAN VOCABULARY IN VIETNAM

Teaching Principle: Decoding the Cognitive Schema Rather Than Passive Memorisation

On the basis of the analysis in Section 3, the article proposes a general teaching principle comprising three closely interlocking components:

– **(a) Decoding the mechanism before practice.**

Rather than requiring learners to memorise a disconnected list of idioms containing 눈, 코 and 입, the teacher guides them in reconstructing for themselves the schema of conceptual mapping (basic sense → cognitive mechanism → derived sense) as illustrated in Section 3. Once learners understand *why* ‘a high nose’ is linked to arrogance (through the HIGH-LOW orientational metaphor), or *why* ‘a heavy mouth’ is linked to keeping a secret (through the metonymy of utterance), the retention of vocabulary becomes more systematic and more durable.

– **(b) Controlled two-way contrast.** The teacher actively elicits Vietnamese equivalents in order to activate the learner’s existing lexical knowledge (*kín miệng* ↔ 입이 무겁다), while making explicit those points of mismatch that must be memorised as special cases and not inferred from a general rule (입이 짧다 → *kén ăn*, not translated as ‘short mouth’; 코가 높다 → ‘arrogant’, not rendered through the image of the ‘nose’ in Vietnamese).

– **(c) Anchoring in cultural and communicative context.** In courses on Translation and Interpreting or on Lexicology and Semantics, vocabulary should be placed within concrete communicative situations (the press, film, everyday conversation) so that learners grasp its

stylistic nuance and not merely its dictionary meaning.

Illustrative Activity

To give concrete form to the principle set out above, a 15–20 minute activity may be organised in three steps (suitable for intermediate level and above). **(1)** The teacher presents a Korean conventionalised expression (for example 코가 높다) together with its literal Vietnamese rendering (‘a high nose’, which in Vietnamese carries only a descriptive sense relating to physical appearance), and asks students to predict its meaning before consulting a dictionary. **(2)** Students work in groups to draw their own three-step schema (basic sense → cognitive mechanism → derived sense) for an assigned term (눈/코/입), to contrast it with the Vietnamese equivalent, and to ask themselves why Vietnamese does or does not possess a comparable mapping. **(3)** Students produce sentences or a short dialogue (three to four turns) that use the expression just learned in a contextually and stylistically appropriate way, after which the class offers feedback and corrects errors of style and context.

CONCLUSION

The article has systematised the models of semantic extension of the three Korean body-part terms 눈, 코 and 입 within the framework of Cognitive Semantics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987, 1991; Kövecses, 2002, 2010) combined with Lexical Semantics, on the basis of an explicitly quantified dataset of 68 units, while engaging selectively with the research directions of Park Jong Gap (2007) and Bae Do Yong (2001). The findings show that semantic extension in this group of terms follows systematic patterns of conceptual metaphorical and metonymic mapping which originate in universal

embodied experience but are “anchored” differently in each language, according to the way each community organises its spatial-orientational models and its social-evaluative values. The case of 코 (‘nose’) is representative in this respect and has been accounted for cautiously, without being reduced to a single unverified cultural norm. On this basis, the article proposes a teaching principle oriented towards “decoding the cognitive schema”, together with an illustrative classroom activity.

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