

LANGUAGES AND CULTURE

IMAGES IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IDIOMS OF HAPPINESS AND SADNESS: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: Idioms serve as distinct linguistic units that encapsulate cultural wisdom, particularly regarding the perception and expression of emotions such as happiness and sadness. This study explores the imagery inherent in English and Vietnamese idioms, presenting a descriptive analysis based on a comparative framework. By examining a collection of 375 idioms, including 91 related to happiness and 146 to sadness in Vietnamese, and 72 and 91, respectively, in English, the research reveals significant linguistic and cultural distinctions. The analysis employs Image Schema Theory, Contrastive Analysis, and an Intercultural Linguistics Perspective to identify prevalent imagery related to emotional expression. Findings indicate that while both languages utilize human body imagery to articulate emotions, Vietnamese idioms favor visceral depictions - highlighting internal organs - reflecting a deep and introspective cultural orientation toward sadness. Conversely, English idioms often utilize spatial and sociocultural symbolism, emphasizing an extroverted expression of happiness. This divergence underscores broader cultural concepts and emotional frameworks, illustrating how language organizes and represents emotional experiences differently. The results contribute to the fields of cognitive linguistics and cultural studies, offering insights valuable for language education, translation, and intercultural communication practices.

KEY WORDS: idioms; emotional expression; cultural identity; cross-cultural comparison; cognitive linguistics.

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1. Introduction

Studies of idioms, especially idioms expressing emotions, plays an important role in exploring the relationship between language and culture. Idioms are not only symbolic linguistic units but also a powerful tool reflecting the profound cultural values of each community. In idioms expressing emotions such as happiness and sadness, images expressing emotional states also reflect the philosophy of life, social concepts and cultural elements specific to each language. Therefore, the study on images used in these idioms has gone beyond the framework of a purely linguistic study, approaching cultural studies, thereby clarifying how language and culture form and express emotions.

Studying the similarities and differences in idioms expressing emotions between English and Vietnamese is important, helping to better understand the nature of language and culture of each nation. Each language has its own characteristics in the use of images to express emotions, reflecting unique cultural values. For example, in English, idioms such as *as happy as a lark* or *like a dog with two tails* use animal images to describe the feeling of happiness, in which the image of a lark or a dog shows joy and happiness through their joyful behavior. These images bear the mark of Western culture, where animals are considered close companions of humans, symbolizing loyalty and joy (Bybee, 2009).

Meanwhile, Vietnamese reflects emotions through images that are close and familiar to rural life, such as the image of a mouse in the idiom *chuột sa chĩnh gạo* (mouse falls into a rice jar) or the image of a mother in the idiom *mừng như mẹ đi chợ về* (as happy as mother comes back from the market). These images do not simply describe emotions but also reflect the profound cultural values

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of the Vietnamese community, where family affection, attachment to nature and familiar images from rural life occupy extremely important positions (Luc & Dang, 2009).

The differences in the way images are used to express emotions between the two languages open up an interesting research direction on the relationship between language and culture. Analyzing these idioms helps to gain a deeper understanding of linguistics, discovering the cultural and social characteristics unique to each nation. Moreover, this research has important implications for promoting intercultural communication, helping language learners and translators better understand how idioms are used in different contexts. In the current context of globalization, understanding the differences in the way language images are used to express emotions is essential to improving communication and translation skills between different cultures (Kemmer & Barlow, 2000).

With the development of cross-cultural research and comparative linguistics, analyzing the similarities and differences in idiomatic images of two languages brings many theoretical benefits and high practical value, especially in language teaching and learning as well as in translation work. Comparing idioms expressing emotions in English and Vietnamese, this study helps to clarify the linguistic characteristics, clarify the cultural factors that influence the formation and development of semantic images in idioms of each language.

2. Theoretical background

This study focuses on comparing the images used in idioms expressing happiness and sadness between English and Vietnamese. To approach this issue comprehensively, three main theoretical bases are applied including: Image Schema Theory, Contrastive Analysis, and Intercultural Linguistics Perspective. Each theory not only contributes to explaining how images are formed and used in idioms, but also provides a basis for analyzing the similarities and differences between the two languages in terms of both language and culture.

2.1. Image Schema Theory

Image schema theory, developed by Johnson (1987), plays a pivotal role in explaining how iconic images in idioms are not simply random manifestations, but are rooted in universal human cognitive patterns. According to Johnson (1987), image schemas are abstract patterns formed from physical experience and regular interactions with the world such as: CONTAINER, PATH, BALANCE, FORCE... These schemas form the basis for the process of meaning formation in linguistic expressions.

In the scope of this study, many English and Vietnamese idioms expressing happiness and sadness use images associated with movement or body states - patterns associated with image maps. For example, the idioms *kick up one's heels* and *jump for joy* express high emotional states through the MOTION UPWARD diagram, associated with joy and excitement. Similarly, Vietnamese idioms such as *nhảy chân sáo* (jum starling leg), *mở cờ trong bụng* (open flag in belly), or *nở từng khúc ruột* (expand each piece of intestine) also express positive emotions through images of expansion and opening - related to the EXPANSION and FORCE-DYNAMIC diagrams.

In contrast, idioms expressing negative emotions such as *heart sinks*, *cry one's eyes out*, *đứt ruột đứt gan* (broken intestine broken liver), *xé gan xé ruột* (tear liver tear intestine)... reflect a state of pain and narrowing of energy, often associated with the CONTRACTION, DOWNWARD MOTION or CONTAINER OVERFLOW diagrams - where emotions are repressed or overflowed, causing internal damage. Thus, the image diagram allows to explain how images in idioms are organized according to a universal cognitive mechanism but the specific expression depends on each culture.

2.2. Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive theory is an effective tool for comparing two language systems to find similarities and differences in structure, semantics and pragmatics. According to Fisiak (1981), contrastive analysis not only plays a role in foreign language teaching but is also a scientific method for examining cultural differences expressed through language. In this study, the contrastive method is used to

analyze how English and Vietnamese use images of animals, plants, body parts, natural phenomena... in idioms denoting happiness and sadness.

For example, both languages tend to use animal images to express happiness: *like a dog with two tails* in English and *vui như chó được xương* (happy like a dog gets a bone) in Vietnamese. However, the symbolic meaning of the same image is different. In English, the image is exaggerated and humorous, while Vietnamese emphasizes realistic satisfaction. Or for the emotion of sadness, Vietnamese uses idioms such as *mặt ủ mày chau* (face gloomy eyebrow frown), *ruột đau như cắt* (intestine hurt as being cut) with the image of the body with damaged internal organs, while English tends to express it through the face or heart such as *a long face*, *one's heart sinks*.

This difference lies in the choice of images, reflecting the cultural identity and way of feeling and expressing emotions of each nation.

2.3. Intercultural Linguistics Perspective

The study of emotional idioms cannot be separated from cultural factors, because idioms are where language crystallizes the social experiences, history and traditional values of the speaking community. According to Viet (1978), idioms are “a means of reflecting worldviews, outlooks on life and national identity in a profound and concise way”. Therefore, analyzing the images in happy and sad idioms helps to clarify how each culture perceives, constructs and expresses emotions.

For example, in Vietnamese, the image of *nở từng khúc ruột* expresses a state of extreme joy associated with a feeling spreading from within the body - reflecting the tendency to internalize emotions. Meanwhile, in English, the idioms *on cloud nine* or *over the moon* express a state of joy with soaring, gentle images - metaphysical and rich in symbolism. This different choice of images reflects the difference in figurative thinking and the way emotions are "materialized" in culture.

The three theoretical bases above are closely combined to form the analytical framework for this study. Image schema theory explains how images are structured in idioms from a cognitive perspective. Contrastive theory provides a tool to analyze the differences and similarities between two languages in terms of linguistic images. Meanwhile, the cross-cultural perspective clarifies the role of culture in the selection and use of images in idioms. The combination of these three theories creates a solid foundation for studying the image system in English and Vietnamese emotional idioms in a comprehensive and in-depth manner.

3. Methodology

Mixed-methods approach, in which qualitative methods play a dominant role in analyzing in-depth the symbolic images in English and Vietnamese emotional idioms, while quantitative methods are integrated to support the determination of the prevalence of the types of images. The research design is implemented according to the *Embedded Design model proposed* by Creswell and Clark (2007), which allows the integration of quantitative data in an overall qualitative research process. This model is particularly suitable for comparative linguistic studies, in which in-depth analysis of meaning and images plays a central role, while numbers play a role in clarifying and reinforcing the findings.

Data sources are collected from reputable academic works and dictionaries, including *the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*. (Siefring, 2004) for English, and *the Dictionary of Vietnamese Idioms* (Luc & Dang, 2009) for Vietnamese, along with a number of selected academic documents and electronic sources. The total data includes 375 idioms, including 91 happy idioms and 72 sad idioms in English, along with 66 happy idioms and 146 sad idioms in Vietnamese. The selection criteria are that the idioms must be directly related to emotions of happiness and sadness and contain at least one specific image, which can be analyzed from a cognitive and cultural perspective.

The research process was conducted in four main steps. The first step was to classify idioms into two basic emotional groups: happiness and sadness. The second step was to analyze each idiom to identify the images present in it and group them according to common image source domains such as:

animals, human body, natural phenomena, social events, food, tools, etc. In the **third step**, the images were coded and statistically processed to determine the frequency of each image group in each language. This quantification was not intended to generalize the entire idiom system, but to provide an oriented view of the relative popularity of image types in each corpus. Finally, in the fourth step, the study applied the method of contrastive analysis (Fisiak, 1981) to compare the use of images in idioms between English and Vietnamese, thereby clarifying the cognitive similarities and cultural differences.

In parallel with the analysis process, the study also applies Johnson's Image Schema Theory (1987) as an important theoretical basis to explain why some images have strong expressive power in expressing emotions. According to Johnson, image schemas such as CONTAINER, PATH, BALANCE or FORCE are abstract but universal cognitive models, formed from bodily experiences and interactions with the physical world. Many idioms such as *kick up one's heels*, *over the moon*, *mát gan mát ruột* (*cool liver cool intestine*), *nở từng khúc ruột* can all be analyzed as manifestations of these image schemas. Thereby, images are not only a means of expressing emotions but also a gateway to the thinking, lifestyle and culture of each language community.

Combining qualitative, quantitative, comparative and epistemological methods in an integrated research design allows for a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of emotional idioms, both deeply analyzing symbolic layers of meaning and creating a statistical basis to strengthen objectivity and comparability in interlingual and intercultural research.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Statistics of the number of idioms by emotional and linguistic groups

The preliminary statistical analysis in this study was based on a corpus of 375 emotional idioms drawn from two languages - English and Vietnamese - representing two fundamental emotional categories: happiness and sadness. The categorization of these idioms along two dimensions, namely language and emotional type, revealed an uneven distribution across the groups. This disparity highlights distinct tendencies in emotional expression characteristic of each linguistic and cultural community.

Within the English idiomatic system, expressions denoting happiness are predominant, with 91 instances identified, compared to only 72 idioms related to sadness. This imbalance suggests a positive orientation in emotional expression through English idioms, which may be attributed to cultural traits commonly associated with Western societies - such as extroversion, pragmatism, and an optimistic worldview. Idioms like *on cloud nine*, *a bowl of cherries*, and *jump for joy* not only convey happiness but also encapsulate enthusiasm, vitality, and emotional openness.

In contrast, the Vietnamese idiomatic system exhibits a markedly different pattern. Out of 212 idioms analyzed, 145 pertain to sadness, nearly double the 67 idioms associated with happiness. This notable divergence indicates that within Vietnamese linguistic cognition, negative emotional experiences - such as sorrow, grief, and suffering - are expressed with greater depth and variety. This tendency may be rooted in Eastern philosophical influences that emphasize spiritual resilience, endurance, and introspective values, reflecting a culturally ingrained sensitivity to internal emotional states.

The stark contrast between the two languages is clearly illustrated in the table below, which presents the percentage distribution of emotional idioms across the entire corpus.

Table 1. Emotional idioms statistics by language

	Language	Feeling	Quantity	Rate (%)
1	Vietnamese	Happy	67	17.9
2	Vietnamese	Sad	145	38.7

	Language	Feeling	Quantity	Rate (%)
3	English	Happy	91	24.3
4	English	Sad	72	19.2
Total			375	100

An examination of the table reveals that Vietnamese idioms expressing sadness constitute the largest proportion of the entire corpus, comprising nearly 39%. This is followed by English idioms denoting happiness at approximately 24.3%, English idioms of sadness at 19.2%, and Vietnamese idioms of happiness - which represent the smallest proportion - at only 17.9%. This distribution pattern underscores the emotional orientation of each language's idiomatic system: while English tends to emphasize positive emotions and an optimistic outlook, Vietnamese idioms allocate considerable linguistic space to the expression of sorrow, pain, and loss.

The disparity observed is not merely quantitative; it also prompts broader considerations regarding the visual-conceptual frameworks, cultural worldviews, and emotional perceptions embedded within each language. These findings lay a critical foundation for subsequent analysis, which will delve into symbolic imagery, cognitive underpinnings, and the application of image schema theory in the idiomatic representation of happiness and sadness in English and Vietnamese.

4.1.2. Image classification by source domains

To clarify the mechanism of emotional expression in English and Vietnamese idioms, the study classified images according to source domains - universal cognitive categories used to organize thinking and express emotional experiences in language. This classification helps identify the symbolic nature of idioms, creating a premise for cultural and thinking comparison between the two languages. Based on the encoded data, the images were divided into eight main source domains:

(1) animals, (2) human body, (3) nature/natural phenomenon, (4) events - social, (5) food - material, (6) religion - belief, (7) tools/objects/movements, and (8) other or unclear cases.

Statistical results show that in Vietnamese, the human body is the most prominent source domain with 80 idioms (27 happy idioms and 53 sad idioms), accounting for 37.7% of the total number of idioms with images. English also uses images of the human body with 42 idioms (14 happy, 28 sad), equivalent to 24.1%. This is a striking similarity between the two languages: emotions are often referred to body parts, where the inner state is directly felt and expressed. However, Vietnamese focuses on internal organs such as *intestines*, *liver*, and *heart*, expressing the depth of inner sadness (*đứt ruột đứt gan* - broken intestines broken liver, *xót gan bào ruột* - painful liver craping intestine), while English tends to express external emotions such as *face*, *eyes*, *hands* (*a long face*, *cry one's eyes out*, *wring one's hands*).

Animal source domain ranks second in frequency of image use. Vietnamese has 19 happy and sad idioms (12 happy, 7 sad), accounting for 8.9%, while English has 14 idioms (11 happy, 3 sad), accounting for 8.0%. Vietnamese idioms often use animals familiar to agriculture such as *fish*, *dogs*, and *mice*, expressing close, instinctive emotions (*vui như chó được xương* - happy like a dog get a bone, *chuột sa chĩnh gạo* - mouse falling into a jar of rice, *như cá gặp nước* - like a fish meeting water). In English, although fewer in number, animals also express vivid emotions through expressions such as *like a dog with two tails*, *grin like a Cheshire cat*.

The domain of nature and natural phenomena has a relatively low number, with 9 Vietnamese idioms and 8 English idioms, accounting for 4.2% and 4.6% respectively. In Vietnamese, nature is often associated with melancholy emotions (*gió thảm mưa sầu* - sad wind and sad rain, *hoa bí buổi chiều* - squash flower in the afternoon), while English exploits cheerful images such as *a ray of sunshine*, *on cloud nine*. This difference shows cultural concepts: Vietnamese tends towards lyrical, introspective emotions, while English tends towards positive emotions and extroverted expressions.

Regarding social events, Vietnamese has 12 idioms (6 happy, 6 sad), accounting for 5.6%, and English has 9 idioms (4 happy, 5 sad), accounting for 5.2%. In Vietnamese, images such as *vui như hội* (joyful as a festival), *mở cờ trong bụng* (opening flag in the belly), *buồn như đưa đám* (sad as following funeral) link emotions with a community context, reflecting the collective nature of expression. English also uses similar expressions such as *the party's over*, *a red-letter day*, but at a moderate level.

Food-material domain also shows clear differences. Vietnamese has 13 idioms (3 happy, 10 sad), accounting for 6.2%, while English has 8 idioms (6 happy, 2 sad), accounting for 4.6%. Food images in Vietnamese often reflect a state of bitterness and sorrow (*ngậm bồ hòn làm ngọt* - *hold soapberry in mouth to sweeten*, *rầu như dưa* - *sad like melon*, *bitter like stomach soapberry*), while in English they are cheerful and entertaining (*a bowl of cherries*, *cakes and ale*, *beer and skittles*).

Religious and belief images are used less often, but they have a strong cultural impact. Vietnamese has only 3 idioms (1 happy, 2 sad), accounting for 1.4%, while English has 9 idioms (6 happy, 3 sad), accounting for 5.2%. English often associates emotions with images of heaven, judgment, and religious beliefs (*seventh heaven*, *bear one's cross*, *a ghost at the feast*), reflecting the profound influence of Christianity on cultural thinking. Meanwhile, Vietnamese - with its folk beliefs - rarely uses religious images directly in expressive idioms.

Tool/object/motion group includes 13 Vietnamese idioms (5 happy, 8 sad - 6.1%) and 15 English idioms (9 happy, 6 sad - 8.6%). Images such as *dao cắt* (knife to cut), *stick* (gậy), *hammer chop* (búa bõ) in Vietnamese or *thrilled to bits*, *kick up one's heels*, *twist the knife* in English show that emotions are often associated with strong actions, metaphorically referring to force, kinetic energy and impact.

Notably, the other or unknown image group accounts for a significant proportion: 63 Vietnamese idioms (29.7%) and 58 English idioms (33.3%). These idioms are often general in nature, do not use specific object images, or are difficult to classify into the mentioned source domains. For example, *mừng ơi là mừng*, *đá sâu đá cảm*, *thrilled to pieces*, *without a care in the world*. The high proportion in this group shows that in both languages there still exists a large number of idioms expressing emotions in a generalized way, subjective feelings or using emphatic structures without specific images.

The chart below shows the comparison of image frequency by source domain between Vietnamese and English idioms:

Figure 1. Comparison of image frequency by source domain between Vietnamese and English idioms

	English	Vietnamese
Animals	8%	8.9%
Body parts	24.1%	37.7%
Nature	4.6%	4.2%
Social Events	5.6%	5.2%
Food and Material	6.2%	4.6%
Religion and belief	5.2%	1.3%
Tool/Object/Movement	6.1%	8.6%
Other/Unclear	33.3%	29.7%

Some notable differences can be seen from the chart. Vietnamese uses more images of the human body, animals, and food, reflecting the way emotions are expressed in relation to the body, nature, and everyday life. Meanwhile, English has a higher proportion of groups such as religion, movement/action, and at the same time distributes images more evenly across groups. The

other/unknown group has a high proportion in both languages, reflecting the flexibility and diversity in emotional idiomatic structures.

Thus, the results of image classification by source domain not only reflect the similarities in the emotional expression mechanisms between the two languages, but also highlight the profound differences in visual thinking, cultural symbols, and emotional expression traditions. This is an important basis for further in-depth analysis of cognitive metaphors, image schemas, and cultural frames in the next chapter of the study.

4.1.3. Most popular images in each emotional group

Analyzing common images in emotional idioms of English and Vietnamese from a cross-cultural perspective shows not only the similarities in the way people express emotions, but also deeply reflects the differences in thinking, life concepts and value systems of each culture. From a total of 375 surveyed idioms, including 158 happy idioms and 217 sad idioms of both languages, the study has statistically calculated the frequently used image source domains in each group. The results show that image domains such as human body, animals, social events, nature, food, religion - belief, tools and ambiguous groups are the main categories for organizing and expressing emotions in idioms of both languages.

In Vietnamese idioms of happiness, the image of "human body parts" accounts for the highest proportion, with 27 idioms, equivalent to 43.5% of the total number of idioms of happiness with specific images. Expressions such as *mát gan mát ruột* (cool liver cool intestines), *nở từng khúc ruột* (expand each piece of intestines), *nở mày nở mặt* (open eyebrows open face) show that the state of happiness is often felt as a process of expansion and relief in the internal organs - a typical expression of internalized visual thinking, typical of East Asia. The image of "animals" ranks second with 19.4%, through idioms such as *mừng như chó được xương* (happy as a dog gets a bone), *chuột sa chĩnh gạo* (mouse falling into a jar of rice), evoking a state of natural joy, innocence, close to daily life. Meanwhile, images such as "social events" (9.7%) and "nature", "food" (each group 4.8%) are present but not dominant, reflecting the tendency of personalization and internalization in the concept of happiness of Vietnamese people.

In contrast, in English happiness idioms, although "human body" is still the second most common image group (14 idioms, accounting for 17.3%), the image domain with the highest proportion belongs to the "other/unclear" group, with 30 idioms, equivalent to 37.0%. This shows that in English, the state of happiness is often expressed through general metaphorical structures, independent of specific images (*be over the moon*, *be on top of the world*, *have a ball*). Other images such as "tools-movements" (11.1%), "religion – beliefs" (7.4%), "food" (7.4%) and "animals" (13.6%) are distributed quite evenly, reflecting a diverse and symbolic image system - where emotions are often associated with behaviors, beliefs, or the active, free lifestyle of Western culture.

For the group of Vietnamese idioms of sadness, "human body" continues to play a central role with 53 idioms, accounting for 38.7%. Unlike English - where the body is often just an expressive surface (face, eyes, hands), Vietnamese focuses on internal organs such as *intestines*, *liver*, and *heart*, thereby creating expressions rich in imagery and expressing sadness as a deep physical sensation: *xé gan xé ruột* (tearing liver tearing intestines), *héo gan héo ruột* (wilting liver wilting intestines), *ruột đau như xát muối* (intestines hurt like rubbing salt). The group of "other/unknown" imagery also accounts for a large proportion, with 45 idioms (32.8%), partly reflecting abstraction in expressing emotions or repetition of linguistic formulas rich in generality (*đá sầu đá cảm – much sadness much emotional*, *nửa mừng nửa tủi – half joy half sadness*). Groups such as "food" (7.3%), "tools", "nature", "social events" and "animals" are all used but at a lower level, adding to the expressive and lyrical nature of the Vietnamese corpus.

Meanwhile, English idioms of sadness show the prominent presence of the image of "human body" (28 idioms, accounting for 38.9%), with many expressions associated with the heart and face

such as *break one's heart*, *a long face*, *one's heart sinks*, *cry one's eyes out*. However, these images are more superficial and psychological than physical organs like in Vietnamese. Similar to Vietnamese, the group “other/unknown” also accounts for a high proportion (30.6%), demonstrating the tendency to generalize emotions. The remaining images have a modest frequency, ranging from 2-6 idioms, with “tools”, “events”, “religion”, “animals” only playing a supporting role.

Below is the table summarizing all the data and percentages of popular images used in emotional idiom groups in the two languages:

Table 2. Frequency and proportion (%) of common images in emotional idioms

Image	Vietnamese Happiness	English Happiness	Vietnamese Sadness	English Sadness
Human body	27/43.5%	14/17.3%	53/38.7%	28/38.9%
Animal	12/19.4%	11/13.6%	7/5.1%	3/4.2%
Events - Social	6/9.7%	0/0.0%	6/4.4%	5/6.9%
Nature	3/4.8%	5/6.2%	6/4.4%	3/4.2%
Food - material	3/4.8%	6/7.4%	10/7.3%	2/2.8%
Religion - belief	1/1.6%	6/7.4%	2/1.5%	3/4.2%
Tools - movements	0/0.0%	9/11.1%	8/5.8%	6/8.3%
Other/Unknown	10/16.1%	30/37.0%	45/32.8%	22/30.6%

The data show that cultural overlap between the two languages is evident in the fact that both English and Vietnamese use the human body as a central domain for expressing emotions. This reflects a common understanding of the role of the body in emotions - where people feel, express and share their mental states.

However, cultural differences are more prominent at the level of image deployment. Vietnamese - associated with agricultural traditions, communal culture and inner philosophy - uses images of internal organs, food, animals and nature to portray emotions in a lyrical, profound and profound way. Meanwhile, English - influenced by Western urbanization, individualism and religion - expresses emotions through symbolic images of movements, actions, social phenomena or abstract concepts.

These differences are not just a matter of vocabulary, but reflect the worldview, perception, and cultural values of each culture. These differences, when understood and explained through cross-cultural analysis, will help language learners, translators, and cultural educators gain a deeper understanding of the “language of emotions” - something that goes beyond grammar to touch the spiritual identity of each nation.

4.1.4. Outstanding image schemas

Analyzing emotional idioms in English and Vietnamese from a cognitive perspective reveals the clear presence of image schemas - fundamental cognitive models that reflect how people organize their life experiences through language. In this study, the most common schemas found include CONTAINER, UP-DOWN, FORCE, BALANCE, and some sub-schemas such as PATH and FULL-EMPTY. These schemas are not only linguistic phenomena but also indicators of profound cultural differences in the way emotions are perceived between Vietnamese and native English speakers.

In the Vietnamese idiom database, the CONTAINER diagram has an overwhelming frequency, with more than 55 idioms belonging to both the happy and sad groups. Expressions such as *mở cờ trong bụng* (open flag in belly), *nở từng khúc ruột* (expand each piece of intestine), *mát lòng mát dạ* (cool intestine cool stomach), or *xé gan xé ruột*, *đứt từng khúc ruột*, *ruột đau như xát muối* (tear liver tear intestine, broken each piece of intestines, intestines hurt like being rubbed with salt) all express emotions as an entity “inside” the internal organs - the “containers” in the body. In contrast, English

also uses this diagram with idioms such as *burst with joy*, *heart full of love*, *empty nest syndrome*, but with only about 30 idioms, which are usually abstract expressions and not associated with specific images of internal organs. This difference reflects the tendency to internalize emotions in Vietnamese culture, in contrast to the general and socio-psychological way of expressing emotions in English.

The UP-DOWN diagram is a prominent feature of English, with about 15 idioms using spatial dimensions to reflect emotions. Expressions such as *on cloud nine*, *walk on air*, *feel on top of the world* express happiness associated with an upward trend, while *down in the dumps*, *heart sinks*, *at a low ebb* express sadness as a falling or lowering. In Vietnamese, this diagram is present at a more limited level, with only about 5-7 idioms, such as *lên tận mây xanh* (go up to the blue cloud) or *héo hột ruột* (withered silkworm gut). This difference reflects the way emotions are expressed externally and spatially in Western culture, compared to the internalized and emotionalized way of expressing emotions in Vietnamese culture.

Regarding the FORCE diagram, both languages use the image of force to describe emotions as a strong impact on the body or mind. Vietnamese has about 25-30 idioms that express emotions - especially sadness - as a physical force: *đau như búa bổ*, *thắt gan thắt ruột*, *xé ruột xé gan* (hurt like being hit by hammer, knot intestine knot liver, tear intestines tear liver). Meanwhile, English also has about 20 idioms that use this diagram, such as *cut to the quick*, *twist the knife*, *hit where it hurts*. However, the difference is that in Vietnamese, force is often felt in a slow, lingering direction, while in English, it is often immediate, decisive and sharp, showing the difference in the way the intensity and duration of emotions are perceived.

BALANCE diagram (balance - imbalance) appears almost equally in both languages, with about 10 idioms each. Expressions such as *dở khóc dở cười*, *nửa mừng nửa tủi*, (half cry half smile, half cry half smile) in Vietnamese indicate mixed, contradictory, and unstable emotional states. In English, idioms such as *bittersweet*, *with a heavy heart*, *more in sorrow than in anger* also express an imbalance between emotional dimensions, often emphasizing a dominant emotion. However, in Vietnamese, the imbalance is often placed in parallel, bipolar, and simultaneous, while English tends to favor emotional tilt, expressing the clear dominance of one emotional nuance.

In addition, secondary diagrams such as PATH and FULL-EMPTY are also present in both languages, although not many, but have clear symbolic value. In English, about 5-7 idioms such as *lead the life of Riley*, *the primrose path* use the path diagram to evoke emotional journeys, while Vietnamese uses it more sparingly, mainly through the image of *chim sổ lồng*, *trút được gánh nặng* (a bird escaping from a cage, unburdened). With the FULL-EMPTY diagram, both languages have expressions such as *heart full of joy*, *ruột rỗng gan đau* (intestine empty liver pain), creating emotional contrasts through the physical experience of fullness - emptiness.

In summary, the distribution of the image diagram in the emotional idiom repository is presented as follows:

Table 3. Image distribution summary

Image diagram	Vietnamese idioms	English idioms	Outstanding features
CONTAINER	~55	~30	Vietnamese uses more visceral images; English is more general
UP-DOWN	5-7	~15	English emphasizes space; Vietnamese limits direction expression
FORCE	25-30	~20	Vietnamese is more about dull pain; English is more about sharp injuries
BALANCE	~10	~10	Both are used, but expressed differently.
PATH	~3-4	~5-7	English is richer, reflecting emotions as journeys

Thus, it can be seen that although image schemas reflect universal cognitive mechanisms, the level of concretization, symbolization and implementation choices of each language depends greatly on the cultural background. Vietnamese tends to be introspective, sensory and concretized in the body, while English tends to be general, spatial and symbolic. This difference is expressed through language, reflecting the cultural thinking identity of each community. This is evidence of the close connection between cognition, language and culture in the formation and use of emotional idioms.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The tendency to express emotions through idioms

The results of the study show an unbalanced distribution of idioms expressing positive and negative emotions in English and Vietnamese, reflecting systematic differences in the emotional cognitive structures of the two language communities. While Vietnamese tends to express sadness, pain, and negative states through a dense and highly figurative idiom system, English shows a tendency to prioritize the expression of positive, extroverted emotions, with a diversity of images and behaviors.

This divergence is not merely a consequence of natural language usage but also a distinct manifestation of the underlying cultural value systems. In Vietnamese, sadness functions not only as an individual emotional response but also as a symbolic representation of inner depth, moral character, and communal connectedness. Idioms such as *xé gan xé ruột*, *đứt từng khúc ruột*, and *héo hon ruột tấm* convey intense emotional states that are inwardly directed, illustrating a process of emotional internalization in which the body serves as a vessel for psychological experiences. This perspective aligns with the findings of Viet (1978, 1981) and Hanh (2008), who argue that Vietnamese idioms are highly symbolic, with emotional expression frequently mediated through complex and nuanced bodily imagery - particularly involving internal organs such as the liver, intestines, and heart.

In contrast, the English idiom system reflects a socio-behavioral and extroverted conception of emotions. Expressions such as *be over the moon*, *walk on air*, *have a ball*, *on cloud nine* evoke images of sublimation, movement, and departure from neutrality, while expressing the positive nature of emotions in a clear and concrete way. This is a consequence of the Western cultural tradition - especially in societies influenced by individualism and optimism - in which emotions are viewed as a component that needs to be expressed publicly and actively regulated. Wierzbicka (1999) and Kövecses (2000) both emphasize that in Western cultures, joy is not only an individual response but also a form of “social practice” that needs to be shared and encouraged.

A comparison between the current findings and previous studies reveals both areas of convergence and notable gaps. For instance, Nguyễn Văn Trạo (2009) conducted a comparative investigation of emotional idioms in English and Vietnamese, observing that Vietnamese idioms often associate emotions with visceral imagery, while English idioms tend to emphasize overt emotional expressions. However, that study primarily approached the subject from the perspective of literal versus figurative meaning, without engaging with the underlying cultural-cognitive reference frameworks that might explain the divergent expressive orientations. Similarly, the work of Long (2010) focused on the structural characteristics and translational equivalences of idioms but did not address the semantic distribution of emotions - an aspect central to the present study.

It is also noteworthy that while researchers such as Giang (2023) and Duc (1995) have affirmed the predominance of happy and sad imagery in Vietnamese idioms, few studies have extended this analysis through a cross-linguistic lens, particularly in comparison with English - a language characterized by a rich idiomatic inventory, yet one that reflects a markedly different emotional model. It is precisely the contrast between these two expressive tendencies that offers a more nuanced understanding of how each language - and by extension, each culture - structures and prioritizes emotional expression within its system of symbolic representation.

Theoretically, this result can be interpreted within the framework of cognitive approaches, especially the usage-based model of language and the theory of image schemas (Johnson, 1987; Dirven & Verspoor, 2004; Bybee, 2009). Language is not only a means of reflecting emotions but also a space for reorganizing emotions according to familiar cognitive models of the community. In this case, the preference for sadness in Vietnamese and joy in English reflects two different approaches to emotions: one tends toward internal depth, internal metaphorical; the other tends toward external expression, dynamic and social.

Thus, the comparison of emotional idiom frequency serves not only as a means of quantifying the corpus, but also as a significant cultural indicator reflecting the prevailing emotional orientations in the communicative practices and cognitive frameworks of the two language communities. This observation provides a critical foundation for deeper inquiry into the ways in which language structures emotional expression, and how cultural values influence the selection, emphasis, and modes of expressing particular emotional experiences.

4.2.2. Cultural patterns in emotion perception

When examining the systems of emotional idioms in English and Vietnamese, one of the most striking differences is the way the two languages select and deploy source domains to express psychological states. This choice is not simply a matter of vocabulary or linguistic aesthetics, but reflects deep cultural patterns of emotional perception, closely related to the life experiences, symbolic structures, and emotional concepts of each community.

Vietnamese idioms show a consistent tendency to prioritize physical images, especially internal organs such as liver, intestines, stomach, and heart, which are considered the center of emotional life. Expressions such as *mát gan mát ruột*, *nở từng khúc ruột*, *xé gan xé ruột* (cool liver cool intestine, tear liver tear intestine) not only show that emotions are directly linked to the body, but also reflect an emotional world that is internal, profound, and rich in nuances. This view is consistent with the observation of Viet (1978) that Vietnamese idioms often use concrete images, linked to the human body, as a means of conveying abstract mental states. At the same time, as Chau (1999) pointed out, Vietnamese lexical units with emotional meanings are often closely linked to physical sensations, showing that the human body is not only a place to "contain" emotions, but also the emotions themselves that are visualized.

Meanwhile, English - although still using the image of the human body - shows a wider spectrum in exploiting spatial, social symbolic and natural phenomenon source domains. Idioms such as *on cloud nine*, *over the moon*, *a ray of sunshine* or *be on top of the world* not only create vivid emotional scenes, but also show a tendency to abstract and generalize emotions in terms of space and movement. This point shows a more rational way of organizing emotions - where emotions do not "reside" in the body's internal organs, but are located as states of movement, change or transformation in space - a common cultural feature in Western cultures, as analyzed by Wierzbicka (1999).

In addition, the fact that Vietnamese strongly exploits images associated with agricultural and folk life, or familiar symbols in the living environment – such as *như chim sổ lồng*, *chuột sa chĩnh gạo*, *trê được bánh* (birds escaping from cages, mice falling into jars of rice, and catfish getting cakes) - also show that emotions are not separated from reality, but are always associated with specific, familiar, and symbolic images of folklore. This is the inheritance of the tradition of figurative thinking typical of Eastern culture - where symbols not only have aesthetic meaning but also include historical experience and philosophy of life. Giang (2023) has emphasized the role of comparative images in Vietnamese idioms as a tool to reflect layers of folk cultural cognition, especially in emotional expressions.

In contrast, in English, many idioms are abstractly symbolic, associated with broad socio-cultural spaces such as religion (*seventh heaven*, *vale of tears*), urban life (*on the tiles*, *bread and circuses*), or

symbolic value systems (*a red letter day, a ghost at the feast*). This is consistent with the observation of Dirven and Verspoor (2004), that in Western European languages, the source domain of emotions is often extended to social categories, values and actions, rather than being confined to personal or physical experiences.

The difference in source domain choice can also be explained through Johnson's (1987) theory of image schemas. In Vietnamese, the CONTAINER and FORCE diagrams are expressed through images of internal organs being "overflowed" or "bursting" - symbolizing emotions as a flow inside the body. Meanwhile, English strongly deploys the UP-DOWN, PATH or BALANCE diagrams, through images of emotions being "lifted up", "sliding down", "flooded", expressing movement in space and emotions as an orientation process. This shows that each language not only expresses emotions differently, but also organizes emotional perception according to distinct cognitive models, nurtured and maintained by the native cultural structure.

4.2.3. *Ways of Organizing Perceptual Space*

One of the central aspects of cognitive linguistics is how humans use space to organize the emotional world. Image schemas, such as CONTAINER, UP-DOWN, FORCE, or BALANCE, serve both as abstract models reflecting primary bodily experiences (Johnson, 1987) and as indicators of how each language community structures and expresses emotions according to specific cognitive spaces. The data from the current study shows that, although English and Vietnamese share some universal image schemas, the ways these schemas are deployed and prioritized differ significantly, reflecting two distinct emotional cognitive patterns.

CONTAINER diagram, where emotions are visualized as a substance "contained" in an internal space - usually the human body - is a clear intersection between the two languages. In Vietnamese, idioms such as *mát lòng mát dạ, nở từng khúc ruột, mở cờ trong bụng* (cool intestine cool stomach, expand each piece of intestine, open flag in belly) express images of positive emotions "spreading" inside the body, while in the opposite direction, expressions such as *xé gan xé ruột* (tear liver tear intestine) or *thắt ruột thắt* (knot intestine knot liver) indicate that negative emotions cause the internal space to "burst." Similarly, English also uses structures such as *cry one's eyes out, with a heavy heart, or music to one's ears*, in which the heart, eyes, or the entire body act as the "container" for the emotional state. As Dirven and Verspoor (2004) noted, the CONTAINER diagram is a universal form of organization in linguistic cognition, especially for abstract concepts such as emotions.

The striking difference, however, lies in the way emotions are organized along the vertical spatial axis - UP-DOWN. English deploys this scheme explicitly: positive emotions are placed "up high" (*over the moon, on cloud nine, on top of the world*), while negative emotions are placed "down low" (*down in the dumps, hit rock bottom, sink into despair*). As Wierzbicka (1999) and Kövecses (2000) have analyzed, in English and many Western languages, verticality is an important means of encoding mental states - where high is positive, low is negative. This spatial pattern is systematic, reflecting how emotions are ranked, navigated and transformed.

In contrast, Vietnamese does not prioritize the vertical spatial axis in the organization of emotions, but instead strongly deploys the FORCE diagram, expressing emotions as an internal force that is oppressive, explosive or broken. Idioms such as *xé ruột xé gan, đứt từng khúc ruột, nát gan nát ruột* (tear intestine tear liver, break each piece of intestine, broken liver broken intestine) show that emotions are visualized as an endogenous energy, highly physical, and can cause damage to the body. In the research of Duc (1995) and Hanh (2008), the model of emotions associated with internal organs - especially in sad states - is considered a characteristic in Vietnamese emotional perception, reflecting an introverted and introverted culture.

The difference in choosing the UP-DOWN or FORCE diagram is a linguistic difference, but also represents two specific models of emotion. In English, emotions are oriented in the extra-body space-visible, recognizable, and can "rise" or "fall" depending on the context. Meanwhile, in Vietnamese,

emotions are something that happens internally, where the body is a closed space, enduring and accumulating, rather than projecting or sharing. This explains why Vietnamese has almost no equivalent expressions to *on top of the world* or *hit rock bottom*, but is very rich with expressions such as *thắt lòng*, *cháy ruột*, *đứt gan* (knot intestine, burn intestine, broken liver) - images that symbolize the process of “bearing the force” of emotions.

BALANCE diagram, although not as dense, also shows the nuance of the difference between the two languages. In English, emotional imbalance is described through idioms such as *lose one's balance*, *be off-kilter*, *keep one's cool*, reflecting the control of emotions in social space. In Vietnamese, emotional overlap is expressed through structures such as *dở khóc dở cười*, *vui buồn lẫn lộn* (half cry half smile, mixed happiness and sadness), but is not directly associated with the image of “balance”, but rather has the nature of “interference”.

The BALANCE diagram, while less densely represented, illustrates the nuanced distinctions between the two languages. In English, emotional imbalance is articulated through idiomatic expressions such as *lose one's balance*, *be off-kilter*, and *keep one's cool* which reflect a conceptualization of emotional regulation within social contexts. Conversely, in Vietnamese, the notion of emotional overlap is conveyed through phrases such as *dở khóc dở cười* (half cry, half smile) and *vui buồn lẫn lộn* (mixed happiness and sadness). These constructs do not explicitly correlate with the concept of balance; instead, they embody a sense of “interference” in emotional experience.

Thus, the organization of cognitive space in the two languages reflects different emotional strategies: English tends to be extroverted, expressing and locating emotions in the physical-social space, while Vietnamese tends to be introverted, associating emotions with the body and endogenous forces. Although using the same basic system of image schemas, each language has deployed those schemas in a way that is consistent with its own emotional modeling, thereby contributing to creating a distinct cognitive identity in the organization of language.

5. Conclusion

This study conducted a survey and comparative analysis of images in idioms expressing happiness and sadness between English and Vietnamese, thereby highlighting the similarities and differences in the way the two languages organize and express the emotional world. Based on 375 collected and classified idioms, the results showed a fairly clear polarization trend in terms of emotions: Vietnamese has twice as many idioms expressing sadness as idioms expressing joy, while English is inclined towards expressions describing positive emotions.

In terms of imagery, both languages use universal cognitive resources - especially the image of the human body - to express emotions, showing a common biological and cognitive point. However, Vietnamese especially favors internal organs such as intestines, liver, stomach... to depict emotional depth, especially in negative states, such as tearing liver, tearing intestines, tightening heart, tearing intestines. Meanwhile, English expands the image system towards social and spatial symbolism, with idioms such as *on top of the world*, *hit rock bottom*, *in seventh heaven*, associating emotions with directions of movement, height - low, or experiences beyond physical limits.

Basic image schemas such as CONTAINER, UP-DOWN, FORCE and BALANCE are found in both languages, but their implementations have distinct characteristics. The CONTAINER schema demonstrates universality as both languages visualize emotions as a material that can accumulate, overflow or explode in the inner space. However, English uses the UP-DOWN schema as a primary tool to locate emotions in vertical space - where “high” corresponds to happiness and “low” to sadness. Meanwhile, Vietnamese prioritizes the implementation of the FORCE schema, representing emotions as an internal force that causes oppression, pain and disrupts the physical balance within the body. This way of organizing cognitive space reflects the emotional patterns characteristic of each

language: Vietnamese tends towards introspection and endurance; English emphasizes extroversion and dynamic expressive states.

The above findings have reinforced the theories in cognitive linguistics about the relationship between images, body and emotions (Johnson, 1987; Kövecses, 2000), and have made practical contributions to the field of contrastive linguistics. The research shows that idioms are not simply fixed linguistic structures, but are the crystallization of visual thinking, life experiences, and cultural identity of a community. The same emotion, but languages will use different images to express - both to reflect their own worldviews and to maintain stability in the cognitive model of the native culture.

In addition to its academic value, the study also opens up many directions for practical applications. The analytical results can support cross-cultural language teaching, improve the effectiveness of idiom translation, and contribute to the construction of language materials for learning, communication, and in-depth research. Understanding how images are used to express emotions in each language not only helps learners use idioms more accurately, but also creates conditions for deeper access to the emotional world of native speakers.

However, the study still has some limitations. The data were collected mainly from dictionaries and traditional reference sources, which do not fully reflect the linguistic expressions in modern discourse such as media, social networks or natural speech. In addition, the scope of the study is limited to two basic emotions, not extended to other complex emotional groups such as anger, fear, jealousy or moral emotions. Therefore, future research directions can focus on expanding the surveyed emotional system, incorporating more languages from different cultural systems, and exploiting more real-life data sources to clarify the movement and transformation of idiom images in contemporary social contexts. Thus, continued research in this direction will not only clarify the cognitive structure of human emotions, but also contribute to affirming the central role of idioms as a “cultural channel” in interlingual communication.

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**Hình ảnh trong thành ngữ chỉ niềm vui và nỗi buồn trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt:
từ góc nhìn liên văn hoá**

Tóm tắt: Thành ngữ đóng vai trò là những đơn vị ngôn ngữ đặc thù, phản ánh trí tuệ văn hóa, đặc biệt là trong việc nhận thức và biểu đạt các cảm xúc như hạnh phúc và buồn đau. Nghiên cứu này khám phá những hình ảnh có trong các thành ngữ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, cung cấp một phân tích mô tả dựa trên khung so sánh. Qua khảo sát 375 thành ngữ, trong đó có 91 liên quan đến hạnh phúc và 146 liên quan đến buồn đau trong tiếng Việt, và 72 và 91, tương ứng trong tiếng Anh, nghiên cứu cho thấy những khác biệt ngôn ngữ và văn hóa đáng kể. Phân tích sử dụng lý thuyết cấu trúc hình ảnh, so sánh đối chiếu và góc nhìn ngôn ngữ học liên văn hóa để xác định những hình ảnh nổi bật liên quan đến biểu đạt cảm xúc. Những phát hiện chỉ ra rằng trong khi cả hai ngôn ngữ đều sử dụng hình ảnh cơ thể con người để thể hiện cảm xúc, thành ngữ tiếng Việt thiên về những miêu tả bên trong - nhấn mạnh đến các cơ quan nội tạng - phản ánh một định hướng văn hóa sâu sắc và nội tâm đối với nỗi buồn. Ngược lại, các thành ngữ tiếng Anh thường sử dụng biểu tượng không gian và văn hóa xã hội, nhấn mạnh sự biểu đạt hạnh phúc một cách hướng ngoại. Sự khác biệt này làm nổi bật những khái niệm văn hóa rộng lớn hơn và các khung cảm xúc, minh họa cách ngôn ngữ tổ chức và đại diện cho các trải nghiệm cảm xúc khác nhau. Các kết quả này góp phần vào các lĩnh vực ngôn ngữ học nhận thức và nghiên cứu văn hóa, cung cấp những hiểu biết quý giá cho giáo dục ngôn ngữ, dịch thuật và các hoạt động giao tiếp liên văn hóa.

Từ khóa: thành ngữ; biểu đạt cảm xúc; bản sắc văn hóa; so sánh văn hóa; ngôn ngữ học nhận thức.