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**The Polysemy of Words Expressing Human Body
Parts of the Four Limb Area in Thai Language in
Vietnam**

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Polysemy of Words Expressing Human Body Parts of The Four Limb Area in Thai Language in Vietnam

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Abstract

The nomenclature and polysemiosis of body parts has constituted a central part of linguistics, and of Linguistic Anthropology. The ramifications of such work make inroads into our understandings of many fields, including language contact, semiotics, and so forth,

This current paper identifies the structures and emerging denotations of expressions of human body parts (HBPs) in Thai language, and ways in which these dimensions reflect polysemy. The study thus applies the following methods: Field research methods of linguistics, description, comparison, and collation.

As sources of data, this study surveys Thai rhymes, fairy tales, riddles and riddle songs, rhyming stories, children's songs and linguistic data of daily speeches in the northwest of Vietnam. The paper uses theories on word meaning and the transformation of word meaning. To aid analysis, this paper applies methods of analyzing meaning components so to construct significative meaning structures of words expressing HBPs in Thai language, thus identifying the semantemes chosen to be the basis for the transformation.

In the polysemy of words expressing HBPs of the four limbs, the polysemy of words expressing the following parts were studied: *khèn - tay, cánh tay* (arm); *m - tay, bàn tay* (hand); *khà - đùi* (thigh); *tìn - chân, bàn chân* (leg, foot). Directions of semantic transformation of words expressing HBPs in Thai language are as diversified and as multi-leveled as Vietnamese. Furthermore, in Thai language, there occur differences in the four scopes of semantic transformation, as compared with Vietnamese, including "people's characteristics," "human activities," "nomination of things with activities like HBPs' activities," and "unit of measurement."

This study contributes to Linguistic Anthropology by suggesting that the polysemy of words expressing HBPs of the four limb area in Thai language will outline a list of linguistic phenomena which serve as the basis to understand cultural and national features, in the light of perception and categorization of the reality of the Thai minority with reference to Vietnamese.

Keywords: Body parts, polysemy, Thai language, Vietnam

Introduction

The nomenclature and polysemiosis of body parts has constituted a central part of linguistics, and of Linguistic Anthropology. The ramifications of such work make inroads into our understandings of many fields, including language contact, semiotics, and so forth.

Research on the polysemy of the languages of ethnic minorities in Vietnam is still limited,

including Thai language. The differences between the languages are a major barrier of the study. In such situations, the paper studies words expressing how HBPs reflect polysemy in the Thai language.

Polysemy is a phenomenon in which a word has multi meanings whose links are still recognizable. The original meaning is the meaning of a word since it appears (or is coined) or the initial meaning from which other meanings are derived. The derived meaning (transformed meaning) refers to the meaning deriving from another. A word (either single or complex), at their appearance, has only one denotation. After a while in use, it may have new denotations. The more they appear, the more possible it is for the word's connotation to change.

Words expressing HBPs belong to the basic layer of lexis - the one expressing things and phenomena around and close to human which can reflect the old age of each language. In medicine, HBPs, when being looked at from the outside (external factors), are divided into the upper part, the middle part, the lower part, and the four limbs. Basing on the survey, in the paper, the researcher focuses on studying the polysemy of words expressing HBPs in the four limbs: ekN - tay, cánh tay (arm); UM - tay, bàn tay (hand); ka - đùi (thigh); tiN - chân, bàn chân (leg, foot).

Materials and Methods

This current paper identifies the structures and emerging denotations of expressions of human body parts (HBPs) in the Thai language, and ways in which these dimensions reflect polysemy. The study thus applies the following methods: Field research methods of linguistics, description, comparison, and collation.

As sources of data, this study surveys Thai riddles, riddle songs and linguistic data of daily speech in Northwest Vietnam. The paper uses theories on word meaning and the transformation of word meaning. To aid analysis, this paper applies methods of analyzing meaning components so to construct significative meaning structures of words expressing HBPs in Thai language, thus identifying the semantemes chosen to be the basis for the transformation.

Results

Polysemy of the word ekN - tay, cánh tay (arm); UM - tay, bàn tay (hand)

The original meaning of ekN - tay, cánh tay is used at a frequency of 35 times and UM - tay, bàn tay 78 times. Accordingly, the meanings of these words are identified as follow:

- (1) The word ekN - tay, cánh tay has two meanings including "Each of the two upper limbs of the human body from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger, used to work" and "Human body part from the shoulder to the wrist".
- (2) The word UM - tay, bàn tay has two meanings including "Human body part from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger, used to work" and "The end part of a person's arm beyond the wrist from the wrist to the tip of the longest finger including the cylinder and slender fingers used to hold".

Based on the meanings of ekN - tay, cánh tay, the denotation structure of ekN - tay, cánh tay is

identified as follow:

ekN - tay, cánh tay 1: [Each of the two upper limbs of the human body] [from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger] [used to work]

ekN - tay, cánh tay 2: [Human body part] [from the shoulder to the wrist]

Based on the meanings of UM - tay, bàn tay, the denotation structure of UM - tay, bàn tay is identified as follow:

UM - tay, bàn tay 1: [Human body part] [from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger] [used to work]

UM - tay, bàn tay 2: [The end part of a person's arm beyond the wrist] [from the wrist to the tip of the longest finger] [including the cylinder and slender fingers] [used to hold]

Looking at the 3 semanteme: [from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger], [from the wrist to the tip of the longest finger], and [used to work], ekN and UM in the Thai language it has meaning transference into the following areas:

Based on the semanteme [from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger] and [from the wrist to the tip of the longest finger], ekN and UM have meaning transference to mean “Thai people's unit of measurement by hand”. So far, in measuring the length of weave tools, pillars, fields, etc., Thai people have used units of measurement by hand, specifically:

Table 1. The number of words expressing Thai people's units of measurements by hand

No.	Word	No.	Word	No.	Word
1	{c Cob - nắm vĩa (an approximate handful)	6	ekN (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the length from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger)	11	Va eG*N - sãi già (more than an arm span)
2	{c - nắm (a handful)	7	Va, Ba - arm span	12	Va jandoN - sãi non (less than an arm span)
3	{c jUN - nắm rưỡì (a handful and a half)	8	Va xoc (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the total length of an arm span and from the elbow to the tip of the longest finger)	13	p*\$ - nắm (a fistful)
4	CUB - gang tay (span)	9	Va ekN - sãi tay (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the total length of an arm span and from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger)	14	cob - vốc (hai vốc tay) (a double handful (two hands))

5	<i>xoc</i> (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the length from the elbow to the tip of the longest finger)	10	<i>Va EF*G - một sải rưỡi</i> (an arm span and a half)	15	<i>FaJ - vốc (một vốc tay)</i> (a double handful (one hand))
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As surveyed, in the Thai language, there are 15 words expressing inaccurate units of measurement by hand estimates (without using accurate tools). There is only one unit of measurement by foot estimate that is inaccurate - bước (step). In Vietnamese there are 12 words for hand estimates (cánh, đốt, gang, sải, bốc, dùm, ôm, nắm, túm, xách, véo, vốc) and 1 foot estimate, bước (step). In the Thai language, units of measurement by hand estimate are divided into 2 groups:

Group 1: Words to measure size and distance include {c Cob - nắm vừa (an approximate handful); {c - nắm (a handful); {c jUN - nắm rưỡi (a handful and a half); CUb - gang tay (span); *xoc* (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the length from the elbow to the tip of the longest finger); ekN (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the length from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger); Va, Ba - sải tay (arm span); Va *xoc* (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the total length of an arm span and from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger); Va ekN (a unit of distance measurement that is equivalent to the total length of an arm span and from the shoulder to the tip of the longest finger); Va EF*G - một sải rưỡi (an arm span and a half) (a unit of measurement that is equivalent to the total length of an arm span and from the middle of the chest to the tip of the longest finger); Va eG*N - sải già (more than an arm span); Va jandoN - sải non (less than an arm span). In the Thai language, the measurements by these units are not accurate, as each person's handful, span, arm span, and "length from elbow to the tip of the longest finger" are different. However, they are very convenient in measuring for Thai people.

In Vietnamese there are only 4 words used to measure distance, including cánh, đốt, gang, and sải, while the Thai language has 12 words to measure distance and size by hand estimate. This shows the difference in partitioning objective reality by Viet and Thai peoples. It is the difference in the languages in categorizing the objective reality that has effected the peoples' different linguistic world pictures. In their daily life and production, Thai people's measurement is mainly by hand. This reflects their economic life to some extent. Thai people rely on traditional handicrafts like weaving, plaiting, pottery, or carpentry, etc. Further to this, they also live on natural resources (forest, river, etc.) for growing, hunting, gathering, and fishing.

Group 2: In the Thai language, there are 3 words to express number and volume, including p*\$ - nắm (a handful); cob - vốc (hai vốc tay) (a double handful (two hands)); FaJ - vốc (một vốc tay) (a double handful (one hand)). For example:

(Eg. 1) Luc ZiG Yh* xaM cob c{b FaJ Q Ma wand> Ma ciN - The daughter gave 3 double handfuls (two hands) and one double handful (one hand) of food. (Daily speech, 6)

In the Thai language, the words in group 2 do not express exact measurements, but they are effective when Thai people need to estimate something. The only tool that they use to quantify is hand, and particularly the palm of the hand. Moreover, based on the meaning [from the wrist to the tip of the longest finger] in the denotation of UM - a hand helping the listener to perceive

rather clearly not only the quantity but also the shape of the measured object. In Vietnamese, words expressing units of measurements in group 2 include *bốc / vốc, dùm / nhúm, ôm, nắm, túm, xách, véo*. For instance, *Chị vợ một ôm rơm vào bếp* (She carried a bunch of straw to the kitchen); *Bà tôi lấy một nhúm muối cho vào nồi canh* (My grandma put a pinch of salt in the pot); *Nó đưa ba túm nhãn cho tôi rồi đi vội* (He gave me 3 bunches of longan and left in a hurry) etc. One might notice that the number of words in group 2 in Vietnamese is larger than in the Thai language.

In terms of collocation, in Vietnamese, a word expressing units of measurement by hand is normally used in combination with a number in front of it (three arm spans, five phalanxes, six pinches, etc.), while in the Thai language they may combine with words of quantity both in front of and behind them (*xaM cob - ba vốc* (three double handfuls (two hands); *FaJ Q - vốc một* (a double handful (one hand)).

The meaning transference of ekN and UM is also based on the semanteme [used to work] to:

- Express human nature: *ebN UM - trộm tay (ăn cắp vặt)* (thieve).
- Express human career: *{s UM - giúp tay (giúp việc)* (give a hand).
- Express human features: *s - khéo tay* (be skillful with one's hands), *VaG UM - bỏ tay (rảnh tay)* (to have free hands).
- Express things with shapes looking like human body parts "UM - tay, bàn tay": *c*>J UM NaG - chuối tay nàng* (her hands (banana)).

(Eg. 2) *o*aJ em h*aG [l* q {s UM Yh* us* Tic #N - Bó cái Hãnh là giúp tay cho chủ tịch đây* (Hãnh's father is the chairman's helper) (Daily speech, 6). In example (2), *{s UM - giúp tay (giúp việc)* (help) has meaning transference to express human careers (helper).

The transference in meaning of ekN and UM can be seen in the following illustration.

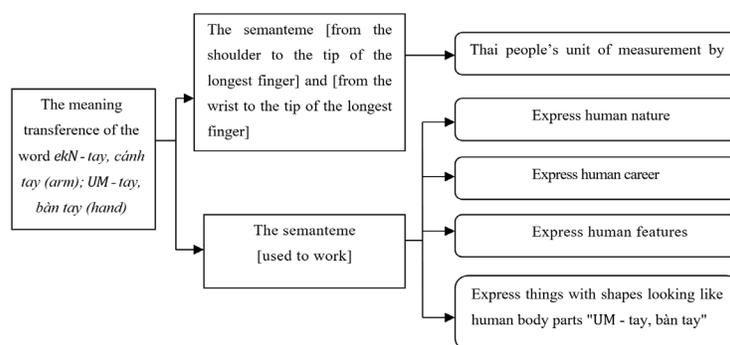


Diagram 1. The meaning transference of the word ekN - tay, cánh tay (arm); UM - tay, bàn tay (hand) in Thai language

As such, the new denotations of ekN and UM in the Thai language express Thai people's units of measurement which express human features, nature, careers, and things with shapes looking like HBPs.

Polysemy of the word ka - đùi (thigh), tiN - chân, bàn chân (leg, foot)

The polysemy of the word ka - đùi (thigh)

The word ka - đùi (khà) appears 3 times in its original meaning. Accordingly, this word's meaning could be identified as the biggest part of the leg from the hip to the knee. On that basis, the denotation structure of ka - khà is worked out as following:

ka - khà : [the biggest part of leg] [from the hip to the knee]

The transference in meaning of ka - khà is mainly the use of the semanteme [the biggest part of leg] to express parts of things looking like ka - khà: ka s*uM - đùi vó (thân vó) (the spreading part of the lift net), ka x*>G - đùi quần (ống quần) (pant swift), ka n*a - đùi nỏ (cánh nỏ) (crossbow), ka EMG - đùi mường (cả mường) (the whole village).

(Eg. 3) / ka }xG }nG idN EHa eVN Yzand? / ka EMG }n*G idN EHa eVN Yzand - Đùi gì ở mường ta to nhất?/ Đùi mường ta là to nhất (What is the biggest in our village?/ The whole village) (Thai riddle, 5, p. 82)

In example (3), the word ka EMG - đùi mường has meaning transference to express the social relationship in Thai people's villages. This transference of ka - đùi only exists in the Thai language but not in Vietnamese.

Presumably, the new denotation of ka - đùi in the Thai language is the expression of the part of things that look like a human thigh.

The polysemy of the word tiN - chân, bàn chân (leg, foot)

The word tiN - chân, bàn chân appears 42 times in its original meaning. Then, the word tiN - chân, bàn chân has two meanings as “the lower extremity of human or animal body from the hip to the foot used to walk, stand, run, or jump, etc.” and “the lower extremity of human body from the ankle to the tip of the longest toe used to support the body when walking, standing, etc.” On that basis, the denotation structure of tiN - chân, bàn chân is illustrated as follows:

tiN - chân, bàn chân 1: [the lower extremity of human or animal body] [from the hip to the foot] [used to walk, stand, run, or jump, etc.]

tiN - chân, bàn chân 2: [the lower extremity of human body] [from the ankle to the tip of the longest toe] [used to support the body when walking, standing, etc.]

Based on the word meaning structure, the transference of tiN - chân, bàn chân in the Thai language could be as follows:

- (1) Using the semanteme [the lower extremity of human or animal body] to express “the lower extremity of things”: tiN PaN - chân bàn (leg of the table), tiN tand}G - chân ghế (leg of the chair), tiN yd - chân thang (foot of the ladder), etc.
- (2) Using the semanteme [used to walk, stand, run, or jump, etc.] to:
 - Express human activities: taG tiN - thay chân (replace), tiN ATG - chân nâng (support), etc.
 - Express things' names: TaG tiN - đường chân (đường bộ) (foot walk).

- (3) Using the semanteme [from the ankle to the tip of the longest toe] to express “things with foot position:” tiN uP - chân núi (foot of the mountain), tiN eh - chân chài (the support of the casting-net), tiN panda - chân rừng (fringe of the fores), tiN Ex* - chân áo (gấu áo) (fringe of the shirt), tiN x*iN - chân váy (gấu váy) (fringe of the dress), etc.

The following illustration shows the meaning transference of tiN - chân, bàn chân in the Thai language.

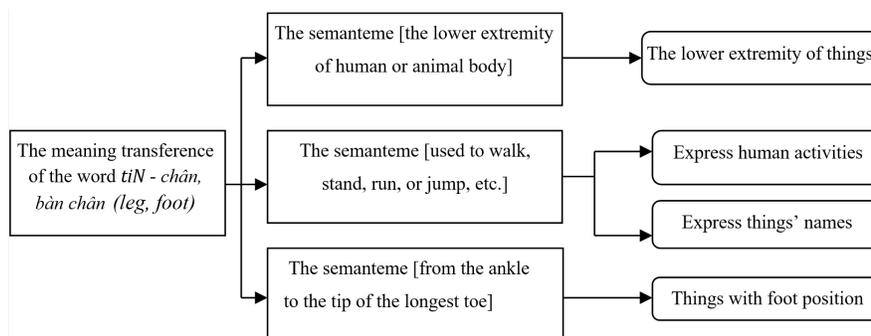


Diagram 2. The meaning transference of the word tiN - chân, bàn chân (leg, foot) in Thai language

The meaning transference of tiN - chân, bàn chân in the Thai language is similar to that of the words chân - leg or bàn chân - foot in Vietnamese in three aspects (“the lower extremity of things,” “human activities” and “things with foot position”); they are different in two aspects (“things’ names” and “things with leg position”).

As such, the new denotation of tiN - chân, bàn chân in the Thai language expresses the lower extremity of things, human activities, and things with leg positions, and also expresses things’ names.

Discussion

The meaning transference of words expressing HBPs ekN - tay, cánh tay (arm); UM - tay, bàn tay (hand); ka - đùi (thigh); tiN - chân, bàn chân (leg, foot) is deep and contains multiple layers. It is concluded that the number of words used to measure distance and size in the Thai language is larger than in Vietnam, but the number of words used to measure volume and quantity is smaller. Words expressing HBPs in the four limb area in the Thai language in Vietnam has meaning transference in two categories including the category of things and the category of units of measurements. In the category of things, the meaning transference of HBPs is reflected in the aspects “naming things with shapes like HBPs” and “naming things with position like HBPs.” Words expressing HBPs also has meaning transference to sub-categories of human categories including “human nature,” “human careers,” “human features” and “human

activities”.

Conclusion

This study contributes to Linguistic Anthropology by suggesting that the polysemy of words expressing HBPs of the four limb area in the Thai language will outline a list of linguistic phenomena which serve as the basis to understand cultural and national features, in the light of perception and categorization of the reality of the Thai minority with reference to Vietnamese.

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