

## Words Indicating Fuel in Vietnamese in Contrast to English

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**Abstract:** *According to Eastern philosophy and the Vietnamese's perspectives, "fire" is attributed to one of the five elemental energies (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) encompassing all the myriad phenomena of the universe. Fire, however, differs from other natural phenomena in its inherent characteristics, and it cannot be isolated from the others. To obtain a deep insight into the arbitrarily-lingual diversity in nominating natural things in various languages, a statistic survey was conducted on words indicating fuels causing fire in Vietnamese and English. Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to focus on the semantic field of fire under the Vietnamese's linguistic perspectives on nominating things indicating fuel.*

**Keywords:** *Fire, fire material, semantic field, subfield*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

"Fire" is one of the five basic elements which are believed to be the origin the universe under the Vietnamese's perspectives. A notable step on the path to the top was the domestication of fire. "Fire" is not the major determinant of all species' existence and survival. Thanks to "fire", however, human (modern human, the only human species who has survived up to now, appeared by about 200.000 years ago)<sup>1</sup> made a spectacular leap from the middle to the top of the food chain. The advent of fire enabled humans to warm themselves, to cook, to destroy a strain of bacteria that poses a threat to human beings and animals, to predator proof domestic animals as well as cultivated crops and to support human to forge so as to create labor tools and weapons. Consequently, fire helped the human diversify food sources, boost their immune system, sustain health, lengthen their longevity and transfer gene to the next generations.

As mentioned above, "fire" is one of five elemental energies (metal, wood, water, fire, earth); however, "fire" differs from other elements by its special attributes. Instead of independently existing, it usually subsists depending on other materials, which is called fire material or fuel. Therefore, when the semantic field of fire is studied, the subfield of fuel materials must be simultaneously considered.

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Chazan. "New discovery of the age human used fire" In Live Science (Cited in Hà Hương -Vietnam.net.Khoahoc, 4.4.2012).

We compare words indicating fuel materials – the foundation for burning in Vietnamese and English to providing the great transparency in linguistic nomination. Qualitative research was conducted in this research with the data taken from: novels, short stories, idioms, proverbs, poetry, etc. (which are listed in the References)

## **II. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Each semantic system is represented by a set of words which is called a semantic field, in which words are semantically related to semantic category. The semantic relations in a semantic field can be described: "we can generalize the semantic relations between the semantic fields and the semantic relations in each semantic field" (Chau, 2007:170).

Thus, the semantic relation between words must be considered in the system of the semantic field. The sememes in a semantic field have an interrelated, intertwined and, prescriptive relation. The constituent elements of a semantic field have common sememes (in addition to distinct sememes). Conversely, semantic relationships between semantic fields must be considered in the larger system of the semantic field. This confirms the systematic meaning of the languages.

In regard to the mentioned concepts, Chau (2007:170) has divided the semantic field into two categories which are horizontal and vertical semantic fields. In terms of the vertical semantic field, it can be based on the meaning of words to distinguish the denotative and significate semantic fields. Furthermore, the associatively semantic field is established on the basis of characteristics of association

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The article uses some methods and tactics as follows: The method of seme analysis is the basis for analyzing words, groups of words belonging to subfields. The method of description is also applied to describe the results of the research. The tactics of statistics and classification are deployed to determine the quantity of words belonging to the subfields of Vietnamese and English. The comparative method is also employed to compare the number of words and the meaning of words between the two languages.

## **IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Words indicating fuel in Vietnamese**

The semantic field of fuel materials, which are the basic for burning, is separated into two subfields, including: liquid, gas fuel materials and solid fuel materials are as follows:

**Table 1. Words in the subfields**

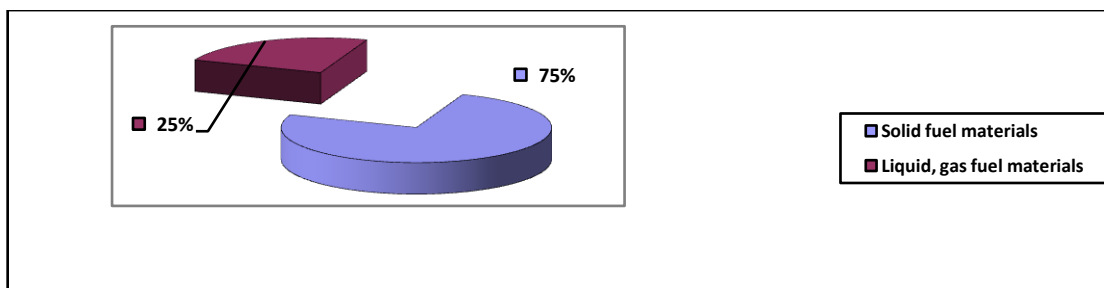
No	Words	Frequency	Rate	Samples
Subfield 1: Liquid, gas fuel materials to “fire” burning				
1	<i>dầu (oil)</i>	21	16.15	1. “Vớ được can <i>dầu</i> , bà đổ vào người, châm lửa, đúng lúc cậu em về” [11]. 2. “Rừng bị ướt đầm <i>xăng</i> đặc, cuộn cuộn lửa luyện ngục” [6]. 3. “Bếp hết <i>gas</i> rồi” [kn].
2	<i>Xăng (petrol)</i>	3	2.31	
3	<i>ga (gas)</i>	2	1.54	
4	<i>khí ga (gas)</i>	2	1.54	
5	<i>khí thiên nhiên (natural gas)</i>	2	1.54	
6	<i>cồn (alcohol)</i>	1	0.77	
7	<i>khí than (coal gas)</i>	1	0.77	
S.total	7	32	24.62	
Subfield 2: Solid fuel materials to “fire” burning				
1	<i>hương/nhang (joss-stick)</i>	38	29.23	1. “Sau đó cô đưa bộ bài cho Quỳnh rồi ra bàn thờ lấy một nén <i>hương</i> châm lửa, khấn” [11]. 2. “Vợ ông đang lúi húi cho thêm <i>củi</i> vụn vào bếp hun muối, làn khói sẫm màu tấp vào vợ ông” [11]. 3. “Thằng chồng hiền lành từ tế thể, có đốt <i>đuốc</i> ban ngày tim cũng chẳng bóí đầu ra” [11].
2	<i>củi (firewood)</i>	14	10.77	
3	<i>rạ/rom/rom rạ (stubble/straw/ stubble and straw)</i>	12	9.24	
4	<i>đuốc (torch)</i>	7	5.38	
5	<i>nén (candle)</i>	5	3.85	
6	<i>than (coal and charcoal)</i>	4	3.08	
7	<i>diêm (match)</i>	3	2.31	
8	<i>đóm (spill)</i>	3	2.31	
9	<i>môi (kindling)</i>	3	2.31	
10	<i>bấc (wick)</i>	2	1.54	
11	<i>sáp (wax/)</i>	2	1.54	

No	Words	Frequency	Rate	Samples
12	<i>trâm</i> (frank incense)	2	1.54	
13	<i>ngòi nổ</i> (detonator)	1	0.77	
S.total	13	98	75.38	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>	

According to the two subfields above, it can be seen that joss-stick “*hương/nhang*” has the highest frequency, accounting for 29.23% of the total, followed by: oil “*dầu*” and firewood “*củi*”, accounting for 16.15% and 10.77% respectively. It can be inferred from the statistics that the word “*hương*” or “*nhang*” (incense) is commonly used by the Vietnamese in spiritual and cultural activities. Although they are rarely used in the routinely life, it’s surprising that they have a higher ratio than oil “*dầu*” and firewood “*củi*”<sup>2</sup> (Table 2 below).

The statistics above show that the subfield of words indicating liquid, gas fuel materials for burning has only 32 cases, accounting for 24.62%. Meanwhile, the subfield of words indicating solid fuel materials for burning has 98 occurrences, accounting for 75.38%. This is quite comprehensible, because in the human history in general and Vietnamese history in particular, the liquid, gas fuel materials are lately found and used within the confined spaces in comparison with solid fuel materials.

The following chart compares two subfields:



**Chart 1. The frequency of words between two sub fields**

<sup>2</sup> Words in the above table are in the central of the subfield of fuel materials (flammables, fuels). Besides, there are words which indicate the materials for “fire” burning: paper, cloth, dust, forest, house, wood, also cars, engines... But these words are not fuels so they cannot be considered in this article.

<sup>3</sup> Dictionaries are used for comparison (Phe, H, 2011) and (Jonathan Crowther, 1995).

## 4.2 Comparison between Vietnamese and English

In order to better understand the cultural characteristics of Vietnamese that govern the way of naming things, we refer to the words which regard to fuel and material - the basis for "fire" to burn between Vietnamese and English.

**Table 2. The statistics of words indicating “fire” in English in contrast to Vietnamese**

No	English	Vietnamese
1	<i>oil</i>	<i>dầu lửa, dầu hỏa, dầu bôi trơn (máy), dầu ăn, dầu bôi (da), dầu sơn</i>
2	<i>petrol</i>	<i>xăng</i>
3	<i>gas</i>	<i>chất khí, chất hơi, hơi đầy trong bụng, khí đốt/ga, khí gây tê/mê, hơi cay, hơi độc, xăng</i>
4	<i>natural gas</i>	<i>khí thiên nhiên</i>
5	<i>alcohol</i>	<i>cồn, thức uống có cồn</i>
6	<i>coal gas</i>	<i>khí than (để phát điện và sưởi ấm)</i>
7	<i>joss-stick</i>	<i>nén hương (que tẩm dài cháy chậm và tỏa mùi hương trầm)</i>
8	<i>frank incense</i>	<i>trầm hương</i>
9	<i>firewood/wood/ twig</i>	<i>củi/củi, gỗ/củi, cành con</i>
10	<i>kindling/tinder</i>	<i>mồi nhóm, củi đóm (khúc củi nhỏ khô,... dùng để nhóm lửa)/mồi lửa (bất cứ chất khô nào để bắt lửa)</i>
11	<i>stubble/straw</i>	<i>ra (gốc cây lúa)/rom (thân cây lúa)</i>
12	<i>torch</i>	<i>đuốc (mẫu gỗ, v.v. nhất là mẫu được bọc trong vải và nhúng vào dầu, v.v. để thắp lên và cầm tay lấy ánh sáng soi)</i>
13	<i>candle/tallow candle</i>	<i>cây nến/nến mỡ (nến làm từ mỡ động vật)</i>
14	<i>coal/charcoal</i>	<i>than đá/than củi</i>
15	<i>briquette/brequet</i>	<i>than bánh (than cám ép thành bánh dùng làm chất đốt)</i>
16	<i>peat</i>	<i>than bùn (thực vật một phần bị phân hủy bởi tác động của nước, nhất là những chỗ sinh lầy)</i>
17	<i>match/matchstick</i>	<i>diêm/que diêm</i>
18	<i>spill</i>	<i>đóm</i>
19	<i>wick</i>	<i>bấc (đèn, bếp, bật lửa và nến)</i>

No	English	Vietnamese
20	<i>wax/paraffin wax</i> <i>/candle wax</i>	sáp (bất kỳ chất nào mềm, dính hoặc nhờn, dễ chảy (có được từ dầu lửa) dùng để làm nến, xi.v.v)/ parafin, nến, sáp (từ dầu lửa)/ sáp nến.
21	<i>detonator/fuse/ percussion cap</i>	ngòi nổ, kíp nổ
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	

According to the statistics, a number of words of two subfields between Vietnamese and English are approximately the same. But according to scope of denotation, it may vary new dissimilarities:

Besides, words of two languages are equivalent in word-formation (including individual nouns and compound nouns), such as individual nouns (*oil/dầu; petrol/xăng; alcohol/cồn, thức uống có cồn; stubble/rom; straw/rạ; torch/đuốc; candle/nến; match/diêm; spill/đóm; wick/bấc (đèn, bếp, bật lửa và nến); wax/sáp*), compound nouns: (*natural gas/khí thiên nhiên; coal gas/khí than (để phát điện và sưởi ấm); frank incense/trâm hương; charcoal/than củi; matchstick/que diêm; candle wax/sáp nến*). There are words that are not equivalent in terms of the scale of the denotation. Serving as in Vietnamese, there are words in which the naming scale is larger than the equivalence of them in English, such as word *củi* in Vietnamese has its naming scale equal to many English words particularly are “*firewood, wood, twig*”. Otherwise, Vietnamese words with the naming scale smaller than English, for instance:

The word “gas” in English is equivalent to various Vietnamese words: (*chất khí, chất hơi, hơi đầy trong bụng, khí đốt/ga, khí gây tê/mê, hơi cay, hơi độc, xăng*). In addition, the English words (*detonator, fuse, percussion cap*) are equal to Vietnamese words (*ngòi nổ, kíp nổ*). There are some words in the two languages that are equal in the nomination scale but different in word-formation, for example, compound nouns in English are equivalent to Vietnamese individual nouns: (*joss-stick/hương; firewood/củi*). On the other hand, there are words between two languages which are not equivalent to the nomination scale as well as word-formation, such as individual nouns in English equal to Vietnamese compound nouns: (*kindling, tinder/môi nhóm, củi đóm, môi lửa; coal/than đá; peat, briquette (brequet)/than bánh, than bùn*) and vice versa: (*paraffin wax/nến, sáp*). There is also a word that exists in Vietnamese, but there is no equivalent word in English which is a compound noun: (*rom rạ*).

## V. CONCLUSION

The article has subdivided Vietnamese words indicating fuel materials – the basis for burning into two subfields. The number and the ratio of words between two subfields are compared with each other. Meanwhile, the frequency of each word and two subfields are also further discussed.

In addition, the scale of word nomination of two semantic fields in the two languages

has been brought into discussion. There are small number of similar words in the scale of word nomination between two languages, which proves that most of words are distinctive. In particular, there are words used in Vietnamese but not found their equivalence in English. The results show that the nomination of things between the two languages is so distinctive, and it depends on each ethnic's linguistic perspectives. Almost all words are different in scale of denotation, which highlights the cultural and conceptual difference monitoring the nomination processes in human languages.

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