



VNU Journal of Foreign Studies

Journal homepage: <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>



A CORPUS-BASED CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF SELECTED LEXICAL REALISATIONS OF *LIGHT* AND *DARK* METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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Received 12 December 2025

Revised 08 June 2026; Accepted 24 August 2026

Abstract: Metaphor use is both universal and culturally variable. Although previous cross-cultural studies have explored metaphorical expressions, not many have focused on comparisons between English and Vietnamese using corpus data. To address this gap, the present study conducts a corpus-based contrastive analysis of selected lexical realisations of *light* and *dark* metaphors in English and Vietnamese. The data were drawn from the British Web Corpus and the Vietnamese Web Corpus. Selected lexical items associated with *light* and *dark* were analysed through concordance and collocation searches, and sampled concordance lines were manually coded for metaphorical use. The findings reveal substantial overlap in the conceptual metaphors identified in the two corpora. However, the differences were observed in lexical realisations and translation equivalence. The findings suggest shared metaphorical tendencies across the two languages while also highlighting language-specific patterns. The study has implications for contrastive metaphor research, translation, and language teaching.

Keywords: contrastive metaphor analysis, *light* and *dark* metaphors, metaphor and translation, English/Vietnamese

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<https://doi.org/10.63023/2525-2445/jfs.ulis.5688>

NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỐI CHIẾU DỰA TRÊN KHO NGŨ LIỆU VỀ CÁC BIỂU HIỆN TỪ VỰNG CỦA ẨN DỤ *SÁNG* VÀ *TỐI* TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

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Nhận bài ngày 12 tháng 12 năm 2025

Chỉnh sửa ngày 08 tháng 6 năm 2026; Chấp nhận đăng ngày 24 tháng 8 năm 2026

Tóm tắt: Ẩn dụ vừa mang tính phổ quát vừa mang tính biến thể văn hóa. Mặc dù các nghiên cứu đối chiếu giao văn hóa đã khảo sát nhiều biểu thức ẩn dụ, nghiên cứu so sánh tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt dựa trên ngữ liệu còn hạn chế. Nhằm lấp đầy khoảng trống này, nghiên cứu tiến hành phân tích đối chiếu dựa trên ngữ liệu về hiện thực hoá từ vựng của ẩn dụ *sáng* và *tối* trong hai ngôn ngữ. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ British Web Corpus và Vietnamese Web Corpus. Các từ khóa liên quan đến *sáng* và *tối* được phân tích dựa trên ngữ cảnh xuất hiện và các từ thường đi kèm. Các ngữ cảnh mẫu được mã hóa thủ công để xác định cách sử dụng mang tính ẩn dụ. Kết quả cho thấy sự tương đồng đáng kể về ẩn dụ ý niệm trong hai ngữ liệu, nhưng cũng có khác biệt về hiện thực hóa từ vựng và mức độ tương đương dịch thuật. Nghiên cứu góp phần làm rõ cả những điểm chung và đặc thù của ẩn dụ trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, đồng thời có ý nghĩa đối với nghiên cứu đối chiếu, dịch thuật và giảng dạy ngôn ngữ.

Từ khoá: phân tích ẩn dụ đối chiếu, ẩn dụ về ánh sáng và bóng tối, ẩn dụ và dịch thuật, Anh/Việt

1. Introduction

Metaphors and their potential to shape people's way of thinking have become an increasingly engaging topic. For instance, a common metaphor, ARGUMENTS ARE WAR contribute to the way we think, act, and conceptualise arguments as wars to be won (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) is reflected in our language when we say *defend an argument*, *attack someone's arguments*, *win or lose an argument*, etc. This connection of metaphors and thought processes is the focus of various studies on metaphors investigating how abstract concepts are understood through concrete experiences, how metaphors are reflected through language patterns, and how metaphors can provide cultural, psychological insights and education applications.

According to Meier (2015), we speak metaphorically because we think metaphorically. Abstract ideas, such as time or arguments, are often understood through concrete experiences like *money* or *war*. These deep-seated thoughts are then reflected through our language and can reveal both universal human experiences and cultural differences. Kövecses (2005) suggests that while many cultures share common metaphors, the specific ways they are expressed can vary. For example, in American English, the expression *sunny side up* reflects the metaphor HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, but such expressions may not exist in other languages. The possibility that some conceptual metaphors are motivated by shared human experiences, while others vary across cultures, highlights the need for further cross-linguistic research.

Building on this, the present study investigates selected lexical realisations of light and dark metaphors in English and Vietnamese, focusing on both shared metaphorical patterns and language-specific ways of expressing these concepts. Previous studies have suggested that light is frequently associated with knowledge, goodness, and happiness, whereas dark is often linked

to ignorance, negativity, and sadness (Deignan, 2005; Meier, 2015; L. Nguyen, 2019; N. Nguyen, 2013). Although these metaphorical associations have been examined (Annamary et al., 2016; Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Meier et al., 2007), several gaps remain. First, relatively few studies have conducted a corpus-based contrastive analysis of light and dark metaphors using naturally occurring data from both languages. Second, previous Vietnamese studies have primarily focused on metaphors such as GOODNESS IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, and NEGATIVITY IS DARK, while comparatively little attention has been paid to KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNKNOWN IS DARK (V. Nguyen, 2016; L. Nguyen, 2019). Third, limited research has explored the implications of these metaphors for translation between English and Vietnamese.

To address these gaps, the present study analyses selected lexical items associated with the source domains of light and dark in the British Web Corpus (ukWaC) and the Vietnamese Web Corpus (viWaC). The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) *What conceptual metaphors are realised through the selected lexical items associated with light and dark in the ukWaC and viWaC corpora?*
- 2) *What similarities and differences can be identified in the metaphorical patterns associated with these lexical items across the English and Vietnamese corpora?*

The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides corpus-based evidence for the comparison of light and dark metaphors in English and Vietnamese. Second, it extends previous Vietnamese research by examining KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNKNOWN IS DARK in naturally occurring corpus data. Third, it explores the implications of shared and language-specific metaphorical expressions for translation and language teaching. By addressing these issues, the study offers insights into both common and language-specific patterns of metaphor use across English and Vietnamese.

2. Metaphors Across Cultures: From Theory to the Light and Dark Within Language

2.1. Metaphors and Conceptual Mappings

Metaphors are central to how people think, communicate, and conceptualise abstract experiences. They allow us to understand one domain of experience through another, often more concrete or familiar, domain. For instance, when we say TIME IS MONEY we do not simply compare the two but conceptually structure time in terms of financial value, influencing how we speak of *wasting time* or *saving time* (Abrams & Harpham, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This process reflects the foundation of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which views metaphors as conceptual mappings between a source domain and target domain that impact how we see the world, comprehend and react to things (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

2.2. Universality and Variation in Metaphors

Many metaphors appear across languages and cultures because they are grounded in shared bodily and perceptual experiences (Kövecses, 2005). Studies have identified cross-linguistic similarities in metaphors grounded in embodied experience, providing support for the idea that some metaphors are widely shared (Ciolăneanu & Villalva, 2023; Neumann, 2001). However, as Yu (2008) notes, metaphor universality is more apparent in primary metaphors grounded in bodily experience than in culturally elaborated metaphorical systems.

However, metaphorical expressions also exhibit variation across cultures and within a single culture. Languages may share the same metaphor while differing in the lexical and linguistic resources used to express it (Kövecses, 2005). Cultural beliefs, historical experiences,

and social practices can influence how metaphorical mappings are realised. Corpus-based research has shown that different language varieties often share broad metaphorical patterns while displaying preferences for different metaphorical expressions (Callies & Onysko, 2017). These findings suggest that metaphor use reflects both shared embodied experiences and language-specific conceptualisations. Metaphors also vary within a single culture. Within a single culture, different social groups might develop specific metaphors (Kövecses, 2005). The way people use metaphors can also change depending on where they live, even when they speak the same language (Barbara Güldenring as cited in Callies & Onysko, 2017). Furthermore, personal experience can also shape metaphorical languages (Roystonn et al., 2021).

2.3. *Metaphors of Light and Dark*

Among the metaphors that demonstrate both universality and variation, those related to *light* and *dark* are particularly prominent due to their grounding in universal human experience. Across cultures, *light* is frequently associated with knowledge, goodness, and happiness, while *dark* represents ignorance, negativity, and sadness (Forceville & Renckens, 2013; Meier et al., 2007). These associations appear in media, religious discourse, and daily language. In films, protagonists often wear light colours while antagonists wear darker tones (Meier et al., 2004). Religious texts similarly employ *light* and *dark* metaphorically, with *light* representing truth or divinity, as seen in expressions such as *Jesus is the light of the world* or *God gives the light of knowledge*.

Empirical research reinforces these metaphorical links. Meier et al. (2007) demonstrate that positive emotional states influence perceptions of brightness, while negative emotions are linked to darkness. Studies on colour associations similarly show that brighter colours (e.g., pink, blue, yellow) are connected to positive emotions, whereas darker colours (e.g., black, brown, red) often convey negativity, sadness, or aggression (Annamary et al., 2016; Boyatzis & Varghese, 1994; Frank & Gilovich, 1988). Specifically, in English and Vietnamese, there have been several studies examining metaphors related to light and dark. In English, Deignan (2005) identifies metaphorical mappings such as KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, GOODNESS IS LIGHT, UNHAPPINESS IS DARK, IGNORANCE IS DARK, and EVIL IS DARK, demonstrating how *light* and *dark* structure conceptualisations of social life. These metaphors are expressed in everyday phrases like *shed light on*, *in the dark*, *a ray of sunshine*, or *dark times*. In Vietnamese, L. Nguyen (2019) explores colour-based metaphors and finds that *light* typically signifies positivity, as in *cuộc đời tươi sáng* (“a bright life”), while *dark* reflects negativity, as in *quãng đời u tối* (“a dark period of life”). Cross-cultural research supports parallels in how *light* and *dark* conceptualise emotions and morality in both English and Vietnamese. For example, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT is reflected in English expressions like *a ray of sunshine* and Vietnamese equivalents such as *ánh sáng hạnh phúc* (“light of happiness”) (V. Nguyen, 2016). Similarly, SADNESS IS DARK emerges in English (*be black with sorrow*) and Vietnamese (*đôi mắt chị bóng tối ngập đầy dần* - “her eyes gradually filled with darkness”). However, existing Vietnamese studies have primarily focused on POSITIVITY IS LIGHT, NEGATIVITY IS DARK, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, and SADNESS IS DARK, with less attention given to KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT or IGNORANCE IS DARK, common in English. This suggests the possibility of both shared and culturally specific metaphor patterns, warranting further contrastive research.

Overall, previous studies suggest that associations between light and positive concepts and between dark and negative concepts are widely attested across languages. However, three limitations remain. First, relatively few studies have employed corpus-based methods to

compare English and Vietnamese using naturally occurring language data. Second, previous Vietnamese research has focused primarily on metaphors such as GOODNESS IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, and NEGATIVITY IS DARK, while comparatively little attention has been paid to KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT and UNKNOWN IS DARK. Third, the implications of these metaphorical patterns for translation equivalence and cross-linguistic comparison remain underexplored. These gaps provide the rationale for the present study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a corpus-based contrastive approach to investigate metaphorical patterns associated with light and dark in English and Vietnamese. The methodology focuses on corpus selection, lexical item selection, data retrieval procedures, metaphor identification, and cross-linguistic comparison.

3.1. Corpora and Word Selection

Two web corpora were used in this study: the Vietnamese Web Corpus (viWaC) (Kilgarriff & Le-Hong, 2012) and the British Web 2007 Corpus (ukWaC) (Ferraresi, et al., 2008). viWaC contains over 106 million words and was selected for its broad representation of contemporary Vietnamese language use (G. Nguyen, 2023). ukWaC contains over 1.3 billion words and provides extensive data for investigating English metaphorical patterns.

As the two corpora differ substantially in size, raw frequency comparisons were not used as the basis for cross-linguistic comparison. Instead, the analysis focused on identifying and comparing metaphorical patterns found in sampled concordance lines and collocations. Nevertheless, corpus size differences may have influenced the availability of examples and should be considered when interpreting cross-linguistic differences.

The study focused on lexical items associated with the source domains of light and dark. The core lexical pairs *light-dark* and *sáng-tối* were selected as the starting point. Near synonyms were then identified using thesauri, dictionary resources, and corpus frequency information. Candidate items were retained if they: (a) belonged semantically to the light/dark domain, (b) occurred with sufficient frequency in the corpus to permit analysis, and (c) showed potential metaphorical use during preliminary concordance inspection. English items such as bright, sunny, darkness, and shade were cross-checked with Vietnamese lexical resources, including Cambridge Dictionary and VDict, to identify comparable Vietnamese equivalents. Although English lexical items served as the initial point of departure, Vietnamese equivalents were not selected solely on the basis of direct translation. Candidate Vietnamese items were additionally evaluated according to their corpus frequency, usage patterns, and relevance within the Vietnamese linguistic context. However, because lexical selection began with core English lexical items, some culturally specific Vietnamese expressions associated with light and dark may not have been captured.

3.2. Procedure

The data collection involved both concordance and collocation searches using Sketch Engine. For each lexical item and part of speech, a random sample of up to 100 concordance lines was retrieved and manually examined. The sample size was selected to provide a manageable yet sufficiently diverse dataset for identifying recurring metaphorical patterns across a wide range of contexts. The purpose of the analysis was not to estimate exact corpus frequencies but to explore metaphorical tendencies and conceptual mappings associated with the selected lexical items.

In addition, collocational behaviour was examined using the Word Sketch function. For collocation analysis, up to 50 concordance lines were examined for each collocational category. This sample size was considered sufficient to identify recurring metaphorical patterns while maintaining manageable manual analysis.

During data cleaning, instances resulting from incorrect part-of-speech tagging were classified as mistagged and excluded from metaphor analysis. Uses unrelated to the target meaning of light and dark (e.g., *light* meaning “not heavy” or *tối* meaning “the most”) were also excluded.

3.3. Metaphor Identification and Comparison

Metaphorical uses were identified using an adapted version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). First, the contextual meaning of the lexical item was determined within the concordance line. Second, its more basic meaning was identified using dictionary definitions. Third, if the contextual meaning differed from the more basic meaning but could be understood in relation to it, the instance was coded as metaphorical. For example, in the expression *bring to light*, the basic meaning of light refers to physical illumination. However, in context, *bring to light* means “make known” or “reveal information”. Since the abstract meaning can be understood through the more basic physical meaning, the expression was coded as metaphorical and classified under the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT.

All the concordance lines were coded into one of four categories: literal, metaphorical, mistagged, or excluded. Literal uses referred to physical meanings of light and dark. Metaphorical uses involved abstract meanings derived from the source domains of light and dark. Mistagged cases occurred when the corpus incorrectly assigned a part-of-speech label to a lexical item. For example, some instances retrieved as nouns were found to function as adjectives in context. Excluded cases referred to meanings unrelated to the semantic domains under investigation, such as *light* meaning “not heavy” in English or *tối* meaning “the most” in Vietnamese. Mistagged and excluded cases were not included in the metaphor analysis.

The coding was conducted by a single researcher. Although intercoder reliability was not calculated, coding criteria were defined prior to analysis and representative examples are provided throughout the paper. This should be considered a limitation of the study, as metaphor identification inevitably involves a degree of subjective interpretation.

4. Results

This section reports the findings of the metaphor analysis conducted on the selected corpora. It is structured by semantic groups (*light* and *dark* synonyms) and by language (English and Vietnamese), allowing for within-language and cross-language comparisons.

4.1. Light and Near Synonyms in English

An analysis of 100 concordance lines for each form of *light* and its near synonyms: *bright*, *sunny*, and *beam* was conducted to examine literal and metaphorical usage. For the noun *light*, 75 out of 100 lines were literal and 25 were metaphorical. In the verb form, 50 lines were literal and 14 metaphorical. 36 out of 50 lines included expressions such as *come to light*, *be exposed to light*, and *be sensitive to light*, which, although they may appear figurative, referred to actual physical light in their concordance contexts. The adjective *light* appeared in 100 lines, all referring to the meaning “not heavy”; therefore, it was excluded from metaphorical analysis.

Among near synonyms, *bright* (adjective) had 71 literal and 29 metaphorical uses out of 100 lines. *Sunny* (adjective) showed 96 literal and 4 metaphorical uses in its 100-line sample. For *beam* (noun), all 100 lines reflected literal usage, with no metaphorical instances identified.

Table 1

Distribution of Literal and Metaphorical Uses of Light Words in English

Word	Part of Speech	Literal Uses	Mistagged	Excluded	Metaphorical Uses	Total
<i>light</i>	noun	75	0	0	25	100
<i>light</i>	verb	50	36	0	14	100
<i>light</i>	adjective	0	0	100	0	100
<i>bright</i>	adjective	71	0	0	29	100
<i>sunny</i>	adjective	96	0	0	4	100
<i>beam</i>	noun	100	0	0	0	100

Collocation analysis was conducted on the noun, verb, and adjective forms of *light*, along with its near synonyms *bright*, *sunny*, and *beam*, to identify metaphorical usage across a range of collocation categories for each word form. For the noun *light*, 3 metaphorical collocations were found out of 9 categories (e.g., *bright light*, *shed light on*, *light of the world*). The verb form had 2 metaphorical collocations out of 14 categories (e.g., *light up*). The adjective form of *light* showed no metaphorical collocations, as it consistently carried the meaning “not heavy,” and expressions like *be light* used *light* as a noun. For *bright* (adjective), 6 metaphorical uses were identified across 9 categories, while *sunny* (adjective) had 1 metaphorical use out of 8 categories. *Beam* (noun) showed no metaphorical uses across its 11 collocation categories.

Overall, metaphorical uses were concentrated in *light* and *bright*, whereas *sunny* and *beam* were predominantly used literally, suggesting differences in metaphorical productivity among lexical items within the same semantic domain.

Table 2

Metaphorical Use in Collocations of Light Words in English

Word	Number of top collocation in each category used metaphorically	Number of collocation categories
<i>light</i> (n)	3	9
<i>light</i> (v)	2	14
<i>light</i> (adj)	No results found	
<i>bright</i> (adj)	6	9
<i>sunny</i> (adj)	1	8
<i>beam</i> (n)	0	11

4.2. *Light and Near Synonyms in Vietnamese*

The noun, verb, and adjective forms of *sáng* (“light”) and their near synonyms in Vietnamese were examined through concordance analysis using 100-line samples per form. For *sáng* retrieved as a noun, 83 concordance lines reflected literal nominal uses, while 17 lines were mistagged by the corpus and functioned as adjectives in context. These mistagged cases were excluded from subsequent metaphor analysis. The verb form had only 2 hits, one of which

was metaphorical. For the adjective form, 58 lines were literal and 42 metaphorical. The synonym *sáng chói* (“bright”) had 62 literal and 38 metaphorical uses, while *rạng rỡ* had 1 hit, which was metaphorical. No results were found for *sáng dạ*. The adjective *nắng* (“sunny”) had 100 literal uses, and both Vietnamese translations of “beam” - *tia* and *chùm*, also showed only literal uses in their 100-line samples.

Table 3

Distribution of Literal and Metaphorical Uses of Light Words in Vietnamese

Word	Part of Speech	Literal Uses	Mistagged	Excluded	Metaphorical Uses	Total
<i>sáng</i> (light)	noun	83	17	0	0	100
<i>sáng</i> (light)	verb	0	1	0	1	2
<i>sáng</i> (light)	adjective	58	0	0	42	100
<i>rạng rỡ</i> (bright)	adjective	0	0	0	1	1
<i>sáng chói</i> (bright)	adjective	62	0	0	38	100
<i>sáng dạ</i> (bright)	adjective			N/A		
<i>nắng</i> (sunny)	adjective	100	0	0	0	100
<i>tia</i> (beam)	noun	100	0	0	0	100
<i>chùm</i> (beam)	noun	100	0	0	0	100

The collocation analysis of Vietnamese equivalents of *light* revealed fewer metaphorical uses and collocation categories compared to English. For *sáng* (noun), 3 collocation results were found but misclassified, reflecting adjective uses. The adjective *sáng* appeared in two categories (modifying a noun and modifying an adjective), with no metaphorical uses. For *sáng chói*, 1 collocation (*sáng chói* modifying a noun) was metaphorical. The adjective *nắng* had only literal top collocations. No metaphorical uses were recorded for *tia* and *chùm* (“beam” nouns), and no results were found for the verb *sáng*, the adjective *rạng rỡ*, or *sáng dạ* in collocation data.

Compared with English, metaphorical uses in the Vietnamese data were concentrated in adjectival forms, while several lexical items displayed only literal uses or yielded limited corpus evidence.

Table 4

Metaphorical Use in Collocations of Light Words in Vietnamese

Word	Number of Top Collocation in Each Category Used Metaphorically	Number of collocation categories
<i>sáng</i> (light, n)	Results found but are mistagged	
<i>sáng</i> (light, v)	N/A	
<i>sáng</i> (light, adj)	0	2
<i>sáng chói</i> (bright, adj)	1	1
<i>rạng rỡ</i> (bright, adj)	N/A	
<i>sáng dạ</i> (bright, adj)		
<i>nắng</i> (sunny, adj)	0	2
<i>tia</i> (beam, n)	0	1
<i>chùm</i> (beam, n)	0	1

4.3. Dark and Near Synonyms in English

A 100-line concordance analysis was conducted for each of the English words *dark* (noun and adjective), *darkness*, *night*, and *shade*. The noun form of *dark* had 85 literal uses and 15 metaphorical uses. The adjective form had 75 literal and 25 metaphorical uses. *Darkness* appeared in 87 literal and 13 metaphorical contexts. In contrast, *night* showed no metaphorical uses in any of its 100 lines. *Shade* had 99 literal uses and only 1 metaphorical instance.

Table 5

Distribution of Literal and Metaphorical Uses of Dark Words in English

Word	Part of Speech	Literal Uses	Mistagged	Excluded	Metaphorical Uses	Total
dark	noun	85	0	0	15	100
dark	adjective	75	0	0	25	100
darkness	noun	87	0	0	13	100
night	noun	100	0	0	0	100
shade	noun	99	0	0	1	100

Collocation analysis showed varying degrees of metaphorical usage. The noun *dark* had 2 metaphorical uses across 8 collocation categories, while the adjective had 3 metaphorical uses across 9 categories. *Darkness* exhibited the highest metaphorical activity, with 8 metaphorical uses across 13 categories. No metaphorical collocations were found for *night* or *shade* despite the former having 14 and the latter 10 collocation categories examined. Among the English dark-related terms, *dark* and *darkness* exhibited greater metaphorical productivity than *night* and *shade*.

Table 6

Metaphorical Use in Collocations of Dark Words in English

Word	Number of Top Collocations in Each Category Used Metaphorically	Number of Collocation Categories
dark (n)	2	8
dark (adj)	3	9
darkness (n)	8	13
night (n)	0	14
shade (n)	0	10

4.4. Dark and Near Synonyms in Vietnamese

A 100-line sample was analysed for each Vietnamese term: *tối* (noun and adjective), *bóng tối* (“darkness”), *đêm* (“night”), and *bóng* (“shade”). For *tối* retrieved as a noun, 95 concordance lines reflected literal nominal uses, whereas 5 lines were mistagged and functioned as adjectives. These cases were excluded from metaphor analysis. For the adjective *tối*, 84 lines were literal, 9 metaphorical, and 3 excluded for meaning “the most.” *Bóng tối* had no data available. *Đêm* showed only literal use across 100 lines. The noun *bóng* had 36 homonymic uses (e.g., “shadow,” “ball”) and 64 literal uses, with no metaphorical cases found for either word.

Table 7*Distribution of Literal and Metaphorical Uses of Dark Words in Vietnamese*

Word	Part of Speech	Literal Uses	Mistagged	Excluded	Metaphorical Uses	Total
tối (dark)	noun	95	5	0	0	100
tối (dark)	adjective	84	4	3	9	100
bóng tối (darkness)	noun			N/A		
đêm (night)	noun	100	0	0	0	100
bóng (shade)	noun	100	0	0	0	100

The noun *tối* had 4 collocation results, but all were misclassified adjective uses. The adjective *tối* appeared in an adjectival phrase, with no metaphorical use. *Bóng tối* yielded no collocational data. The collocations of *đêm* were all literal, and *bóng* occurred as a noun modifier or within noun phrases, again, all literal uses. No metaphorical collocations were found for any of the Vietnamese synonyms. The Vietnamese dark-related items showed relatively limited metaphorical use, with metaphorical patterns concentrated primarily in the adjectival form *tối*.

Table 8*Metaphorical Use in Collocations of Dark Words in Vietnamese*

Word	Number of Top Collocation in Each Category Used Metaphorically	Number of Collocation Categories
tối (dark, n)	Results found but are mistagged	
tối (dark, adj)	0	1
bóng tối (darkness, n)	N/A	
đêm (night, n)	0	4
bóng (shade, n)	0	2

4.5. Similarities and Differences in Metaphorical Uses in Both Language

The similarity and differences in metaphorical uses in English and Vietnamese can be summarised as in table 9. The table shows a comparison of metaphorical uses of light and dark metaphors in English and Vietnamese. Based on the sampled corpus data, both languages exhibit the conceptual metaphors KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT, GOODNESS IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, UNHAPPINESS IS DARK and UNKNOWN IS DARK. Additionally, English uniquely uses the metaphor INTELLIGENCE IS BRIGHT. The results show that there is considerable overlap in the metaphorical use of light, dark and their near synonyms between the two languages.

Table 9*Comparison of Metaphors in English and Vietnamese*

Metaphor	English	Vietnamese
KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT	+	+
GOODNESS IS LIGHT	+	+
INTELLIGENCE IS BRIGHT	+	-
HAPPINESS IS LIGHT	+	+
UNHAPPINESS IS DARKNESS, NEGATIVITY IS DARK	+	+
UNKNOWN IS DARK	+	+

5. Discussion

This section interprets the corpus-based findings regarding the metaphorical use of selected light- and dark-related lexical items in English and Vietnamese. It discusses the conceptual metaphors identified from ukWaC and viWaC, highlights shared and language-specific metaphorical patterns, and considers their implications for metaphor theory, translation, and language teaching. Particular attention is given to the contribution of the study in providing corpus-based evidence from Vietnamese, a language that remains underrepresented in conceptual metaphor research.

5.1. Metaphorical Uses of Light and Near Synonyms in English and Vietnamese

The results showed that the metaphors KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT and GOODNESS IS LIGHT were found in both languages. Concordances and collocation searches for *light* and near synonyms in English and Vietnamese both revealed three conceptual mappings: KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT, GOODNESS IS LIGHT and HAPPINESS IS LIGHT. In English, another metaphor, INTELLIGENCE IS BRIGHT, was also identified. This association of light and near synonyms with knowledge, intelligence, goodness, and positive emotions can be explained based on human experience.

5.1.1. Light and Knowledge

The identification of KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT in both corpora supports previous findings that visual perception serves as an important source domain for conceptualising understanding and knowledge (Deignan, 2005). Rather than simply demonstrating the existence of this metaphor, the corpus data reveal how it is realised through different lexical expressions in the two languages.

The metaphors of light in the study were consistently used in phrases to represent the idea of making something clearer and more understandable. For example, in English, *guiding/leading light* refers to guidance or someone who is the provider of knowledge; and *throw/shed/cast light on* means provide insight and understanding. In Vietnamese, *soi/ chiếu/ rọi sáng* (“shed light”) also refers to provide insight and understanding; and another example is *bùng/ loé sáng* (“flash”) meaning suddenly realising or having an idea. These findings are consistent with those from Deignan's (2005) corpus investigation of light and dark metaphors, further supporting the connection between light and knowledge across languages. Interestingly, near synonyms of *light* (*bright*, *sunny* and *beam*) were not used to reflect the target domain of knowledge, although *bright* was used to describe intelligence. However, in Vietnamese, no near synonyms of *light* from the concordance and collocation search were used in the target domain of knowledge or intelligence. Although not found in the corpus, the adjective form of *bright* in Vietnamese, *sáng dạ*, is in fact, a term used to describe those who are smart, similar to *a bright child* (Vu, 2007). In Vietnamese culture, intelligence is often compared to sunlight through terms like *sáng dạ* and *thông minh* (Pham, 2017) (*minh* is another near synonym of *light* in Vietnamese), which suggests that there are near synonyms of *light* in Vietnamese used in the target domain of knowledge or intelligence.

5.1.2. Light, Goodness, and Happiness

Light, bright, and sunny conditions provide warmth, visibility, and a sense of safety. Humans are active during the day; therefore, light enables us to see clearly, find food and avoid dangers. These qualities are mapped onto the target domain of goodness. Light makes things visible and clear. Goodness makes actions and intentions clear. Light helps us know our

surroundings and avoid threats just as goodness ensures mental and physical safety. Moreover, light is essential for life and goodness supports life and growth. Various phrases reflect this idea, for example, in English, *green light* is a phrase used to show approval. Similar to how a green light in traffic signals indicates that it is safe to move forward, in many cases, the phrase *green light* signifies approval or permission to proceed with an action. Expressions with *bright* and *sunny* are also used to indicate a positive perspective as in *on the bright side*, *sunny side*, and *a sunny outlook*. A bright condition allows us to see things clearly and enhances comprehension which is associated with making informed and better decisions. In Vietnamese, *sáng* (“light”) and near synonyms also suggest goodness and positivity. For instance, a *good example* is *tấm gương sáng* or *tương lai sáng lạng* refers to a *bright future*.

Moreover, the sense of security associated with light can enhance the feelings of happiness. For example, the phrases *eyes bright*, *eyes/face light up*, *a sunny disposition* all indicate happiness. Similarly, in Vietnamese, the phrases *cười rạng rỡ* (“smile brightly”) and *mắt loé sáng* (“eyes light up”) are used to suggest happiness.

5.2. Metaphorical Uses of Dark and Near Synonyms in English and Vietnamese

While light is often associated with positivity, knowledge and happiness; dark, on the other hand, is more linked to ignorance, negativity and sadness. Therefore, when looking at metaphorical uses of *dark*, metaphors similar to previous studies like BAD IS DARK, UNKNOWN/IGNORANCE IS DARK, SADNESS IS DARK and EVIL IS DARK are expected to be found. Concordances and collocation search for *dark* and near synonyms in English and Vietnamese both showed the realisation of two conceptual mappings: UNHAPPINESS IS DARK and UNKNOWN IS DARK. This link between dark and near synonyms with lack of knowledge and negativity can be explained based on human experience.

5.2.1. Darkness and the Unknown

The dark makes objects and details harder to see. Similarly, the unknown encompasses things that are hidden from understanding or knowledge. The metaphor UNKNOWN IS DARK uses our sensory experiences with the dark to conceptualise the abstract concept of the unknown. In English, the phrases that realise UNKNOWN IS DARK are, for example, *dark continent* and *dark horse*. The term *dark continent* was first used by Welsh journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who viewed it as mysterious and until the late nineteenth century, Africa’s landscapes and cultures were largely unfamiliar to many outsiders (Huynh, 2020). The use of this term reflected Europeans’ perspective of Africa as mysterious and unexplored. Another phrase is *dark horse*, which was coined by the British author and former Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in 1831 to refer to an unfancied horse that won a race (BBC Bitesize, 2019). These days, the phrase *dark horse* is generally used to refer to someone who may perform unexpectedly well in a competitive situation. Likewise, there are lexical phrases that realise UNKNOWN IS DARK in Vietnamese such as *tối nghĩa* (“unclear”) and *phủ tối* (“cover up”). The phrase *tối nghĩa* is used to describe something that is unclear or ambiguous in Vietnamese and *phủ tối* translates to “cover up” or “obscure”. Both phrases imply the act of concealing information, making something difficult to understand much like how the darkness obscures objects, limiting visibility.

5.2.2. Darkness, Negativity, and Unhappiness

As the dark obscures our vision, it also creates feelings of danger, evoking negative emotions. This arises from humans’ experience of encountering greater threats at night, when the reduced ability to monitor the external environment for predators and other dangers in the

dark leads to vulnerability (Wichlinski, 2022). In fact, previous research also suggests that nighttime fear is a common reaction to a danger experienced at night, whether it is real or imagined (Gordon et al., 2007; Gordon, 2017). In addition, when humans interact with the world, we rely on vision more than other senses (Pike et al., 2012). Therefore, in the dark, when our vision is limited, it can lead to feelings of vulnerability and fear. The metaphors UNHAPPINESS IS DARKNESS and NEGATIVITY IS DARK in both English and Vietnamese used this experience of darkness to conceptualise the abstract concepts of unhappiness and negativity. The qualities of the source domain *darkness* such as obscurity are mapped onto the target domain *unhappiness*, suggesting that unhappiness feels like being immersed in darkness. *Dark* is also used as a source domain to describe the target domain *negativity* implying that negativity casts a shadow over situations or moods, obscuring positive aspects and creating a sense of discomfort or pessimism. The two metaphors seem to overlap as when something is considered negative, it often brings along the negative judgements and emotions. In English, a phrase that realises UNHAPPINESS IS DARKNESS or NEGATIVITY IS DARK is *dark cloud*. Literally, *dark cloud* refers to a cloud that appears dark, often indicating rain or storm. This visual phenomenon naturally leads to associations with negativity. Metaphorically, *dark cloud* is used to describe a sense of looming trouble or disaster. Another phrase associated with unhappiness or negativity is *be dark*. For instance, in *these last three years have not been easy. They have often been dark*, *dark* is used to refer to times marked by hardship, uncertainty, or sadness. In Vietnamese, phrases with *dark* also realise the same metaphors. For example, *vết tối* (“dark stroke”) is often used to describe a troubling aspect or suggest negativity while *mù tối* (“pitch-dark”), conveying a sense of absolute darkness, is frequently used to describe a situation that is hopeless.

5.3. Comparison of Metaphorical Expression in English and Vietnamese

A notable contribution of the present study is that it extends previous discussions of light and dark metaphors by providing corpus-based evidence from both English and Vietnamese. While earlier studies have largely focused on conceptual analyses or single-language datasets, the present study combines concordance and collocation analyses to examine how metaphorical mappings are realised through actual language use and translation equivalents across the two languages. English and Vietnamese share several conceptual metaphors related to light and dark, suggesting that some metaphorical mappings may be grounded in common embodied experiences. However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of metaphor universality in general, as the analysis was restricted to selected lexical items from two web-based corpora. However, previous research on colour indicates that there is a universal system for basic colours across various languages (Berlin & Kay, 1991). Since light and dark are closely tied to colour perception, this connection may be significant. Kay and McDaniel (1978) argue that the basic colour terms used in all languages are shaped by how the human visual system works. These common colour concepts come from the way our brains process colour. Kövecses (2005) also builds on this idea, stating that most metaphors should appear in different languages and cultures in the world because metaphors are based on how human’s brain and body function and overall, humans function similarly. As people experience the same light and dark conditions, their brains and bodies react similarly, leading to the development of shared conceptual metaphors across cultures. Additionally, Yu (2008) states that primary metaphors, derived from bodily experience, tend to be widely shared across cultures. Light and dark metaphors also stem from bodily experience and our direct physical interactions with light and darkness shape how we understand and describe abstract concepts.

Light is often associated with visibility and safety because in humans' physical experience, light allows us to see and feel secure. As a result, abstract concepts like KNOWLEDGE, GOODNESS and HAPPINESS are often linked with LIGHT. Conversely, darkness is associated with obscurity and danger because in the dark, our visions are limited which can evoke fear. This leads to the conceptualisation of the UNKNOWN, NEGATIVITY, UNHAPPINESS as DARK.

However, the comparison of metaphorical expressions between English and Vietnamese also shows that metaphors do not always translate directly, and translation shifts are necessary to achieve equivalence in the two languages. The translation examples discussed below were selected because they represent recurrent patterns identified in the corpus data and illustrate different types of translation relationships, including direct equivalence, partial equivalence, and conceptual equivalence realised through different lexical forms. For instance, the English phrase *dark continent* translates directly into Vietnamese as "lục địa đen", with *lục địa* means "continent" and *đen* ("black") corresponds to "dark." However, *dark horse* translates to "ngựa ô" in Vietnamese, where *ngựa* means "horse" but *ô* does not mean "dark," indicating that the metaphor works differently in the two languages. *Ngựa ô* as a phrase means "dark horse" but *ô* does not mean anything on its own. Similarly, translating Vietnamese metaphors into English presents the same challenges. The phrase *sáng mắt* (literally "light eyes") translates to "eye-opening" in English, which does not include any vocabulary from the *light* source domain, even though both phrases convey the idea of gaining insight. On the other hand, *tấm gương sáng* translates to "a shining example", with *shining* being part of the *light* metaphor, aligning more closely with the source domain. This difference in translations can be explained by the variations in metaphor between languages. Two languages can share a common conceptual metaphor, but they can use different linguistic expressions to convey these ideas. For example, the metaphor TIME IS A MOVING ENTITY is present in English, Hungarian, and Finnish, but the expressions for its usage vary by language. English uses phrases like *time passes* and *time goes by*, while Hungarian and Finnish use verbs indicating transience, with Hungarian also incorporating a container metaphor, such as *kuluu* ("wear on") in Finnish and *múlik* ("elapse") in Hungarian, none of which imply physical movement (Kövecses, 2005). Therefore, when translating metaphors, it is important not to translate them literally. Instead, the translator should consider the vocabulary of the source domain and have a deep understanding of the language, as translating metaphors across different languages and cultures can be difficult due to varying linguistic and cultural contexts (Schäeffner 2004, p. 1253 as cited in Valiulienė, 2015). Metaphors based on bodily experiences, in this context is the interaction with light and darkness, often have cross-cultural similarities; however, their universality is only potential, which can result in instances of misuse or mistranslation of metaphorical language (Valiulienė, 2015).

The findings also present some overlaps among metaphorical concepts, especially with *darkness* in both languages. For instance, where something that is unknown is described as *dark*, there is a strong implication that it is also negative. This is observed in the example *dark secret/ dark side/ dark corner*. *Dark* in these phrases is not only hidden or unknown but also carries a negative or troubling aspect. Similarly, in Vietnamese, the phrase *phủ tối* (literal translation: "cover dark", meaning "to cover up"), suggests that something is hidden or not easily visible, similar to how darkness obscures what we see but it also carries a negative connotation suggesting something problematic, troubling, or undesirable. The findings are aligned with Deignan (2005)'s corpus research exploring light and dark metaphors. However, overlaps in metaphorical concepts are less pronounced when it comes to light metaphors.

The present findings tentatively suggest differences in the distribution of metaphorical

meanings across word classes in English and Vietnamese. However, these patterns should be interpreted cautiously because they may also be influenced by corpus size, tagging accuracy, and lexical selection procedures. In English, the metaphorical meanings were distributed evenly across different parts of speech but in Vietnamese, most metaphorical meanings were from adjectives, a few were verbs, and the findings showed no nouns. There are different views on which parts of speech tend to be more metaphorical. In Deignan (2005)'s corpus study, *light* tends to be nominal when metaphorical, and *dark* tends to be adjectival which is different from the findings of the current study. Goatly (1997) states that adverbial and prepositional metaphors are less forceful and less likely to be perceived as metaphors than verbal and adjectival ones. Nominal metaphors, on the other hand, are the most impactful. They offer richer interpretations because the contrast between their metaphorical and literal meanings is more pronounced, making them more recognisable and vivid in their metaphorical force. However, conclusions on which word class tends to be more metaphorical need to consider the source domain being analysed as well as the specific registers. As Deignan (2005) found in her data, the source domain of ANIMALS tended to be realised by nouns, the source domain of MOVEMENT had a prominent use of verbs, and the source domain of CLEANLINESS AND DIRT contained a high incidence of adjectives. Consequently, further research using larger and more balanced datasets is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn regarding cross-linguistic differences in metaphorical word-class distribution.

Additionally, word classes of metaphors exhibit different distributions in different registers. For example, while nouns are prominent in news, metaphorical nouns are not and on the other hand, verbs are not a prominent feature of news, but metaphorical verbs are (Krennmayr, 2015). The current study initially did not focus on examining parts of speech of metaphor in relation to their source domain as well as looking at the registers; therefore, firm conclusions cannot yet be drawn, and this leaves room for future research to build on. Another interesting point is that *light* and *dark* metaphors in Vietnamese are not found as nouns in the current study while previous studies suggest otherwise. For example, in a study examining the terms of sensory perception metaphorically used to express love in English and Vietnamese, the results showed that nouns account for the largest number in both English and Vietnamese, verbs and adjectives respectively share the second and the third positions in English, but adjectives reach the second rank in Vietnamese (Ho & Phan, 2016). This could be attributed to the smaller size of the Vietnamese corpus compared to the English corpus. A smaller corpus may limit the range of metaphors, making it challenging to generalise the word classes (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives) typically used in metaphorical expressions.

5.4. Limitations and Recommendations

Although the study offers valuable insights into how *light* and *dark* metaphors are used in English and Vietnamese, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focused on only three near synonyms for each term due to time constraints, which may have limited the identification of broader metaphorical patterns and cross-linguistic distinctions. Second, the initial lexical selection process was conducted in English and subsequently translated into Vietnamese, potentially overlooking more frequently used or culturally salient Vietnamese expressions. Future studies could adopt a bidirectional selection procedure to improve the representativeness and accuracy of cross-linguistic comparisons.

Additionally, near synonyms were selected primarily on the basis of overall frequency without separating items by part of speech. As a result, metaphorical expressions associated with less represented grammatical categories may not have been fully captured. The findings

concerning word-class distributions should therefore be interpreted cautiously. Future research could examine metaphorical usage systematically across different parts of speech and source domains.

Another limitation concerns corpus comparability. Although ukWaC and viWaC are both large web-based corpora and are suitable for contrastive analysis, they differ substantially in size and composition. These differences may have influenced the availability and distribution of metaphorical examples and should be considered when interpreting cross-linguistic similarities and differences.

Furthermore, the analysis was based on sampled concordance and collocation lines rather than all available occurrences. While this sampling approach enabled detailed qualitative examination of the data, it may not fully represent the complete range of metaphorical uses associated with each lexical item. Future studies could combine qualitative analysis with larger-scale frequency-based investigations to provide a more comprehensive picture of metaphor usage.

The exclusive use of web-based corpora also restricts the findings to a particular register of language use and may underrepresent metaphorical patterns found in other genres, such as academic writing, literature, spoken discourse, or media texts. Future research should therefore incorporate a wider range of corpora and registers to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

Finally, metaphor identification relied primarily on the researcher's interpretation. Although explicit coding criteria were applied consistently throughout the analysis, identifying metaphorical meanings inevitably involves a degree of subjective judgement. Future studies could incorporate intercoder verification or reliability checks to improve methodological transparency and strengthen the reliability of metaphor identification.

5.5. Research Implications

The field of translation practice may benefit from further research on metaphors between different languages. First, while both languages share many light and dark conceptual metaphors, direct translations sometimes fail to convey the same meaning, or the translation uses a different word from the same source domain vocabulary. Therefore, when faced with such a translation task, it is important not to translate them literally. Instead, the translator should consider the vocabulary of the source domain and have a deep understanding of the language, as translating metaphors across different languages and cultures can be difficult due to varying linguistic and cultural contexts.

The findings from the study may also benefit foreign language teaching as non-native students have a habit of thinking in their native language instead of thinking in English. A study by Upton & Lee-Thompson (2001) reveal that some second language learners can understand the meaning of a sentence in the second language directly without needing to translate it; however, other learners need to analyse each word and translate them into their native language to fully understand the sentence. Gaining an understanding of cognitive metaphors might help alleviate this issue to some degree. In addition to teaching students the meanings and uses of specific words and expressions, teachers should focus more on encouraging students to think in English and on helping them develop a conceptual system of the target language. Previous research has also suggest that conceptual metaphors enhance vocabulary learning (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Samani & Hashemian, 2012). The use of conceptual metaphors in teaching could also enhance vocabulary learning as students remember phrases more effectively

when they are grouped under a conceptual metaphor. English teachers should categorise metaphorical expressions based on different conceptual metaphors, allowing learners to systematically memorise English metaphors and compare them with their Vietnamese equivalents (N. Nguyen, 2013). Additionally, teachers could introduce methods for translating these metaphorical expressions between English and Vietnamese.

6. Conclusions

The objectives of this study were to identify and analyse metaphors related to light and dark in both English and Vietnamese, and to compare the metaphors used in these languages. The findings of this research show that there is significant overlap in the metaphorical use of light, dark and their near synonyms in English and Vietnamese which provide modest support for the idea of metaphors being universal. However, the study also reveals that metaphors do not always translate directly between the two languages, often requiring translation shifts to achieve equivalence. While many light and dark metaphors are shared, direct translations sometimes fail to convey the same meaning, or different words from the same source domain are used. The results have important implications for translation practice and foreign language teaching. With translating metaphors, it requires more than literal translation. The translator should consider the vocabulary of the source domain and have a deep understanding of the language, as translating metaphors across different languages and cultures can be difficult due to varying linguistic and cultural contexts. For foreign language teaching, the understanding of conceptual mappings can break students' habit of thinking in their native language and enhance vocabulary memorisation. Despite the contributions of this study, there are several limitations to consider, including limited scope of selected near synonyms, word selection process, lack of separations by parts of speech and sole reliance on web corpora. Therefore, further studies should focus on expanding the range of near synonyms selected for the study, refine the words selection process, consider separating the parts of speech and use different types of corpora beyond web sources to improve the generalisability of the findings and provide deeper insights into metaphor usage across languages.

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