

A STUDY ON COGNITIVE METAPHORS OF TIME IN LYRIC SONGS IN ENGLISH VERSUS VIETNAMESE

NGHIÊN CỨU ẢN DỰ Ý NIỆM VỀ THỜI GIAN TRONG NHẠC TRỮ TÌNH ANH – VIỆT

Dinh Thi Minh Hien, Le Thi Khanh Lam

The University of Danang, University of Foreign Languages

Email: minhchien02@yahoo.com, lai313@gmail.com

Abstract - Cognitive metaphor (CM) is a language tool commonly used to reflect human feelings, thought and/or images in human mind. In light of Cognitive Linguistics, CM functions a significant part in the conceptualization of abstract concepts. This article presents a socio-cultural research on the conceptual metaphors (CMs) of Time in English versus Vietnamese lyric songs. Basing on the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews and the theoretical background of many linguistics, especially Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Kovecses (2010) the study investigates and discovers the similarities and differences in CMs of Time between English and Vietnamese songs from the late decades of the 20th century to present. The findings of the study can contribute a significant part in the areas of English language teaching and learning (ELT / ELL), Semantics, Translation Studies and Socio-cultural Communication.

Key words - cognitive Linguistics; cognitive metaphor(s) (CM(s)); lyric songs; English language teaching and learning (ELT / ELL); socio-cultural communication

1. Rationale

Of all the abundant abstract concept system which shapes the way we view the world, the concept of *Time* is the most elusive that has a strong influence on all things, especially on living beings. In this sense, *Time* adds an important and necessary dimension to our understanding of the world. It seems that it is almost impossible to conceive of what our world of experience might be like without the presence of *Time*. It takes for granted that the concept of *Time* is commonly seen in all forms of art, especially in music. In the song *Viva Forever*, Spice Girls (1998) wrote:

Slipping through our fingers like the **sands of time**

Promises made, every memory saved has reflections in my mind

Viva Forever - Spice Girls

“**The sands of time**” and “**slipping through our fingers**” are both metaphorical in the sense that *Time* is conceptualized as a concrete thing- the sand - that can be touched and slipped through one’s fingers. Experiences in real life make people appreciate the passing of *Time* over years and comprehend that *Time* is passing very quickly and why the metaphorical expression “*Time is Motion*” is formed from the line “**Time is slipping through our fingers**”.

In Vietnamese, the song *Mùa Thu Cho Em* written by Ngô Thụy Miên makes listeners feel good when the meaning of *Time* is conceptualized by romantic images of lovely deer, falling leaves and raining drops:

Em có nghe **mùa thu mưa giăng lá đổ**
Em có nghe **nai vàng** hát khúc yêu đương
Và em có nghe khi **mùa thu tới**
Mang ái ân **mang tình yêu tới**

Mùa Thu Cho Em - Ngô Thụy Miên

Tóm tắt - Ẩn dụ ý niệm là một công cụ ngôn ngữ thường được dùng để phản ánh tình cảm, tư duy và/hoặc hình tượng trong tâm trí con người. Dưới ánh sáng của Ngôn ngữ học Tri nhận, Ẩn dụ ý niệm đóng một chức năng có ý nghĩa trong việc khái quát hóa những ý niệm trừu tượng. Bài viết này trình bày một nghiên cứu về Ẩn dụ ý niệm Thời Gian trong nhạc trữ tình tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Dựa trên cứ liệu thu thập từ bảng điều ghi, những cuộc phỏng vấn và trên cơ sở lý thuyết của nhiều nhà ngôn ngữ học, đặc biệt của Lakoff và Johnson (1980), Kovecses (2010), tác giả nghiên cứu và khám phá đưa ra những điểm tương đồng và dị biệt trong ẩn dụ ý niệm Thời gian giữa hai dòng nhạc trữ tình Anh -- Việt từ nửa cuối thế kỷ 20 đến nay. Những kết quả của công trình nghiên cứu có thể đóng góp một phần ý nghĩa trong Dạy và Học tiếng Anh, Ngữ Nghĩa Học, Dịch thuật và Giao thoa Văn hóa Xã hội.

Từ khóa - ngôn ngữ học tri nhận; ẩn dụ ý niệm; nhạc trữ tình; dạy và học tiếng Anh; ngữ nghĩa học, dịch thuật, giao thoa văn hóa xã hội

Do you see autumn comes with rainy drops and falling leaves
Do you hear lovely deer are singing love songs?
And do you hear autumn is coming
That brings along with it my love to you?

The Autumn for You - Ngô Thụy Miên

Here the *Time* of autumn is comprehended as a concrete thing that can be heard by ear with the verb “nghe” (hear) is repeated on purpose from which metaphorical expression “*Time is Senses*” can be found. The above-mentioned examples prove that by abstract and elusive nature, *Time* becomes understandable via the use of the conceptual or cognitive metaphor (CM). And, CM is commonly used to express the beauty of the language, to facilitate our language interpretation and to enhance the listeners’ aesthetic skill in appreciating works of art. And, in this sense, this paper was conducted to serve these purposes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Conceptual Metaphors (CMs)

Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphor we live by* [12] have found that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not only in language but also in action; that is, metaphor is a cognitive instrument whereby we conceive of our world. Moreover, via cognitive metaphorical expressions, we can understand one kind of thing or experience in terms of something of a different kind. In this sense, CMs can be used as a language instrument to reflect the metaphoric nature of concept, via metaphorical linguistic expressions.

Another linguist - Kovecses - claimed that “Conceptual metaphors bring two distant domains into correspondence with each other. One of the domains is typically more

physical or concrete than the other. The correspondence is established for the purpose of understanding the more abstract in terms of the more concrete” [5]. CM is a popular phenomenon in language which serves as an important device in building new meanings and words.

Classification of Conceptual Metaphors

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) [5], there are four types of conceptual metaphors (i) Structural metaphors, (ii) Orientation metaphors, (iii) Ontological metaphors and (iv) Conduit metaphors [12]. Structural metaphor is the case where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. In ontological metaphors, people conceive their experiences in terms of objects, substances, and containers without specifying exactly what kind of object, substance, or container is meant. And orientation metaphors make a set of target concepts coherent in people’s conceptual system (Lakoff, 1992).

2.2. Mapping Principles

The set of mappings (Lee, 2001) that applies to a given source-target pairing is illustrated below:

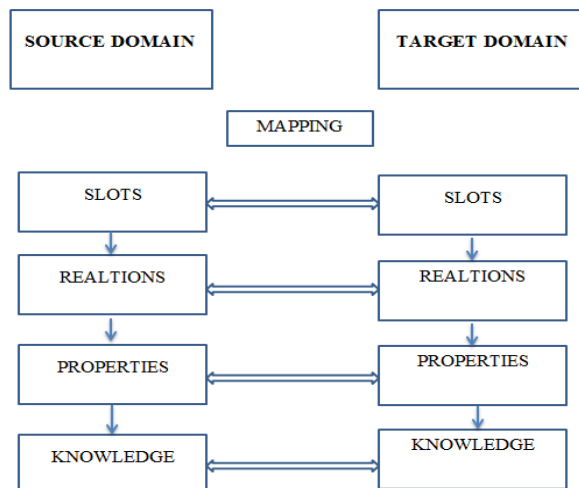


Figure 2.1. Metaphorical Mappings

2.3. The concept of Time

From the fact that *Time* is a very valuable commodity and a limited resource that we can use to achieve our goals, we understand and experience *Time* as money - the kind of thing that can be spent, wasted, budgeted, invested, wisely or poorly save or squandered. In this paper, the concept of *Time* can be mapped onto the structural expression “Time is money” which can be understood in phrases and/or utterances like “You’re *wasting* my time”, “This gadget will *save* you hours”, “I don’t have the time to *give* you”, “How do you *spend* your time these days?”, “That flat tire *cost* me an hour”, “I’ve *invested* a lot of time in her”, “I don’t *have enough* time to *spare* for that”, “You’re *running out of* time”, “You need to *budget* your time”, “*Put aside* some time for ping pong”, “Is that *worth* your while?”, “Do you have much time *left*?”, “He’s living on *borrowed* time” [12].

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3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. CMs Expressing Time in English and Vietnamese lyric songs

| No. | Source Domain | CMs of Time | |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| | | English songs | Vietnamese songs |
| 1 | Time is an Entity | + | + |
| 2 | Time is Motion | + | + |
| 3 | Time is Emotion | + | + |
| 4 | Time is Actions | + | + |
| 5 | Time is Color | - | + |
| 6 | Time is Natural Phenomena | - | + |
| 7 | Time is a Plant | - | + |
| 8 | Time is Money | + | + |
| 9 | Time is Characteristics | + | + |
| 10 | Time is State | + | + |
| 11 | Time is Fire | + | + |
| 12 | Time is Senses | + | + |
| 13 | Time is a Changer | + | - |
| 14 | Time is a Thief | + | - |
| 15 | Time is Adversary | + | - |

Figure 3.1. A Summary of the CMs of Time in Vietnamese versus English lyric songs

Notes :+ : available; -: not available

3.1.1. Time is an Entity

Our experiences with physical objects provide the basis for a wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing abstract things. In this case, *Time* as entities.

Now the **half-time** air was sweet perfume
While the sergeants played a marching tune.

American Pie - Don McLean

(5) **Nửa đêm** đó lời ca dạ lan như ngai ngừng

Dấu Chân Địa Đàng - Trịnh Công Sơn

At that mid-night your singing voice sounded hesitant

Foot Trace in Heaven - Trịnh Công Sơn

3.1.2. Time is Motion

a. Of An Object

In this version, the observer is fixed and *Time* is an object moving with respect to the observer. *Time* is oriented with their fronts in their direction of motion.

(6) Well **morning comes** and you're still with her

Year of the Cat - Al Stewart

(7) All our **times** have **come**

Don't Fear the Reaper - Buck Dharm

(8) Mùa **xuân** đã **qua** rất nhanh

Mùa **thu** đã **qua** đã qua

Mùa **đông** đã **sang** đã **sang**

Bên em là biển rộng - Bảo Chấn

Spring **passed by** so quickly
 Autumn **has just gone**
 Winter is **coming**

Beside You Is an Immense Sea - Bảo Chấn

b. Time is Observer's Motion over a Landscape

Time is fixed location and the observer is moving with respect to time. Here the observer, instead of being fixed in one location, is moving.

(9) I **pass my time** with strangers

Never Say Goodbye - Jon Bon Jovi

(10) Wishing **me back to the time** when we were more than friends

25 Minutes - Richter

3.1.3. Time is Emotion

When we interact with others, it is important to let them understand our emotion or how we are feeling.

(11) **The days feel like years** when I'm alone

When you're gone - Avril Lavigne

(12) The **nights** are **lonely**

The days are so **sad**

Nobody Knows - Joe Rich

(13) Đem chôn vùi vào **ngày thật buồn**

Sầu dâng ngày tháng đón đau

Tình Phụ - Đỗ Lễ

Buried it in such a **sad day**

Sadness increases in **painful days**

Unfaithful Love - Đỗ Lễ

(14) I miss the old days

I **miss** the old **days**

That Happy Night - Ralph Stanley

(15) I **love** the **night**

There's so much I can show and give to you

I Love the Night - Roeser

(16) I can't be so **lonely**

... **Miss** the **day**

Miss the **day**

Miss the Day - Donald

(17) Sẽ qua đi ngày tháng

Ngày vui nào còn dài

Tình Khúc Buồn - Ngô Thụy Miên

Time is passing by

Happy days are still ahead

A Sad Love Story - Ngô Thụy Miên

3.1.4. Time is Actions

Time is also conceptualized by personification via actions:

(18) **Paint a picture** of the **days** gone by

When love went blind and you would make me see

I'd **stare a lifetime** into your eyes

So that I knew that you were there for me

I Remember You - Jonny Mercer

(19) Anh vẫn mơ **mùa thu hát** bên trời

... Em đi **tìm ngày tháng** cũ trong đời

Thu Khóc Trên Ngàn - Ngô Thụy Miên

I still dream of an autumn singing outdoors
 ... I'm looking for the old day's life

Crying over the Wood in Autumn - Ngô Thụy Miên

3.1.5. Time is Color

Imagine the world around us without colors, how boring and unexciting life would be.

In Vietnamese, a variety of colors are taken into use to describe *Time*.

(20) Em mãi mãi bờ cỏ dại

Xanh mượt tháng năm trẻ dại

Đánh Thức Tâm Xuân - Dương Thụ

You're forever a blade of grass

As green as the days when you're young

Awakening Flower Bud - Dương Thụ

(21) **Sen hồng** một độ

Em hồng một **thuở xuân xanh**

Đóa Hoa Vô Thường - Trịnh Công Sơn

(22) **Rosy lotus** of a time, you were rose in **your green youth**

Evanescent Bloom - Trịnh Công Sơn

3.1.6. Time is Natural Phenomena

"*Time*" is also conceptualized as natural phenomena such as rain, sun storm, gales, wind, hurricane and the like.

(23) **Bốn mùa** như **gió**

Bốn mùa như **mây**

Bốn Mùa Thay Lá - Trịnh Công Sơn

Four seasons are like **wind**

Four seasons are like **clouds**

Four Seasons Change Leaves - Trịnh Công Sơn

(24) Tình ta như **dòng sông** đã yên **ngày thác lũ**

Thơ Tình Cuối Mùa Thu - Phan Huỳnh Điểu

Our love's like **the river after a flood**

Love Letter by the of Autumn - Phan Huỳnh Điểu

3.1.7. Time is a Plant

A plant with its physical semantic characteristics including leaves, flowers, branches, sow, garden, etc. are conceptualized to bring new meanings and new ideas of *Time*.

(25) **Bốn mùa** thay **lá**, thay **hoa** thay mãi đời ta

Bên trời xanh mãi, những **nụ mầm** mới

Bốn Mùa Thay Lá - Trịnh Công Sơn

Four seasons change **leaves**, change **flowers** and change my life

The sky is ever as green as new **buds**

Four Seasons Change Leaves - Trịnh Công Sơn

(26) Hoàng hôn xuống, **chiều thắm muôn hương**

Thu Vàng - Cung Tiến

At nightfall, **evening twilight** spreads **delicate flavor**

Yellow Autumn - Cung Tiến

3.1.8. Time is Money

Terminology related to money such as *give, have, spend, set aside, need* allows us to comprehend the meaning of *Time*

(27) **Spend** all your **time** waiting for that second chance

Angel - Steven Tyler

- (28) **Hạ còn** nắng ấm, thấy lòng sao buốt giá
... Lau mắt đi em **gần hết đêm** rồi

Riêng Một Góc Trời - Ngô Thụy Miên

Summer still has warm sunshine, why I'm feeling so cold?
... Just clean your tears! Night is over

Personal Corner of Mine - Ngô Thụy Miên

3.1.9. Time is Characteristic

The characteristics such as “long”, “short” “strange”, “peculiar”, “old”, “new”, “beautiful” are commonly accompanied with *Time*.

- (29) Lovin' you whether, whether
Times are **good** or **bad**, happy or sad

Let's Stay Together - Al Green

- (30) Yêu cho biết sao **đêm dài**

Áo Ảnh – Y Vân

Love! And you know why **night** is so **long**!

Illusion – Y Vân

3.1.10. Time is a State

The concept of Time can be comprehensible through words denoting a state.

- (31) You don't have to put on the red light
Those **days** are **over**
... The only **day off** is far away

Roxanne – Sting

- (32) **Chiều thu** về đây **lạnh lẽo**

Thu Ca – Phạm Mạnh Chương

Autumn is coming - so **cold**

A Song for Autumn – Phạm Mạnh Chương

3.1.11. Time is Fire

Music composers also used the image of fire to mention *Time*.

- (33) **Burnt out** ends of **smoky days**
The still cold smell of morning
A street lamp dies, another night is over

Memory - Lloyd Webber

- (34) Vừa tàn mùa sen, **hạ cháy** trên cành

Chiều Biển Vắng Thành Thang – Việt Anh

Lotus season has just been over, **summer sets fire** on braches

Immense Deserted Sea in the Afternoon – Việt Anh

3.1.12. Time is Senses

Composers use the five senses – seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling and touching to describe the physical form of *Time*.

- (35) Watch the **day** begin again
Whispering into the **night**

Everything Will Flow - Brett Anderson

- (36) Hôm nay mùa thu đang trở về
Nhìn thu trôi tình em thêm nào nề

Thu Khóc Trên Ngàn - Ngô Thụy Miên

Today **watching autumn** passes by
I'm feeling so sad

Autumn Cries over the Woods - Ngô Thụy Miên

3.1.13. Time is a Changer

Time is also seen as something or someone that makes changes by the passing of the time.

- (37) Love will find a way oh yeah

In a **minute** it can **change** your life

One Heart - John Shanks

3.1.14. Time is a Thief

Time is conceptualized in terms of a thief who steals someone's possessions and takes them away from the owner's mind.

- (38) If the **years take away**

Every memory that I have
I would still know the way
That would lead me back to your side

A Love before Time - Jorge Calandrelli

- (39) So hold, hold me tonight

Before the **morning takes you away**

Hold Me for a While - Teijo

3.1.15. Time is an Adversary

The adversary here can be seen through the image of an enemy who is unforgivable, unkind, and who will not set us free but will get us down or trap us.

- (40) Even I never see you again

The **night** is so **unforgiving**

If I Never See You Again - Graeme Clark

- (41) Today is just another day

But it's lost without you here with me
Time's become my **enemy**

Take Back Yesterday - Christian Ingebrigtsen

3.2. Results from the Questionnaire and Interviews

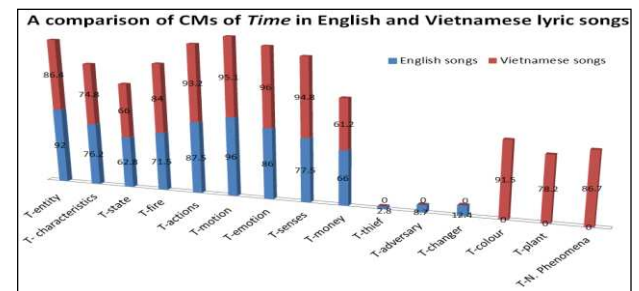


Figure 3.2.a. Responders' levels of agreement on the CMs denoting Time in English and Vietnamese lyric songs (from the Questionnaire)

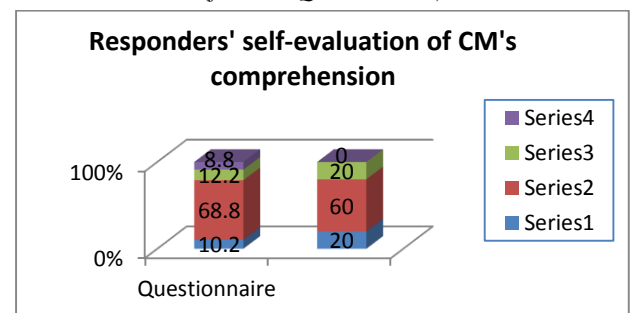


Figure 3.2.b. Responders' self-evaluation of their comprehension of CMs

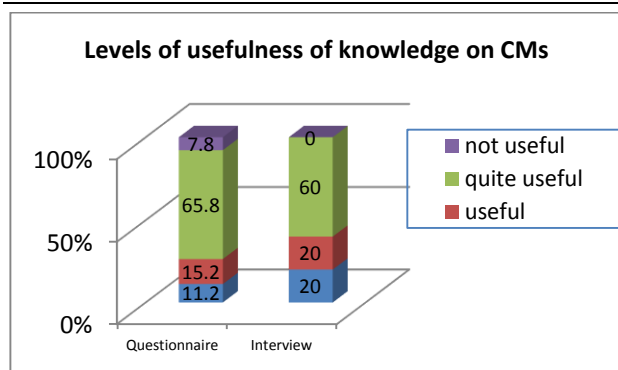


Figure 3.2.c. Responders' agreement on levels of usefulness of knowledge on CMs

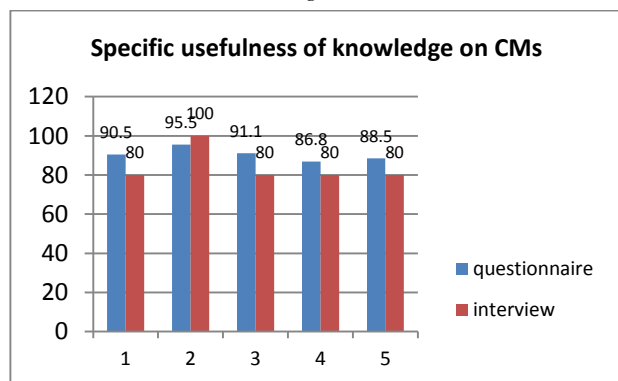


Figure 3.2.d. Responders' levels of agreement on the specific usefulness of knowledge on CMs

- Notes:
- 1: Enhance the ability to enjoy and appreciate works of art
 - 2: Improve translational skills
 - 3: Comprehend language in songs more profoundly
 - 4: Enhance knowledge on aesthetics in art
 - 5: Improve communicative skills

4. Analyzing and Discussion

4.1. Similarities in CMs of Time in English versus Vietnamese Lyric Songs

Generally speaking, there are many similarities in CMs of *Time* in lyric songs in English and Vietnamese. The mapping patterns *Time Is An Entity*, *Time Is Characteristics*, *Time Is State*, *Time Is Fire*, *Time Is Actions*, *Time Is Motion*, *Time Is Emotion*, *Time Is Senses*, and *Time Is Money* do exist in both languages. This makes us think that English and Vietnamese composers have the same way of thinking when using CMs to express *Time* in their songs.

4.2. Differences in CMs of Time in English versus Vietnamese Lyric Songs

In English lyric songs, some CMs of *Time* exist in English lyric songs whereas not present in Vietnamese ones. The data collected from various sources in the corpus and the questionnaire and interviews reveal a fact that the metaphorical mapping *Time Is a Thief*, *Time Is an Adversary*, *Time Is a Changer* do exist in English but not in Vietnamese lyric songs. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that in Vietnamese culture, when dealing with *Time*, people normally do not think a thief, an adversary or a changer have anything to do with the concept of *Time*.

On the contrary, we can find the metaphorical mappings *Time Is Color*, *Time Is a Plant* and *Time Is Natural Phenomena* are available in Vietnamese but not in English lyric songs. Results from the questionnaire and the interviews also reflect that Vietnamese people have a tendency to imagine the world around us with colors. Additionally, since Vietnam is a tropical country and agriculture plays an important and significant role in real life, Vietnamese people often explain everything around them in correlation with nature. Moreover, the natural phenomena also affect the development of plants since plants provide an inexhaustible source of materials. All these causes have a strong influence on their way of thinking about *Time*.

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Conclusions

In short, when dealing with the concept of *Time*, Vietnamese composers have a tendency to use CMs *Time Is Color*, *Time Is a Plant*, and *Time Is Natural Phenomena* to express their ideas whereas English composers use CMs *Time Is a Thief*, *Time Is an Adversary*, *Time Is a Changer* to denote the notion of *Time*.

In addition, in reality, CMs have not been paid much attention to in teaching and learning English. The reason is that we have concentrated much on traditional metaphors with literal meanings. Nowadays, modern methodology has a tendency to use metaphorical mappings to explain the complex concepts in teaching and learning. These mappings are cognitive, not linguistic. CMs allow us to shed insights into the abstract meanings of the given concepts.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. For Language Teachers and Language Learners

When Vietnamese learners come across a metaphorical word, they often deduce this metaphorical meaning if they know its literal meaning but seldom use their knowledge on CMs to understand the metaphorical expressions. In addition, Asian learners might think differently as compared to Western learners. Perhaps their knowledge on CMs is not sufficient to understand the CMs which are pervasive in English. To solve this problem, besides teaching the meaning and usage of the words, teachers should guide students to think in English and to help them establish a conceptual system of the target language. The main tasks for teachers are (i) asking students to judge themselves whether a metaphorical expression is appropriate or not by consciously referring to those CMs; and (ii) practicing frequently in class to help students use these conceptual expressions consciously to produce natural English.

Cultural awareness is extremely important in intercultural communication. Teachers should conduct class activities in which traditions, customs, beliefs, and social development can be discussed from different perspectives and/or contrasted and compared to other cultures. They should focus on using conceptual expressions in their teaching process. As with learners, results from the questionnaire and interviews proved that

being aware of or having knowledge on CMs in general, and CMs denoting *Time* in particular, might help them enhance their communicative skills.

5.2.2. For Translators and Interpreters

The phenomenon of metaphor has regularly been a concern to translation scholars who have argued about problems of transferring metaphors from one language and culture into another. The outcome of this study can contribute new insights into translation as well as interpretation in terms of taking cultural aspect into consideration. Hence, cultural dimension in CMs might help translators broaden their viewpoints, accept other cultures and improve their translation skills.

5.2.3. For Music Fans

CMs are also implied in songs, thus listeners could appreciate and enjoy not only the beauty of language in songs but also the images in music world. These images do not exist on the surface of the language but take place in listeners' mind.

Enjoying songs not only means enjoying their melody but also appreciating their lyric, comprehending the situation in which they were composed, especially what the composers want to communicate with the listeners via CMs. In this sense, having knowledge on CMs in general, and CMs of *Time* in particular, might help them enhance their critical thinking skills and cross-cultural communicative skills. And since they have a profound understanding on words and images in CMs, they might enhance their knowledge on aesthetics in art as well.

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