

# Exploring Linguistic Synaesthesia in a Vietnamese Songwriter's Love Letters

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## Abstract

Synaesthesia has been a research interest from various disciplines, including linguistics. This study examines how synaesthetic metaphors work in the Vietnamese language and what language universality and relativity can be explained based on this. A collection of 300 love letters written by Trinh Cong Son, a well-known figure in Vietnamese music and songwriting, from 1964 to 2001, was the dataset of this study. The directionality and hierarchy of senses Ullmann (1957), Williams (1976), and Lien (1994) serve as the theoretical framework. The findings show that there are (1) distinct synaesthetic mappings, with *dimension* being the most prevalent source domain, (2) *sound* being the most prevalent destination domain, and (3) reciprocal transfers between *dimension* and *emotion*, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between sensory experience and language. The result validates Ullmann's (1957) hierarchy of senses, where lower senses act as foundational domains for higher senses. Nevertheless, significant disparities are seen in relation to prior studies. The differences can be ascribed to the variation in language and culture, highlighting the necessity for more cross-linguistic investigation to comprehensively grasp the subtleties of synaesthetic language.

**Keywords:** Linguistic synaesthesia, Vietnamese, love letters, hierarchy of senses, directionality

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## 越南知名音樂人其情書中的語言共感詞

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### 摘 要

共感是熱門的跨領域研究主題，卻在越南語的語言學研究上寥寥可數。本文聚焦於越南語中的共感詞隱喻，用以探討語言的普遍性和相對性。語料乃收集自越南知名音樂人 Trinh Cong Son 在 1964 年至 2001 年間寫的 300 封情書。Ullmann (1957)、Williams (1976) 和 Lien (1994) 的共感方向性和層次性是為研究的理論架構。我們的研究問題有：a). 共感隱喻如何在這位越南詞曲創作者的情書中發揮作用？b). 所呈現的共感詞可以解釋怎樣的語言相對性與普遍性？。研究結果顯示：(1) 在多樣的聯覺映射中，空間容積是最普遍的來源域；(2) 聲音是最常見的目標域；(3) 空間與情感之間存在著相互傳遞，強調感知經驗與語言之間的動態互動。我們的研究結果驗證了 Ullmann (1957) 的感官層次結構，較低的感官是較高感官的基礎域。最後，與其他語言的研究相比，越南語有著顯著的語言差異性，這些差異可以歸因於語言文化的因素。不同語言的相關研究能突顯共感在語言裡的微妙運用。

**關鍵字：**共感詞彙、越南語、情書、感知層次、共感方向性

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