



The phenomenon of semantic field shift of “wind” in the poetry of Luu Quang Vu

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Abstract

This article investigates the phenomenon of semantic field shift of the word “wind” in Luu Quang Vŭ’s poetry based on semantic field theory, aiming to clarify its role in artistic expression. Using corpus analysis combined with statistical and descriptive methods, the study examines occurrences of “wind” to identify patterns of semantic shift. The findings show that “wind” possesses a diverse semantic structure and frequently shifts into other semantic domains, most notably the human domain, as well as the domains of objects and animals. These shifts are primarily realized through metaphor and metonymy, enabling “wind” to embody human actions, emotions, and sensations while generating highly symbolic imagery. The study thus concludes that semantic field shift significantly enhances the expressive capacity of poetic language, reflects Luu Quang Vŭ’s highly associative creative style, and underscores the important role of semantic field theory in literary linguistic analysis.

Keywords: Semantic field, semantic shift, wind, metaphor, poetic language, Luu Quang Vu

Introduction

In modern lexical studies, the phenomenon of semantic field shift is regarded as one of the most dynamic and expressive mechanisms of language. When words are placed in collocational relationships that extend beyond their familiar semantic fields, new layers of meaning are activated, enriching emotional nuance, imagery, and the depth of artistic thought. Therefore, semantic field shift is not only a noteworthy linguistic phenomenon but also a crucial key to approaching an author’s artistic world, especially in literary works. Examining this phenomenon not only helps clarify individual stylistic features but also holds practical significance for innovating the teaching of literature in schools, particularly in fostering students’ capacities for aesthetic appreciation and analysis of artistic language.

In modern Vietnamese poetry, Luu Quang Vŭ stands out as a distinctive figure, both as a poet and as a playwright and writer of considerable influence. His poetry bears the imprint of a sensitive soul, constantly yearning to engage with life while persistently reflecting on human and social issues. With more than 170 poems spanning a wide range of themes, his works reveal a rich emotional world: from the passionate tremors of romantic love to poignant reflections on human fate and the destiny of the nation. Notably, his poetic language is highly evocative and expressive, frequently featuring novel word combinations that generate unique associations and profound layers of meaning.

A close examination shows that one of the prominent techniques in Luu Quang Vŭ’s poetry is the organization of word combinations that transcend conventional semantic boundaries, thereby creating forms of semantic field shift rich in aesthetic value. Within this system, the word “wind” appears with notable frequency and is employed as a flexible semantic anchor. It not only retains its concrete, natural meaning but also transforms into a multidimensional symbol of emotion, time, memory, and human condition. Studying the semantic field shift of the word “wind” in Luu Quang Vŭ’s poetry thus helps illuminate the mechanisms of meaning-making and the expressive value of language in poetic contexts, while also contributing to the identification of the poet’s distinctive linguistic style and artistic world.

Based on these considerations, this paper focuses on surveying and analyzing the phenomenon of semantic field shift of the word “wind” in Luu Quang Vŭ’s poetry, thereby clarifying its role in constructing artistic imagery and expressing the poet’s thoughts and emotions.

Content

1. Semantic Fields and the Phenomenon of Semantic Field Shift

In modern linguistic research, the theory of semantic fields plays a crucial role in explaining the structure and dynamics of vocabulary. Any discussion of semantic fields must acknowledge the contributions of the German linguists Jost Trier and Leo Weisgerber. According to J. Trier, the lexicon of a language does not exist as isolated units but is always organized into “fields,” and “the value of a word is determined by its relations with other words within the same field.” This perspective highlights the systemic nature of vocabulary: a word can only be fully understood when placed within a network of relationships with other units in the same semantic field. In other words, word meaning is not a fixed entity but is established through opposition, similarity, and association with other words.

Building on this viewpoint, L. Weisgerber argues that the study of semantic fields must take into account the different “perspectives” through which humans perceive the world. According to him, the interaction among these perspectives gives rise to the process of “linguistic shaping” of domains of life. For instance, when examining lexical fields related to sin or disability, it is necessary to consider multiple dimensions, such as degrees of responsibility or violated norms. The intersection of these criteria generates distinct lexical units, reflecting how humans perceive and categorize reality. Thus, a semantic field is not merely a collection of words but also the result of cognitive and cultural processes in structuring reality.

Based on these theoretical foundations, a semantic field (or lexical-semantic field) can be understood as a subsystem within the vocabulary, consisting of words that share at least one common semantic feature. In Vietnam, scholars such as Đỗ Hữu Châu, Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, and Bùi Minh Toán

have adopted and further developed this theory. Đỗ Hữu Châu defines a semantic field as “each semantic subsystem, that is, a set of words unified by at least one shared semantic feature.”^[2] This definition has provided an important foundation for subsequent studies of Vietnamese vocabulary.

One notable phenomenon in the dynamics of semantic fields is semantic field shift. This refers to the process in which “a word belonging to one conceptual field is transferred to denote entities in another conceptual field.” In actual language use, vocabulary is constantly evolving; words not only retain their original meanings but also develop new referential meanings. Such changes entail shifts in conceptual meaning, thereby forming the basis for semantic transfer and semantic field shift. When a word moves into a new semantic field, its denotational content changes while still maintaining a certain connection with its original meaning. For example, the word “eye” initially belongs to the semantic field of body parts (human eyes, cat’s eyes), but through semantic shift, it can refer to parts of plants (pineapple “eyes,” sugarcane “eyes”) or components of tools (mesh “eyes,” chain links). Thus, the word “eye” moves across different semantic fields based on similarities in form or function.

In terms of mechanisms, semantic field shift is primarily realized through two fundamental processes: metaphor and metonymy. According to Đỗ Hữu Châu, metaphor involves a transfer of meaning based on similarity between entities or phenomena. It can be classified into various types, such as formal metaphor (e.g., “ship’s nose,” “mountain foot”), positional metaphor (e.g., “alley head,” “mountain peak”), manner metaphor (e.g., “grasping psychology”), functional metaphor (e.g., “bus station,” “ferry terminal”), and resultative metaphor (e.g., “bitter voice”). In contrast, metonymy is based on contiguity or close association between entities, such as part–whole relations (e.g., “mouths to feed”), container–contained relations (e.g., “the whole village”), or attribute–entity relations (e.g., “Hanoi beer”).

The phenomenon of semantic field shift plays a significant role in enriching vocabulary and enhancing the expressive capacity of language. When a word enters a new semantic field, it becomes polysemous, acquiring additional layers of meaning while retaining a connection to its original sense. This process fosters flexibility and creativity in language use. For instance, in Luu Quang Vū’s poetry, the phrase “mad wind” not only describes a natural phenomenon but also evokes intensity and violence, while simultaneously conveying an extreme emotional state of human experience. Notably, when undergoing semantic field shift, a word simultaneously bears the imprint of the new semantic field and preserves elements of its original field. This “resonance” creates semantic depth and expressive value. However, to interpret such meanings accurately, language users must draw on their linguistic knowledge and cultural experience to decode the intersection of semantic fields. In this way, language functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium for reflecting thought, culture, and human perception of the world.

2. The Semantic Field of “Wind” in the Poetry of Luu Quang Vu

Within the system of natural imagery in Luu Quang Vu’s poetry, “wind” emerges as a highly evocative semantic field that is at once a physical phenomenon and a medium for expressing the lyrical subject’s emotions and artistic

thought. In essence, wind consists of large-scale movements of air determined by speed and direction. However, in poetry, wind is no longer merely a natural phenomenon; it becomes a symbolic image that conveys inner vibrations, as well as reflections on time, space, and human existence.

The semantic field of “wind” in Luu Quang Vu’s poetry can be divided into the following basic subfields:

The subfield of naming includes lexical items associated with origin, spatial context, and geographical characteristics, such as Lao wind, monsoon, sea breeze, continental wind, heo may (light autumn wind), and northeasterly wind. These terms not only denote natural phenomena but also evoke specific cultural–climatic spaces, thereby adding realism and expressive nuance to poetic imagery.

The subfield of states and characteristics of wind includes words such as hot, cold, biting, freezing, fierce, cool, and harsh. This layer of vocabulary concretizes sensory experience, making wind perceptible and capable of directly affecting human emotions. Wind is no longer neutral but takes on psychological shades: at times violent and severe, at others gentle and soothing.

The subfield of activities and movement of wind encompasses verbs such as blow, lash, sweep, buffet, rise, shift, howl, swirl, shake, jerk, fly, roll, and surge. This diversity reflects the poet’s keen observation of subtle natural changes. At the same time, these dynamic expressions are often personified, giving wind the qualities of a living being—capable of “howling,” “jerking,” “shaking,” or “lashing”—as manifestations of intense emotional states.

The subfield of variants of wind includes the notion of air as a related conceptual extension.

Among these four subfields, the lexical group denoting activities and movement predominates in both quantity and expressive value. This suggests that, in Luu Quang Vu’s artistic perception, wind is прежде всего a process—a constantly shifting flow. It is precisely this ceaseless movement that renders the image of wind flexible, expressive, and readily aligned with transformations in inner life. Notably, wind in his poetry is frequently personified, becoming a “subject” with its own existence: at times intimate like a kindred companion, at others distant like an invisible force. Wind may carry sorrow, loneliness, aspiration, or even foreboding.

Thus, the semantic field of “wind” in Luu Quang Vu’s poetry is an open, multilayered, and dynamic semantic structure. From a natural phenomenon, wind is elevated into an artistic image rich in symbolic depth, contributing to a poetic style that is emotionally charged, contemplative, and deeply attuned to the subtle fluctuations of human experience.

3. The Phenomenon of Semantic Field Shift from the Semantic Field of “Wind” to Other Fields

A survey of the corpus reveals that the semantic field of “wind” in Luu Quang Vū’s poetry is rich and diverse, and is frequently extended into other semantic domains such as those of humans, objects, and animals. This phenomenon of semantic field shift not only reflects the poet’s individual linguistic creativity but also contributes to expressing the depth of his artistic thinking.

Table 1: Statistical Overview of Semantic Field Shifts from the Field of “Wind” to Other Fields

No.	Type of Semantic Field Shift	Number of Lexical Items	Number of Occurrences	Frequency (%)	Example
1	From “wind” to the human domain	28	39	90.69	“The brown top spins on the empty pavement / The thin sparrow sings innocently in the wind” (Lullaby)
2	From “wind” to the object domain	3	3	6.98	“Afternoon sunlight on the treetops / Wind piles up, white dust flying” (Lullaby)
3	From “wind” to the animal domain	1	1	2.33	“I wait for you, white shirt of school days, wind flying” (Em III)

The statistical results indicate that shifts from the semantic field of “wind” to the human domain overwhelmingly dominate, with 39 occurrences (90.69%), while shifts to the domain of objects appear only 3 times (6.98%), and to the animal domain just once (2.33%). This disparity is not incidental but reflects a clear aesthetic tendency: the poet employs “wind” as a means of personifying and psychologizing the natural world, thereby expressing the subtle states of human life. In other words, “wind” becomes a “humanized subject,” enabling the poet to convey emotions, inner reflections, and contemplations on existence.

3.1 The Shift from the Semantic Field of “Wind” to the Human Domain

In Luru Quang Vũ’s poetry, the shift from the semantic field of “wind” to that of the human domain occurs across multiple dimensions: actions, states, emotions, and sensations.

At the level of action, “wind” is often combined with verbs that typically denote human behaviors such as breathe, sing, chase, and shake, thereby creating a strong effect of personification. For example:

Example 1:

“Oh, is it the dragon rising over Thăng Long?
The heart of the nation—wind breathing in pulsations”
(Flights)

Here, the verb “breathe,” a physiological activity of humans, is attributed to “wind,” producing a striking personification. “Breathing wind” not only evokes the movement of air but also symbolizes the vibrant rhythm of the “nation’s heart.” Nature thus merges with humanity, embodying vitality and the spirit of the nation.

Example 2:

“The brown spinning top turns on the empty pavement,
The thin sparrow sings innocently in the wind”
(Lullaby)

The verb “sing” is an intentional act typically associated with humans. When combined with “wind,” it creates a poetic space in which wind becomes a medium carrying sound and emotion. “Wind singing” softens the atmosphere, evoking innocence and purity.

Example 3:

“The fierce wind of the harsh old forest,
So many dreams the wind drives into the past”
(Love Poem about an Unnamed Woman III)

The verb “drive” implies a deliberate and forceful action. When performed by “wind,” it becomes an invisible yet powerful force sweeping away the past. In this sense, “wind” acquires symbolic meaning, representing time or the upheavals of life.

Beyond actions, the shift of “wind” into the semantic field of human states, emotions, and sensations is a typical manifestation of the tendency to personify and psychologize nature. Through combinations with adjectives and expressions belonging to the inner world, the poet transforms an inanimate phenomenon into an emotionally charged subject, thereby reflecting the depth of human spiritual life.

At the level of states and emotions, “wind” is frequently associated with words expressing human psychology, generating subjective and evocative associations. In the verse:

“Our hearts are as beautiful as the homeland,
Like joyful wind dropping leaves from branches”
(Awakening with the Homeland)

The adjective “joyful,” belonging to the field of human emotion, modifies “wind.” Here, “joyful wind” not only suggests a gentle breeze but also conveys a buoyant, life-loving state of mind. Nature thus becomes a mirror reflecting human emotion, imbued with a clear subjective coloring.

Similarly, in the line:

“Only at times, yet truly terrifying,
Like mad wind, like water breaking the banks”
(The One with Me)

The word “mad”—an extreme psychological state—is attributed to “wind,” emphasizing its violent and uncontrollable nature. At the same time, this image reflects intense inner turbulence. “Mad wind” thus functions not only as a description of nature but also as a metaphor for emotional upheaval.

Particularly noteworthy is the line:

“The restless wind calls back familiar footsteps,
You are like my moment, like my form, like my memory”
(You Are Absent)

“Restless” is a subtle psychological state associated with longing and anticipation. When combined with “wind,” the natural element is personified into a subject capable of “calling back.” Wind is no longer inanimate but becomes an agent that awakens memories and stirs deep emotional resonances.

In addition to expressing states and emotions, “wind” is also extended into the domain of human sensations, especially those related to temperature. In the verse:

“Water laps against the boat in surging waves,
White sails swell with sunlight and cool wind”
(Crossing the Thuong River)

“Cool” refers to a pleasant sensory experience when humans interact with the environment. “Cool wind” not only describes a physical property but also evokes a sense of relaxation and inner peace, creating a lyrical atmosphere. Conversely, in the line:

“Who returns to Vũ Ân, Thanh Cù?
Cold wind blows along the devastated road”
(District Town)

The word “cold” conveys not only temperature but also emotional nuances such as loneliness and harshness. “Cold wind” thus carries a dual function: both descriptive and expressive, contributing to the depiction of a desolate and melancholic space.

At a more intense level, the line:

“Rough and narrow paths,
Endless bamboo hedges in biting wind”
(The Roads)

Uses “biting cold” to intensify the sensation of coldness. “Biting wind” not only highlights the severity of nature but also evokes associations with hardship and deprivation, thereby deepening the expressive value of the image. Beyond tactile sensation, “wind” is even extended into the domain of taste, as in:

“We are the children
Of a peninsula of showers and salty wind”
(Song on the Peninsula)

“Salty” is an adjective belonging to the gustatory domain, typically used to describe taste (salt, seawater). However, in the collocation “salty wind,” it is attributed to wind—an entity that inherently lacks taste. This is an instance of synesthesia, where sensory domains are blended in perception and expression. As a result, “wind” is not only felt through touch (cool, cold, hot) but also through taste, making the image more multidimensional and evocative. “Salty wind” not only suggests the maritime environment but also evokes the saltiness of sweat and labor, thereby expanding the symbolic meaning of the image.

3.2 The Shift from the Semantic Field of “Wind” to the Object Domain

In addition to its tendency to shift into the human domain, “wind” in Luru Quang Vũ’s poetry is also extended into the domain of objects, forming image clusters rich in visuality and spatial suggestiveness. At this level, “wind” is no longer merely a phenomenon of moving air but becomes a constitutive element of imagery, contributing to the identification and characterization of objects.

First, in the lines:

“Those hands that shelter and preserve
I thank you, you from a land of wind and sand”
(And I Exist),

The collocation “wind and sand” combines two natural elements typically associated with harsh environments. Semantically, “wind” does not stand independently but merges with “sand,” highlighting the dryness and severity of the living environment. However, the value of this image goes beyond mere description. The “land of wind and sand”

also functions symbolically, representing spaces marked by hardship and adversity. When associated with the pronoun “you,” the image further contributes to portraying the origin and character of the lyrical subject: a person forged in difficulty, embodying endurance, resilience, and inner strength. Thus, “wind” participates in the symbolic construction of objects, rendering the image both concrete and conceptually profound. Similarly, in the line:

“Uneven sand mounds, dense thorny fences,
Narrow strips of land—summer’s wind of fire”
(The Storm)

The combination “wind of fire” intensifies the expressive power of the image. “Fire,” inherently associated with heat and intensity, when combined with “wind,” creates a highly emphatic image. “Wind” is no longer an ordinary current of air but becomes “fiery wind,” a scorching force that evokes the suffocating harshness of summer. At the same time, this image can be interpreted metaphorically: “wind of fire” symbolizes violent upheavals in living conditions, the severe challenges that humans must confront. Through its association with “fire,” “wind” is thus materialized to a high degree, becoming an element charged with emotional weight and symbolic meaning.

In the lines:

“Afternoon sunlight on the treetops,
Wind piling up, white dust flying”
(Lullaby)

“Wind” is placed in direct relation with a concrete object—“dust.” Here, it functions as a physical agent that sets “dust” in motion (“flying”), thereby creating a dynamic image. Notably, the combination of “wind,” “piling,” and “white dust” evokes a vivid visual space: a dry landscape, possibly coastal or sandy, where strong winds sweep up clouds of pale dust. In this case, “wind” both retains its literal meaning and participates in the construction of artistic space, enhancing the visual and evocative qualities of the verse. The image is not only seen but also sensorially experienced through movement and tonal nuance.

From these analyses, it can be seen that the extension of the semantic field of “wind” into the domain of objects enriches the system of imagery in Luru Quang Vũ’s poetry. “Wind” no longer exists solely as a natural element but actively participates in the process of meaning-making—at times highlighting the properties of objects, at others evoking associations of movement, space, and emotion. Through such semantic shifts, “wind” becomes a polyvalent artistic device: concrete and vividly pictorial, *yet also* imbued with symbolic depth. In this way, the poet not only recreates the external world but also conveys subtle reflections on life and human experience.

3.3 The Shift from the Semantic Field of “Wind” to the Animal Domain

Beyond the object domain, “wind” in Luru Quang Vũ’s poetry also intersects with the semantic field of animals. Although less frequent, this shift still demonstrates the flexibility of his linguistic imagination. In the lines:

“I wait for you, white shirt,
Schooldays—wind flying”
(Em III),

The verb “fly” is typically associated with the characteristic activity of animals, especially birds. When combined with “wind,” it not only describes physical movement but also evokes lightness and grace. “Flying wind” lends the image of the “white shirt”—a symbol of schooldays—a sense of softness and vitality, as if moving gently through space. Here, “wind” serves as an intermediary, bridging humans and the animal world through the shared feature of movement. At the same time, the image carries symbolic meaning: “flying wind” suggests the flow of time and the fragility and purity of youth.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it can be affirmed that “wind” in Lư Quang Vũ’s poetry is not merely a natural phenomenon but has evolved into a richly polysemous artistic image. The word “wind” is flexibly extended into multiple semantic fields, most prominently the human domain, as well as the domains of objects and animals. These semantic shifts are primarily grounded in the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy, through which “wind” is personified, emotionalized, and concretized. As a result, it not only reflects the external world but also subtly expresses human psychological states, emotions, and lived experiences.

This phenomenon contributes to enriching the vocabulary, enhancing imagery, emotional resonance, and the expressive power of poetic language. At the same time, it reveals Lư Quang Vũ’s highly associative creative style, as well as the significant role of semantic field theory in approaching and interpreting literary language.

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