

**THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION**

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**GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR
IN VIETNAMESE CHILDREN'S FICTION**

Field: Linguistics

Code: 9229020

**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
IN LINGUISTICS**

Da Nang - 2026

This dissertation was completed at
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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The dissertation will be defended before the Dissertation Evaluation Council convened at the University of Education – The University of Danang on , 2026.

This dissertation is available for reference at:

- The National Library of Vietnam;
- The Library of the University of Education – The University of Danang.

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for the Research Topic

Within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) developed by Halliday, “grammatical metaphor” (GM) was formally introduced in 1985 to account for the way language restructures meaning through incongruence between the semantic stratum and the lexicogrammatical stratum. This entire theoretical system was built on the basis of English – an inflectional language – whereas Vietnamese is an isolating language with no morphological inflection, and therefore must realize GM through different means. To date, no study in Vietnam has yet constructed an analytical framework for GM that is specific, systematic, and comprehensive for Vietnamese.

Vietnamese children's fiction (VCF) is a valuable corpus domain for investigating GM: the language of VCF is simple yet structurally rich, and it further includes a distinctive body of work written by children themselves – a source that naturally reflects children's process of language acquisition. Because the readership of VCF is still at a formative stage of language development, correctly identifying GM in the works children encounter daily has practical significance for teaching reading comprehension and creative writing. Meanwhile, previous studies of Vietnamese children's literature have focused mainly on literary criticism, poetics, or traditional rhetorical metaphor, and no study has systematically examined GM across all three metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal, and textual – in Vietnamese VCF from an SFG perspective. Given the convergence of this theoretical gap, the rich presence of GM in VCF, and the practical needs of teaching, criticism, and creative writing, the dissertation has selected the topic “Grammatical Metaphor in Vietnamese Children's Fiction.”

2. Research Aims and Tasks

2.1. Research Aim

To construct a set of criteria for identifying GM in Vietnamese, to clarify the distributional patterns and modes of expression of the various types of GM in VCF, and to demonstrate how GM enhances the effectiveness of conveying ideas and constructing an artistic world suited to children's psychology, thereby providing a basis for

application in the research, teaching, and criticism of Vietnamese VCF.

2.2. Research Tasks

- To synthesize and systematize SFG theory on GM;
- To construct an analytical framework and a set of criteria for identifying the three types of GM (ideational, interpersonal, textual) suited to Vietnamese;
- To build a corpus and to identify, tabulate, and classify instances according to the established criteria;
- To analyze and generalize the operating mechanisms, distributional patterns, expressive value, and aesthetic functions of GM;
- To compare the use of GM between the two groups of authors: adults and children.

3. Research Object and Scope

3.1. Research Object

The modes of GM realization occurring in modern Vietnamese VCF works, focusing on three types: ideational GM (experiential metafunction), interpersonal GM (interpersonal metafunction – Halliday), and textual GM (textual metafunction – Martin).

3.2. Research Scope

Regarding the corpus: modern VCF (short stories and novels), covering both stories written by adults for children (Tô Hoài, Đoàn Giỏi, Võ Quảng, Nguyễn Nhật Ánh, etc.) and stories written by children themselves (drawn mainly from the “Đóa hoa đồng thoại” [Fairy-Tale Blossom] collection), spanning the period from the 1940s to the present. The total corpus comprises 234 works, from which 1,677 representative GM instances were surveyed, analyzed, and selected.

Regarding content: ideational GM comprises nominalization and de-nominalization; interpersonal GM comprises modal metaphor (subjective, consensual, objective) and mood metaphor (interrogative, declarative, exclamative, imperative); textual GM comprises four modes of expression following Martin's framework.

4. Research Questions

- How are ideational and interpersonal GM (Halliday) and textual GM (Martin) applied in a manner consistent with the isolating typological features of Vietnamese in modern Vietnamese VCF?
- According to what criteria is ideational GM established in Vietnamese VCF, through what modes is it realized, and what artistic value does it achieve?
- According to what criteria is interpersonal GM established in Vietnamese VCF, through what modes is it realized, and what artistic value does it achieve?
- According to what criteria is textual GM established in Vietnamese VCF, through what modes is it realized, and what artistic value does it achieve?

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Approach

The dissertation combines a quantitative approach (tabulating the frequency and percentage of each type of GM relative to the total sample, and establishing distributional patterns) with a qualitative approach (explaining the meaning-making mechanisms and aesthetic value), thereby ensuring that the research avoids both mechanical enumeration of figures and unfounded, impressionistic interpretation.

5.2. Methods and Techniques

Data collection and processing were carried out manually, stratified by two groups of authors (adults writing for children and children writing for themselves), with the reading/identification unit and the statistical unit determined according to each metafunction (the clause for ideational and interpersonal GM; the sentence sequence/paragraph for textual GM). The linguistic description method was implemented on two levels: the surface level (identification, structural segmentation, and classification by formal criteria) and the depth level (functional-semantic analysis and explanation of artistic effect). These were combined with techniques of statistics, classification, systematization, and comparison (horizontal axis – comparing the metaphorical expression with its congruent expression; vertical axis – comparing the two groups of authors).

5.3. Research Steps

The procedure comprises six steps: (1) establishing criteria for identifying GM; (2) detecting and coding GM expressions in the corpus; (3) converting them into their congruent expressions; (4) analyzing and comparing structures; (5) explaining their value and artistic significance; (6) analyzing the context of use.

6. Contributions of the Dissertation

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

It extends the scope of application of GM theory to the genre of literary texts for children, demonstrating that GM operates not only in abstract discourse but also in children's literature. It constructs a set of criteria for identifying and classifying GM suited to the typological features of Vietnamese, integrating and adapting the four principles RSP, SJP, FRP, and MPP of Yang and of Li & Yang, which may serve as a basis for comparative studies across isolating languages.

6.2. Practical Contributions

The research findings can be applied to the teaching and study of GM and Vietnamese VCF from an SFG perspective, serving the reform of Vietnamese language instruction toward competency-based development in line with the spirit of the 2018 General Education Curriculum; the results have been published in specialized scientific journals.

7. Structure of the Dissertation

In addition to the Introduction and Conclusion, the dissertation comprises four chapters: Chapter 1 – Overview of Research and Theoretical Basis; Chapter 2 – Ideational Grammatical Metaphor in Vietnamese Children's Fiction; Chapter 3 – Interpersonal Grammatical Metaphor in Vietnamese Children's Fiction; Chapter 4 – Textual Grammatical Metaphor in Vietnamese Children's Fiction.

CHAPTER 1 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BASIS

1.1. Overview of Research

Internationally, GM was formally introduced by Halliday in 1985 and further developed by Matthiessen, Ravelli, Derewianka, and, notably, Martin, who separated textual GM into a distinct type alongside ideational and interpersonal GM. In Vietnam, SFG was first introduced through the work of Hoàng Văn Vân, Diệp Quang Ban, and others, but no study has yet constructed a systematic and comprehensive analytical framework for GM in Vietnamese, particularly in the field of children's literature. Studies of Vietnamese children's literature (Vân Thanh, Bùi Thanh Truyền, Lê Thị Bắc Lý, etc.) have focused mainly on literary criticism, poetics, or traditional rhetorical metaphor, without systematically examining GM.

1.2. Theoretical Basis of Grammatical Metaphor

The dissertation systematizes the congruent/incongruent realization dichotomy, the concept of GM, and the classification of the three types of GM (ideational, interpersonal, textual) corresponding to the three language metafunctions. To address the problem of transferring the theory to an isolating language, the dissertation applies and adapts Li & Yang's (2024) four-principle system for identifying nominalization metaphor:

- RSP (Rank Shift Principle);
- SJP (Semantic Junction Principle);
- FRP (Full Realization Principle);
- MPP (Morphological Priority Principle).

Because Vietnamese lacks derivational suffixes as in English (-tion, -ness, -ment, etc.), the dissertation establishes the functional equivalent of MPP in Vietnamese through dedicated nominalizing elements (sự, cái, cuộc, nỗi, niềm, điều, etc.) combined with quantifying elements (một, những, các, etc.) – this constitutes the specific lexicogrammatical “resource” that creates ideational GM in Vietnamese. The dissertation also clarifies the question of “mood” in Vietnamese (through function words and modal particles) and the cohesive resources of textual connection that underlie interpersonal and textual GM.

1.3. Overview of Vietnamese Children's Literature

Vietnamese children's literature emerged in the 1920s and developed into an independent branch from the 1940s onward, with prominent “pillar” figures such as Tô Hoài (fable-tales, notably *Dế Mèn phiêu lưu ký* [The Diary of a Cricket]), Võ Quảng (revolutionary novels, fable-tales), and Phạm Hổ (who founded the “modern fairy-tale” genre). After 1975 and during the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) period, the community of writers expanded to include Nguyễn Nhật Ánh, Nguyễn Ngọc Thuần, and others, marking a shift from epic inspiration toward exploring children's inner emotional world.

1.4. The Dissertation's Standpoint

The dissertation applies Halliday's theory to examine nominalization/de-nominalization (ideational GM) and modal metaphor/mood metaphor (interpersonal GM, distinguished from genuine interrogative mood); and applies Martin's framework to examine the four modes of textual GM expression (Text Reference – TR, Metamessage Relations – MR, Internal Text Conjunction – ITC, Negotiatory Text Structuring – NTS), situated in relation to the isolating typological features of Vietnamese.

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 accomplishes three foundational tasks: identifying the research gap (GM theory has not yet been systematized for Vietnamese; Vietnamese VCF has not yet been examined from a GM perspective); constructing an integrated theoretical framework comprising the classification system for the three types of GM, the congruent/incongruent dichotomy operationalized through the four principles RSP–SJP–FRP–MPP, and the Vietnamese-specific “resources” that create GM; and establishing the analytical standpoint that underlies the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2 IDEATIONAL GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR IN VIETNAMESE CHILDREN'S FICTION

2.1. Statistics and Classification of Ideational GM

The criteria for identifying ideational GM are constructed on three groups: (a) incongruence between the semantic stratum and the lexicogrammatical stratum (linked to RSP and SJP); (b) the role of dedicated nominalizing elements and quantifying elements (linked to MPP); (c) the capacity for conversion into congruent expression (linked to FRP). The results of a survey of 952 instances of ideational GM from 234 works are summarized as follows:

Table: Survey Results of Ideational GM in Vietnamese Children's Fiction

Mode	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Process nominalization	412	43
Quality nominalization	215	23
Total nominalization	627	66
Quality de-nominalization	198	21
Process de-nominalization	127	13
Total de-nominalization	325	34
Total	952	100

Nominalization is overwhelmingly dominant (66%, nearly twice that of de-nominalization), reflecting a tendency to “objectify” abstract processes and qualities into perceptible entities – consistent with children's concrete, image-based thinking. Within the nominalization group, process nominalization (43%) exceeds quality nominalization (23%), reflecting the narrative character of the genre. Within the de-nominalization group, quality de-nominalization (21%) exceeds process de-nominalization (13%).

2.2. Modes of Expression of Ideational GM

Process nominalization and quality nominalization employ dedicated Vietnamese nominalizing elements (sự, cái, cuộc, nỗi, niềm,

điều, etc.) combined with quantifying elements to place a process/quality into a nominal syntactic slot. Process de-nominalization and quality de-nominalization create the reverse direction of conversion, contributing to a livelier and more flexible narrative rhythm.

Chapter 2 Summary

Ideational GM produces four systematic aesthetic effects in VCF: (1) conciseness and information integration; (2) imagery and evocative power – objectifying abstract concepts in a manner suited to children's concrete thinking; (3) the capacity to adjust informational focus and narrative point of view; (4) the creation of rhythm and appeal in the prose. Both groups of authors (adults and children) make full use of nominalization/de-nominalization; the main difference lies in the degree of syntactic complexity and artistic deliberateness – for adults it is a conscious stylistic strategy, while for children it is natural and intuitive, reflecting the process of internalizing Vietnamese grammar.

CHAPTER 3 INTERPERSONAL GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR IN VIETNAMESE CHILDREN'S FICTION

3.1. Statistics and Classification of Interpersonal GM

Interpersonal GM is identified through deliberate incongruence between grammatical form and actual communicative function, manifested through two mechanisms: projecting clauses expressing modal meaning, and incongruence between illocutionary function and the mood of the clause. The results of a survey of 470 instances (243 instances of modal metaphor and 227 instances of mood metaphor) are as follows:

Table: Survey Results of Interpersonal GM in Vietnamese Children's Fiction

Type of Interpersonal GM	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consensualmodal metaphor	87	36
Subjective modal metaphor	79	33
Objective modal metaphor	77	31
Total modal metaphor	243	100
Interrogative mood metaphor	97	43
Declarative mood metaphor	73	32
Imperative mood metaphor	35	15
Exclamative mood metaphor	22	10
Total mood metaphor	227	100

Modal metaphor is distributed relatively evenly among the three types – subjective, consensual, and objective. Within mood metaphor, interrogative mood metaphor accounts for the highest proportion (43%), reflecting a distinctive feature of children's discourse: questions are used not to seek information but to express emotion, affirm content, or guide the young reader's reception.

3.2. Modes of Expression of Interpersonal GM

Modal metaphor is realized through projecting clauses: subjective modality (expressing an individual point of view), consensual modality (a collective lens that heightens reliability), and objective modality (creating a neutral effect). Mood metaphor comprises four types – interrogative, declarative, exclamative, imperative – which the dissertation clearly distinguishes from genuine interrogative mood and from declarative mood with indirect interrogative content, from an SFG perspective.

Chapter 3 Summary

Interpersonal GM simultaneously performs the function of building an emotional bridge between narrator and reader, portraying the psychological depth of characters, creating expressive rhythm, and conveying educational messages in a gentle, non-imposing way. There is a systematic differentiation between the two groups of authors: for adults, interpersonal GM is a deliberate artistic choice that balances educational effectiveness with aesthetics; for children, it is natural and intuitive, directly reflecting their emotional world and their age-appropriate stage of language development.

CHAPTER 4 TEXTUAL GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR IN VIETNAMESE CHILDREN'S FICTION

4.1. Statistics and Classification of Textual GM

Following Martin's framework, textual GM is examined through four modes of expression. The results of a survey of 255 instances from 234 works are:

Table: Survey Results of Textual GM in Vietnamese Children's Fiction

Mode	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Text Reference (TR)	116	45
Metamessage Relations (MR)	55	22
Internal Text Conjunction (ITC)	47	18
Negotiatory Text Structuring (NTS)	37	15
Total	255	100

TR is dominant (45%), reflecting the genre's priority on coherence and its capacity for concise information summarization. MR (22%) is “softened” and “narrativized” through a layer of story-rich vocabulary in place of formal logical connectives. ITC (18%) both anchors the narrative axis and constructs a simulated dialogue between narrator and young reader. NTS (15%) – within which the imperative form with an evidential/authenticating function is a distinctive subtype specific to the explanatory fable-tale genre in Vietnamese VCF, not previously recorded in earlier studies – establishes a subtle, intimate communicative boundary.

4.2. Modes of Expression of Textual GM

The text reference mode uses anaphoric elements (như vậy [thus], điều này/đó [this/that matter], nó [it], như thế đó [like that], đó là [that is], etc.) to link previously mentioned content. The MR mode is realized through three relations: cause–effect, explanation–signaling, and emphasis–focus orientation. The internal text conjunction mode and the negotiatory text structuring mode (comprising text-opening expressions with an introductory interrogative mood, discourse-

coordinating expressions, and imperative expressions with an evidential/authenticating function) complete the overall picture of discourse organization in Vietnamese VCF.

Chapter 4 Summary

The four modes of textual GM establish a structured functional system, each mode assuming a distinct role in organizing VCF discourse. The differentiation between the two groups of authors is also evident: professional writers deploy these modes as deliberate artistic strategies, while child authors employ them naturally and intuitively, faithfully reflecting their emerging thought patterns and language competence. This confirms that textual GM is both a text-organizing device of high artistic value and an indicator of age-related linguistic proficiency and strategy.

CONCLUSION

1. From the GM theoretical framework of Halliday, of Halliday & Matthiessen, and of Martin – originally built on the basis of English – the dissertation has constructed a set of criteria for identifying GM suited to the typological features of Vietnamese, organized around three groups of criteria: (i) incongruence between the semantic stratum and the lexicogrammatical stratum; (ii) the role of dedicated linguistic elements – in place of derivational suffixes, Vietnamese uses dedicated nominalizing elements (sự, cái, cuộc, nỗi, niềm, điều, etc.), a system of modal function words, and specific syntactic structures; (iii) the capacity for conversion into congruent expression. This set of criteria integrates and adapts the four principles RSP, SJP, FRP, and MPP of Yang and of Li & Yang, and is operationalized into a six-step procedure applied consistently to a corpus of 1,677 instances drawn from 234 modern Vietnamese VCF works.

2. On the basis of the established criteria, the dissertation empirically examines three planes of GM. At the ideational plane (952 instances), GM is realized through nominalization (66%: process nominalization 43%, quality nominalization 23%) and denominalization (34%), performing the function of objectifying inner experience in a manner consistent with children's image-based thinking. At the interpersonal plane (470 instances), GM is realized through modal metaphor (balanced distribution: subjective 33%, consensual 36%, objective 31%) and mood metaphor (four subtypes, with interrogative accounting for the highest proportion), performing the function of softening educational messages and building an emotional bridge. At the textual plane (255 instances), GM is realized through four modes following Martin: TR (45%), MR (22%), ITC (18%), NTS (15%), performing the function of narrativization, organizing the narrative thread, and orienting the young reader's cognition; the evidential imperative subtype of NTS is a distinctive subtype specific to Vietnamese VCF that has not been recorded in earlier studies.

3. From the research findings, the dissertation draws four cross-chapter generalizations: (i) GM in Vietnamese VCF exhibits a function running counter to that in academic discourse – it concretizes and objectifies psychological states and emotions into perceptible

entities, narrowing the cognitive distance between writer and young reader; (ii) the three types of GM combine into a coherent cognitive-design system – ideational GM objectifies the conceptual world, interpersonal GM constructs emotional relations, and textual GM orients cognition; (iii) Vietnamese VCF consistently performs two transformative operations throughout: softening and narrativization; (iv) the comparison between the two groups of authors across all three planes provides consistent linguistic evidence for the relationship between GM competence and age-related linguistic maturity.

4. Regarding its contributions, the dissertation extends the scope of application of the SFG framework to the domain of GM in VCF – a genre not previously explored from this angle – thereby demonstrating that GM operates systematically even in texts oriented toward children's concrete, intuitive cognition. The findings can be applied to teaching Vietnamese at the primary and lower-secondary levels, to designing activities that develop reading-comprehension and creative-writing competence, and to the criticism and creation of Vietnamese VCF. The author has already begun implementing these applications through published works (see List of Published Works).

5. Alongside the results achieved, the dissertation also has certain limitations to be addressed in future research: it has not yet extended its generic scope to poetry, drama, or children's folk tales; it has not yet conducted a cross-cultural comparison with VCF from other countries; and it has not yet designed a pedagogical experiment to verify its teaching applications. These directions open up further potential for exploring a domain that still holds much to be discovered. The dissertation establishes GM in Vietnamese VCF as a research object of clear academic depth and practical applied value, laying the groundwork for future follow-on studies.

LIST OF PUBLISHED WORKS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

1. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà, Bùi Trọng Ngoãn (2024), “Yếu tố hư từ trong các biểu thức danh hoá thuộc ẩn dụ ngữ pháp trong tiếng Việt (Ngữ liệu truyện thiếu nhi Việt Nam)” [in Vietnamese], Tạp chí Ngôn ngữ & Đời sống, 7(356), pp. 73-84.

2. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà, Bùi Trọng Ngoãn (2025), “Vận dụng ẩn dụ ngữ pháp theo quan điểm ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống vào việc bồi dưỡng học sinh giỏi tiếng Việt ở tiểu học” [in Vietnamese], Vietnam Journal of Science and Technology (Series B), Ministry of Science and Technology, 67(10), pp. 46-52. DOI: 10.31276/VJST.2024.3030.

3. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà (2025), “Ẩn dụ thức thể hiện nỗi buồn của trẻ thơ trong văn học thiếu nhi Việt Nam dưới góc nhìn ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống” [in Vietnamese], Hue University Journal of Science and Technology, No. 3(2025), pp. 57-70. DOI: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33100/vjossh.2026.12.2.7>.

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6. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà (2026), “Danh hoá – ‘nguồn lực’ tạo nên ẩn dụ ngữ pháp tư tưởng trong truyện thiếu nhi Việt Nam từ góc nhìn ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống” [in Vietnamese], VNU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, No. 2(2026), pp. 287-303. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33100/vjossh.2026.12.2.7>.

7. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà (2026), “‘Nguồn lực’ tạo ẩn dụ ngữ pháp trong tiếng Việt từ góc nhìn ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống” [in

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8. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà (2026), “Ảnh dụ ngữ pháp văn bản trong truyện thiếu nhi Việt Nam từ góc nhìn ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống” [in Vietnamese], Quy Nhon University Journal of Science. (Accepted for publication on 13 April 2026).

9. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hà, Bùi Trọng Ngoãn (2026), “Phi danh hoá – nguồn lực tạo ảnh dụ ngữ pháp tư tưởng trong truyện thiếu nhi Việt Nam” [in Vietnamese], The University of Danang - Journal of Science and Technology, Vol. 24, No. 6B, 2026, pp. 147-152. DOI: 10.31130/ud-jst.2026.24(6B).018.