

LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS IN VO HONG'S SHORT STORIES

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Received:	2/01/2026	Vo Hong is a writer and educator who is always conscious of preserving and educating the younger generation about the good morals and traditional culture of the nation. In his works, specifically in his short stories, Vo Hong always consciously uses simple, colloquial language as the main language in expressing his ideas. To achieve maximum aesthetic effect, the author employs many flexible artistic techniques. This makes Vo Hong's short stories accessible and easy to understand for most readers of different levels. This article examines the linguistic characteristics of Vo Hong's short stories in shaping his literary style and in disseminating traditional cultural and humanistic values to readers.
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3. INTRODUCTION

Vo Hong (1921-2013) was a renowned writer from the period before and after 1975. Originally a teacher, his works possess a clear educational value. This educational content includes moral education, love for the homeland, a sense of civic responsibility towards the nation, and a consciousness of returning to one's roots to preserve Vietnamese cultural identity. Vo Hong's short stories cover a wide range of themes: war, love, school life, customs, etc.; almost every aspect of life is naturally incorporated into his stories thanks to his straightforward writing style and simple, easy-to-understand language. He uses minimal embellishments and few unusual techniques, making his works accessible to a wide audience. Beyond language, he also naturally incorporates real-life experiences into his writing. As a result, readers feel a strong sense of closeness, as if the stories are about themselves, their families, and their homeland. It can be said that the simple language combined with flexible artistic techniques has brought his works to readers of all levels, spreading love for the Vietnamese language and culture.

2. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Vo Hong is an author with a vast body of work, so research on him is quite extensive and comprehensive. However, research on the linguistic culture in Vo Hong's short stories is primarily focused on the doctoral dissertation of Nguyen Thi Thu Trang, *Humanity and Traditional Cultural Values in Southern Urban Prose 1954-1975* (2008) - University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City. This dissertation deeply examines cultural issues through various aspects, including language. On a smaller scale, the master's thesis *Poetics of Vo Hong's Short Stories*

(1989) by Nguyen Van Long - Hue University, examines the linguistic aspects of Vo Hong's short stories, but only at the semantic level. Regarding articles, noteworthy is the article *Vo Hong - Virtues of Literature** (2022) by Professor Huynh Nhu Phuong. This article examines Vo Hong's literary career from various perspectives: tradition and modernity, politics and culture, ethics and art. While many articles have been written about Vo Hong's works, there has been no in-depth study of the cultural language of his short stories.

3. THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH METHODS

Looking at the historical development of humankind, we clearly see the immense role of language. In all aspects of a nation's life, language is an element intimately connected to culture: "*Language is a part of culture. Besides its role in defining and reflecting cultural values, language is, by its very nature, culture. A particular language always exists in close relationship with socio-cultural life*" (Dang Van Vu, 2022, p. 44). Along with the formation and development of Vietnamese culture, the Vietnamese language has also formed and developed, becoming an effective tool in building and developing an advanced Vietnamese culture rich in identity. Language is both a means of communication and a product of thought; it is also closely linked to national culture, so linguistic artistic creations are not outside the orbit of culture. Therefore, when disseminated into life, it will positively impact many aspects of the mind, especially consciousness, emotions, and national spirit – the foundation for integration with the world.

To complete this article, the author uses a combination of the following methods. Firstly, the sociological method of creative writing. We apply this method to understand the social factors that influence the construction of language to express the content and meaning of the story. Next, we use the cultural studies method (mainly culture expressed through language) to examine its reflection and educational significance from a cultural perspective. And the most important method is analysis and synthesis. We apply this method to analyze linguistic units to highlight the content; then synthesize and put it into a system to obtain an overall view.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leo Spitzer (1887 - 1960), a renowned German literary critic of the 20th century, said: "The best documentation of a nation's soul is its literature. And this literature is the voice of that nation, written by those who speak with authority" (*Thuy Khue, 2017, p. 330*). In his works, Vo Hong uses the simple language of the rural people he has seen and interacted with to depict the landscape of his homeland and the image of the farmer. The linguistic system that creates a unique characteristic in Vo Hong's works is the vocabulary imbued with the cultural nuances of the people of the coastal region. Under his pen, rural languages are refined, used flexibly, richly, and diversely—specifically, the dialect of Central Vietnam.

4.1. Characteristics of the South Central Vietnamese dialect

When reflecting on life in a particular region or era, writers must pay attention to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of that region and era in order to highlight its cultural identity. Each writer belongs to a specific ethnic group and lives in a specific region, thus possessing a specific cultural space. Within that space, the writer is influenced by the psychology, lifestyle, language, customs, and spiritual and material aspects of life... All of these contribute to the "literary" quality within the individual.

The simple, natural local language of the Central Coast region in Vo Hong's works is evident in the narrator's (usually the author) and the characters' speech. These are extremely natural sentences, reflecting everyday life and the common spoken language of daily existence. In everyday speech, people may use colloquial words, but when writing, writers must use clear, euphemistic language. If they intentionally include colloquialisms or local dialects in their works, it is always for a specific artistic purpose.

In his works, Vo Hong realistically reflects the vibrant and detailed life and customs of simple, honest rural people. Through the characters' speech, we see the specific language of the region and the writer's deep understanding and skillful use of language. In constructing his characters, Vo Hong pays attention to creating special details that allow them to reveal their qualities. Among these details, the language, imbued with local nuances, is particularly emphasized. This includes the use of idioms, local vocabulary, filler words, and intonations commonly used by the locals.

The main characters in Vo Hong's works are farmers or those from rural backgrounds; therefore, the dialogue of his characters is simple and natural. In the short story "Footprints in the Desert," the neighbors' words about Miss Ba Huong and Mr. Lai Muc are as follows: “- That old man wants to extort money. But he's too hasty and will ruin things. He wants to catch the fish as soon as it smells the bait. - Before marriage, before sleeping together, he's already asking to borrow money to reclaim the reed pond; who wouldn't be suspicious? Miss Ba is clever from birth, she's not easily fooled... - To wield a knife and slash at someone's face and nose, that's quite bold. A female hen causing trouble, in this day and age, hens are running rampant” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 247). The language used by the villagers to describe Miss Ba Huong and Mr. Lai Muc reveals a great deal of their understanding of idioms and ancient stories in Vietnamese culture. This clearly shows that writer Vo Hong has truthfully reflected the communication culture of people in Central Vietnam in particular and Vietnamese people in general from the past to the present, which is the tradition of favoring rhyming and rhythmic speech based on balance, often using highly symbolic and expressive imagery. Thanks to the use of many idioms such as "a fish just smelling the bait, clever from the egg, a hen wielding power," which is a subtle indirect way of speaking, the passage has a musicality, and the sentences can be interpreted in many different ways. Each person assesses the cleverness of Co Ba Huong at different levels.

In the story *Vết hằn năm tháng*, the language the author uses in the dialogues is very simple and natural, for example: “*Sách vở cũng là món hàng buôn. Đồi sách mới lấy sách cũ, bán sách cũ mua sách mới, rồi bắt bù tiền, nạp tiền cọc, nài thêm, rút bớt, trừ hoa hồng, ăn lãi hai phân, năm phân vân vân, anh tung hoành trong các chương mục thương mại như một võ tướng hữu đột tả xung. Trương Kỳ Phùng chỉ có một nỗi khổ lớn: đó là anh ta có một người chị. Người chị này đã được các bạn luân phiên nhau hét “gả” cho đứa này đến “gả” cho đứa khác.*

- *Ê, Phùng. Anh rể mà đây.*

- *Tổ mẹ mày.*

Phùng đỏ mặt chửi liền.

- *Thằng này hồn quá bay. Bộ thằng Thừa làm anh rể mà không được sao?*

- *Làm anh rể cái... ông nội cha mày” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 1175).*

The communication style is characterized by simple vocabulary through idioms, colloquialisms, and local dialects that reflect the cultural flavor of each region. Words like "bù, nại, ăn lăi, gả, tổ mẹ mày, ông nội cha mày" may exist to some extent in other regions, but they are most prevalent in the South Central region.

Besides words found in the North and South, Vo Hong uses many words characteristic of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces in his works. Not only through dialogue, but Vo Hong also uses these words in character descriptions and observations. In the short story *Con đường gai*, “sự học” is revealed through gentle, familiar, and relatable language.

“Ba tôi đi về thấy tôi nằm im thin thít trong giường, liền hỏi:

- Sao mà xẹp đi vậy? Bộ rớt rồi hả?

Tôi cự nự:

- Chắc rớt.

- Thôi, lo học lại để thi kì II, - giọng nói của ông đủng đĩnh (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 893).

Vo Hong, a local writer, uses the word "xẹp" (meaning slumped or dejected) to express sadness and disappointment; "cự nự" (meaning to argue resentfully but quietly and stubbornly); and "đủng đĩnh" (meaning leisurely, unhurried) to describe a slow, deliberate pace (walking leisurely, speaking leisurely, having a leisurely attitude...). Vo Hong uses simple, truthful language to make the work relatable and easy to understand, yet achieving a high level of artistry—simple yet subtle, colloquial, concise, and very natural. The author skillfully incorporates conversational language and observations about the events and people he encounters to vividly recreate rural life in Central Vietnam.

A common feature in the dialogues is the use of regional filler words. The writer proactively portrays the "local character" of the characters. Through spoken language, the unique characteristics and flavors of each region's culture are revealed. This is easily seen in the work "The Thorny Road," with its many local and regional words from Central Vietnam: "*Thực ra thì tụi bay có bị lứt lộn gì đâu? Trong khi ở nhiều tỉnh đồng bào chết cả xóm, trâu bò nhà cửa trôi mất tích thì tụi bay xăn quần lội nước đi chơi. Rồi lại cũng được thêm điểm lứt. Thật tụi bay gặp may hết cỡ. Không đồ năm nay thật là uống. Nghìn năm một thuở*" (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 896). Or a short dialogue about choosing a bus between the narrator and a fellow passenger in "The Trip to Tuy Hoa" is similar: "- *Tôi nghĩ rằng xe dài đôn chạy vững vàng hơn, ít bị tai nạn hơn loại xe ngắn nên tôi chọn nó.*"

- Lâm to! Lâm to! Xe ngắn đôn nó lách chạy lanh lẹ mới để tránh được tai nạn chớ. Xe dài công

kênh tiến thoái chậm chạp, hễ trở tay không kịp là chổng gọng.

Tôi im lặng hết biết ngỗ cãi” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 1023).

The local character of the Ba people in the work "*chớ, hễ, hết biết, ua, ...*" "The Trip to Tuy Hoa" is prominently displayed through a system of filler words such as "don't, whenever, know nothing, like,..." and a layer of local dialect words like "*chổng gọng, lanh lẹ, tụi bay, xăn quần, dài đôn, hết cỡ, uống*". This makes Vo Hong's passages feel familiar, reflecting the unique character of his homeland, demonstrating an understanding of those around him, and fostering openness within the community. Through this, it contributes to clearly portraying the characters' personalities,

allowing readers to easily sense the atmosphere of the communication space. The colloquial language and conversational style do not hinder understanding the work, but rather create surprises and enjoyment for the reader. The cultural and linguistic environment of the countryside, the region, and the interactions in his work have endowed Vo Hong with a rich vocabulary. The writer does not betray this gift, demonstrating a firm, abundant, and somewhat skillful mastery in his artistic creations.

Reading these words imbued with the essence of the countryside makes the reader feel that the characters speak very naturally. Their personalities are vividly portrayed. Local words, adjectives, verbs, particles... create surprise and interest for the reader. Vo Hong introduces colloquialisms into prose, contributing to elevating them to a high artistic level—simple yet sophisticated, colloquial yet concise and natural. Vo Hong skillfully and creatively utilizes conversational words, local dialects, regional idioms... to recreate the reality of life in the South Central and Southern regions of Vietnam.

4.2. Artistic Techniques

Besides its simple and natural language, Vo Hong's works are also notable for their rich lyricism and vivid imagery. Through numerous comparisons and metaphors, the author enhances the expressive power of each character's cultural identity. He employs many similes, alliteration, and evocative descriptions, increasing the reader's engagement; the characters, scenes, and stories are presented in a highly impressive and captivating way. Vo Hong's use of word combinations is also unique; he frequently employs the rhetorical device of comparison. This rhetorical device combines two or more novel comparative images. In artistic prose, comparison becomes a means of creating vivid artistic images, evoking interesting sensations. Vo Hong possesses a rich and diverse vocabulary for describing the characters' moods and the objects being compared and imitated. In each situation, each character exhibits different expressions thanks to vivid descriptive imagery and expressive language. Adjective and verb phrases are used extensively to clearly convey the complex emotions of the characters. A passage describing the state of mind of the narrator ("I") in the short story "*Trung thành với tôi là những giọt mồ hôi, những suối mồ hôi đổ cay con mắt, đổ ướt vạt áo sơ mi. Là sự mỏi nơi bắp thịt đùi, nơi thắt lưng sau một ngày cong người ngồi trên yên xe và hai chân gối nặng nhọc đạp. Là những suy nghĩ âu lo cuộn khúc, quằn quại trong khối óc tôi. Tôi không tin ở Dịp May*" (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 902). The character's state and circumstances are depicted through a series of descriptive noun-verb-adjective phrases—sweat, streams of sweat, stinging eyes, soaking shirt, aching thigh muscles, hunched over on the bicycle seat—bringing genuine emotion to the reader. To clearly convey the character's feelings, the writer uses a system of evocative and precise imagery. Although the narrator works collecting garbage fees in the city, through the writer's descriptions, the hardship, the pungent smell of sweat, the fatigue in the muscles, and the constant worry—all these details evoke the image of a farmer with a hoe and plow, engaged in arduous and laborious work.

The lyrical language in Vo Hong's literature cannot be discussed without mentioning the language of love. The words in his works about romantic love carry intense, sincere, and powerful emotions. The short story "The Spring Stream" tells the story of Tinh, a poor civil servant, who has a beautiful love for My Khue. Tinh's love for Mỹ Khê was a love of joy and excitement: "*Tôi còn yêu nàng bằng cả sự tinh nghịch dí dỏm như vừa rồi. Tâm hồn tôi không chịu được sự bằng phẳng.*

Tôi không thích những con đường dài tráng nhựa chạy thẳng tắp, rộng rãi và có nhiều bóng mát ở trên đầu. Ở bên dưới là hai lề đường song song chạy theo nhau không dám trái ý. Thật là chán nản. Tôi ưa sự đột ngột, bất ngờ. Như một con suối nhỏ chảy len lỏi giữa khe đá, trốn dưới một lùm cây rồi bất ngờ chảy vọt ra, hát róc rách bên một chòm hoa dại. Có tình yêu, tâm hồn tôi nhanh nhẹn, vui tươi như con suối tinh nghịch đó” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 210, 211). By using many adjectives like “playful, witty, sudden, unexpected, winding, gurgling, nimble, joyful,” it is clear that Mỹ Khê's powerful attraction captivated Tịnh, making him fall deeply in love with her. She is likened to a small stream trickling between rocks, watering the “*chòm hoa dại.*” Tịnh's emotions in love are also passionate when he falls in love with a girl named Annie (Mỹ Khê's name after marriage): “*Annie! Em đột nhiên hiện đến chiều nay nhí nhảnh, bất ngờ như một dòng suối nhỏ hát róc rách giữa một vùng hoa lá, nhưng cũng đủ để làm xáo trộn hồn tôi*” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 229). The description of love and the stirrings of the heart is accompanied by the sound and image of a “*dòng suối nhỏ hát róc rách,*” enlivening the entire garden. Speaking of love through natural imagery—a stream, a field of flowers and leaves, a rocky crevice—evokes the flavor of a peaceful, cool countryside, like a spring stream always fresh and full of life, flowing on and on with time. The onomatopoeic and descriptive words—“playful,” “trickling,” “stirring”—have a very high evocative power for readers of all times.

A series of verbs and adjectives that evoke the character's thoughts and emotions are also used: “*Những câu trao đổi đều vô vị. Tâm hồn tôi mục ruỗng, hoang vắng, tiêu điều. Tôi đang sống hai thế giới: thế giới xã giao nhạt nhẽo với Nhãn và thế giới tâm tình u uất nghẹn ngào với Thịnh. Nàng vẫn ngồi đó bất động”* (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 1084). The words meaningless, rotten, desolate, barren, gloomy, and choked-up all belong to a semantic field that vividly describes the feelings and thoughts of the character “I”. The writer skillfully uses many different adjectives in the same sentence to vividly and miraculously portray the feelings, moods, and emotions of a human being, which are thought to be intangible and abstract, making them tangible and easily perceptible. The emotions and states of love are vividly and authentically portrayed through numerous evocative images and suggestive words; it can be said that the use of this language in expression is a great forte of Vo Hong. Vo Hong's language of love allows the reader not only to see but also to hear and feel these emotions, thanks to the loving feelings constructed through rich imagery and lyrical language. These are also the inevitable emotions of human beings when in love, so when reading, the reader can easily empathize with the writer as well as with the characters themselves.

The system of adjectives describing the states and characteristics of things is effectively utilized, thereby affirming the lyrical and cultural imagery in Vo Hong's works. In his works, Vo Hong successfully uses adjectives to describe the external environment, the rural setting, and the emotions of the characters. Adjectives, especially reduplicated words, are frequently used to create syllable harmony in sentences and help the writer accurately express vague states, making them concrete and vivid. Proof of writer Vo Hong's skillful use of language is his description of the quietness of the Dong Chay dam on mournful afternoons during wartime: “*Chiều xuống nhẹ nhàng. Bóng tối dần về cây mít đứng sừng sững ở trước sân. Hàng tre im lặng. Dãy núi Bà im lặng. Chòm nhà bà Kinh, bà Nhuận lẫn vào bóng tối. Ngày thường, vào giờ này có ngọn đèn màu đỏ điểm giữa khung cửa đen sẫm. Bây giờ thì tất cả đều là màu tối loang lổ”* (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 452). The afternoon scene of the Dong Chay dam village is vividly depicted through a series of adjectives describing the

scenery: “*nhẹ nhàng, sừng sững, loang lổ, im lặng, đen sẫm*” – the states of various things appearing in an afternoon. Vo Hong describes each scene with different nuances, yet there is a unity and connection between all the details within that scene. Readers can easily sense the atmosphere taking place in Dong Chay village thanks to these very effective descriptive adjectives.

Vo Hong skillfully uses evocative and vivid language through metaphors and similes. The unique, sweet, and gentle comparisons deeply touch the hearts of readers. The author understands and observes human emotions subtly, comparing them to vivid and familiar images of nature. This writing style makes everything captivating and relatable. For example, the beauty in Tuyet's eyes in the story “*Đôi mắt sáng có hàng mi đen thăm thẳm của nàng chính là thứ đại dương mênh mông nơi đó dần ông biến thành những tên thủy thủ. Tha hồ mà phiêu lưu và chết chìm trong đó*” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 188). Tuyet's eyes with their “*đen thăm thẳm*” eyelashes are likened to a “*đại dương mênh mông*” with no shore in sight, containing countless secrets. This is the charm of a woman. With beautiful eyes and a captivating gaze, she will be truly attractive, especially to the opposite sex. A girl's beauty emanates from her eyes, likened to the ocean, which is also the image of a beautiful soul. Vo Hong used this aesthetic comparison, rooted in traditional culture, to show that sparkling eyes are always similar to flowing water.

The writer Vo Hong frequently uses similes in his descriptions of emotions and landscapes. In the story “*Tôi chán nản nhìn ra khung cửa sổ, nhìn mảnh trời xanh cao vút. Hy vọng về văn chương đối với tôi xa quá, khó vươn tới như mảnh trời xanh sáng đẹp kia*” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 1095). Nature is the most frequently used simile in Vo Hong's stories. When we have unattainable goals, dreams, and aspirations, we tend to look up at the sky, towards the horizon, to find inspiration for moving forward. Because of this, Vo Hong compares Vinh's aspiration for literary excellence to a bright, beautiful blue sky with a powerful allure. Even knowing it's difficult to reach, he still hopes and moves forward. Vo Hong's similes are all closely linked to nature. Because the richness of nature mirrors human emotions and resonates with them, the whimsical, dreamy aspirations of young people are also expressed in the story “*Nhờ sóng gió trùng dương bất ngờ đưa đẩy mà chúng ta cập bến vào hải đảo cô liêu này... chúng ta sẽ rời xa nó để trở về đô thị như áng mây phiêu lãng kia không hẹn dưng chân ở lâu ở một bến bờ nào*” (Vo Hong, 2003, p. 963). The journey of the tourists leaving the city is likened by the tour leader to a wandering cloud traveling everywhere, discovering many new things. This comparison is traditional and not entirely new, but together with the way it is expressed and the choice of words, it creates a language full of emotion, while also reflecting traditional cultural imagery – a unique quality in Vo Hong's literature.

With the sensitivity of an educator who studied and taught in many regions across the country, interacting with many generations of students and diverse types of people in society, Vo Hong possessed an incredibly rich vocabulary. This richness is demonstrated in thousands of pages of his literary works. The success of Vo Hong's literature lies primarily in his successful use of language that is appropriate to the regional culture and suits the psychology and character of his people.

5. CONCLUSION

Through his works, Vo Hong clearly demonstrates his use of simple, unadorned language, his clear and fresh comparisons, his concise yet profound and simple style, rich imagery, and evocative power, resulting in high expressive value in every sentence and story. By employing numerous onomatopoeic and descriptive words, adjectives, and similes, his writing is imbued with

rich and evocative meaning. The language in Vo Hong's literature is familiar, his comparisons deeply rooted in traditional culture, and his associations are based on established norms closely linked to the relationship between nature and humanity. Most importantly, it contains an endless stream of lyrical emotion in every word.

Vo Hong's works, in addition to spreading humanistic values and preserving the traditional moral values of the nation, are efforts to preserve and promote the beautiful cultural values that our ancestors have built and passed down through generations. These are the reasons why readers have always admired Vo Hong's personality and literary works.

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