

A Contrastive Analysis Of Proverbs And Idioms Relating To Animals In English And Vietnamese Equivalents \ Phân tích đối chiếu các câu tục ngữ, thành ngữ liên quan đến các động vật trong tiếng Anh và cách biểu đạt tương đương trong tiếng Việt .

. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \ Hán Văn Mai ; Supervisor : MA. Đào Thị Thu Trang

1.1. Rationale of the study

Each nation's language has its own similar and different concepts on many fields of life such as humane values, ways of thinking, behavior standards, religious beliefs, customs and traditions, social convention, etc. Words and expressions including idioms and proverbs have formed the vocabulary system of a language. Idioms and proverbs are regarded as special factors of a language's vocabulary system because they reflect cultural specific characteristics of each nation, including material and spiritual values. Therefore, many researchers have long shown their concerns for idioms and proverbs.

Being interested in idioms and proverbs for long time, I choose idioms and proverbs as my thesis topic.

1.2. Aims of the study

- To discover cultural values through proverbs and idioms
- To investigate the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese idioms denoting human characteristics through images animals.
- To help the Vietnamese learner of English be more aware of English and Vietnamese proverbs and idioms and how to use them in appropriate and interesting way.

1.3. Scope of the study

In this study, the cross-cultural differences view from customs, religion are extensively discussed; English idioms denoting human characteristics through the images of animals are compared with Vietnamese ones.

1.4. Methods of the study

To achieve these aims, the author has discussed with supervisor, teachers, friends and consulted many dictionaries and books of languages, idioms, proverbs, metaphor, magazines, newspapers, etc. in both English and Vietnamese in which whatever relating to idiomatic and proverbial expression containing ‘animals’ is taken into consideration. Then a comparative analysis is designed to point out the similarities and differences between English proverbs and idioms relating to animals and Vietnamese ones.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Relationship between language and culture

There is a close relationship between language and culture; knowledge of the target culture remains an important part of language learning, especially at higher levels. That is the reason why culture learning should always go hand in hand with language learning though it may take a longer time and make language teaching and learning more challenging than ever.

1.2 Literal meanings and idiomatic meanings

1.2.1 Literal meaning

The literal meaning of a word is the strict dictionary meaning of a word, the ‘dictionary definition’. For example, if you look up the word ‘*snake*’ in a dictionary, you will discover that one of its literal meanings is ‘*any of numerous scaly, legless, sometimes venous reptiles having a long, tapering cylindrical body and found in most tropical and temperate regions*’.

1.2.2 Idiomatic meaning

1.2.2.1 Definitions of idiom

English idiom

In Cambridge International Dictionary of idioms, idiom is defined as a colorful and interesting aspect of English. They are used generally in all types of language, informal and formal, spoken and written.

Words do not just come individually; they also come in expressions – in-group. Idioms are among the most common of these expressions (Wright, 2002).

According to Wright, idiom is an expression with following features. Firstly, idiom is fixed and is recognized by native speakers. We cannot make up our own idioms. The second feature is that idiom uses language in a non-literal-metaphor-way

Vietnamese idioms

According to Hung, in Vietnamese, idioms frequently use fixed expressions; grammatically, they are not complete sentences, which mean they are only words or phrases. Idioms do not show any comments, experiences, ethnical lesson or critics, so they often have figurative function, not educational function.

1.2.2.2 Some features of idiom

In terms of semantic peculiarities, Jackson and Amvela (2000:67) indicate that idiom has “ambiguity”, it means that idiom may have either a literal or an idiomatic meaning

Another noticeable semantic feature of idiom is affirmed by Cruse (1986: 37-38): “although idiom consists of more than one word, it displays to some extent the sort of internal cohesion that we expect of single words”. In other words, idiom may be characterized as “a lexical complex, which is semantically simplex”. And this semantic integrity of idiom leads to its lexical integrity. It means that idiom has a number of syntactic (grammatical) constraints

1.2.2.3 Types of Idiom

Fernando (1996:35-36) states that idiom can be divided into three sub-classes: pure idiom, semi-idiom, and literal idiom.

1.3 Proverb in relation to idiom

1.3.1 Definitions of proverb

- Proverbs can be defined as “*a short saying or sentence that is generally known by many people. The saying usually contains words of wisdom, truth or morals that are based on common sense or practical experience.*”(www.Theidiomconnection.com)
- *A short saying that everyone knows, expressing a truth, an experience or giving advice.* (English version by Bach Anh Hong/Viện ngôn ngữ học, 1992)

1.3.2 Proverb versus Idiom

Idiom is a phrase which is a part of sentence; thus, it is equivalent to words only

Proverb is a complete sentence or a phrase expressing the whole idea. Moreover, idiom and proverb are also different in terms of their functions. Proverb is a short well-known sentence or phrase that expresses a judgment, state a general truth about life or advice; it is told to contain three main literature functions which are perceptive function, aesthetic function, and educational function.

CHAPTER 2

SOME FEATURES OF ENGLISH –VIETNAMESE PROVERB AND IDIOM

2.1 Proverb and Idiom relation to Language and Culture

Language, thought or culture are not all the same thing, but none can survive without the others. Proverb and idiom not only belong to a language but also reflect much of its culture. In other words, they are considered to be a mirror reflecting social-cultural traditions in the most reliable ways. For all these things above, we can conclude that there is a close relation between language, culture and proverb and idiom. Both proverb and idiom reflect values, beliefs across culture.

2.2 Comparison between English and Vietnamese proverbs and idioms viewed from cultural identities .

2.2.1 Based on principles of cultural types

Vietnamese people's lives are closely linked with agriculture, or to be more exact, with the cultivation of water rice and other plants, not only weather but some cattle are also familiar with Vietnamese people. Cow and buffalo are the most common animals to

Vietnamese peasants because they bring about meat and milk and, to some extent, means of transportation. Therefore, these two appear repeatedly in proverb and idiom.

Different from that of Vietnam, with dry and cold climate, England has a greater proportion grassland than any other countries. And most of which is more suitable for breeding, especially sheep farming than for rice growing. We can say that England economy in the past depended much on sheep breeding for getting wool, milk and meat. So sheep can be considered as the most popular cattle to the English. The image of sheep appears much in proverb and idiom, however, the English attitudes toward this kind of animal are various. Lamb is not the animal of high respect.

It is the weather conditions that differentiate English and Vietnamese culture types, that is, the former is of agricultural origin while the latter belongs to the nomadic one. This leads to differences in the images that are reflected in each country's stock of idiom and proverb. To Vietnamese, some agriculture-work associated animals such as buffaloes or cow are frequently seen in their proverb or idiom. Meanwhile, English proverb and idiom stock seem full of such big cattle as sheep or horses. In some cases, the same ideas are expressed differently in a way that they mirror the characteristics of each country's culture.

2.2.2 Based on cognitive culture

Proverb not only belongs to language but reflects much of the culture. In other words, they are considered to be the mirror reflecting the socio-cultural traditions in the most reliable ways. They are very traditional and specific. Understanding them helps us know more about a nation and its people. Analyzing and comparing English-Vietnamese proverbs basing on the cultural identities systems bring us a deeper comprehension of the two nations and their languages. We will find not only the similarities but the interesting differences in the way proverb reflects socio-cultural life of the communities.

To Vietnamese people, who undeniably possess a generalization mind, dragon is the most beautiful image which is proved by the number of proverbs and idioms with its appearance. This seems reasonable for the Vietnamese who highly regard the harmony among things. This can be illustrated in symbol of dragon- An imaginary animal which crystallizes strength and beauty of other animals. However, the English, who have an

analytical mind, consider dragon a strange and wicked one partly because their analytical mind seem to be unfamiliar to anything that is not concrete and touchable.

2.3 Animal images in proverbs and idioms

2.3.1. Animal images in Vietnamese proverbs and idioms

Idioms preserve close relationships with people's life and the culture where they are shaped and used. As Vietnam has a long history of cultivation and agriculture, a large number of idioms related to agriculture have been in use. Most of the elements used in Vietnamese idioms are focus on animals that the farmers have to deal with in their daily life .

In Vietnam, the dog is of low status. Most of the Vietnamese idioms concerning with dogs are used in an insulting sense, usually describing wicked persons, although the numbers of pet dogs have increased nowadays

2.3.2 Animal images in English proverbs and idioms

Differently, living on an island, the English are tend to sail and travel a lot, the English language flourish in idioms connected with navigation.

In the eyes of the English, “Dog” is man’s best friend in Western countries. Since the dog is a lovely pet, a faithful fellow.

However, it is not all the cases that the attitude of English and Vietnamese are always different. When living and working with the animals, human beings have the same feelings towards some certain animals.

CHAPTER 3

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH PROVERB AND IDIOM RELATED TO ANIMALS VERSUS THE ONES IN VIETNAMESE

3.1 The cognitive similarities

Hatch and Brown (1995) have convincingly argued that although we think proverbs are bound to culture, there are many with equivalents across cultures. Like in many other

languages, proverbs and idioms in Vietnamese and English use a lot of simile, metaphor with animals' images. Most of those animals are familiar to human. Among them, domestic animals such as dogs, cats, mice, chicken, ducks, and cows... take a large portion. Then comes the typical wild animals such as foxes, rabbits, lions, tigers, fish, and birds ... Maybe those points are also the common points for proverbs and idioms in most languages in the world.

3.1.1. Same expressions same meanings

As we all know, human beings have similar capabilities of thought, similar laws of cognition. So, taking a closer look at the proverbs and idioms in English and Vietnamese we can see there are even more equivalent proverbs and idioms that have amazing similarities in images, form and implied messages.

3.1.2. Different expressions close meanings

There are some proverbs and idioms that carry the same messages but contain different images of animals. Although they are different in expression and show different perspectives, they are similar in meaning.

3.2 The cross-cultural differences

Proverbs and idioms are always results of social, cultural, historical and political values. Despite the universal features, there still be distinct features that differentiate one culture from another. Therefore, we can say that there are two types of proverbs and idioms: those with a common, universal morality, similar in most cultures, if not in the form, at least in the message; and those born from a historical fact, a local custom or a specific event in a particular culture. They have their own identity signs which characterize the place or time of origin and are the distinct features of that culture.

2.3.1 View from Customs

One of the most important elements that differentiate the proverbs and idioms in English and Vietnamese is the differences in tradition and custom. Vietnam - an Oriental country - has the agricultural culture, while England – a Western country - has the nomadic culture. They have different concepts about the world, especially the animal world.

In nomadic culture like English culture, dogs help human beings lots of work. They watch the houses, keep farm animals like sheep, goats ..., and help hunting wild animals. In short, the image of a dog sticks to the image of a nomad. Therefore, dogs are highly valued and are considered human's best friends. There are many proverbs showing the importance of dogs .

2.3.2 View from Religion

There is a big difference between the religion in Vietnam and in England. The Vietnamese religion can be considered as a complex of Buddhism, Confusion, and some other religions; while most English people believe in Christianity. That is why the concepts of people about some animals in both countries are different. For instance, the *dragon* possesses different cultural connotations in Vietnamese and English.

In Vietnamese culture, the dragon symbolizes the high reputation. In the past, when someone passed the national exam and became a mandarin.

Both English and Vietnamese languages are rich in images and have a lot of proverbs and idioms. And among them, idioms and proverbs using the images of animals take a large portion. Both cultures share the same capabilities of thought, the same laws of cognition and a common, universal morality. Moreover, some animals have the same important role in people's lives in the two cultures, and have the same attributes and features. Therefore, we have a large number of similar proverbs and idioms related to animals, both in the form and in the message.

However, England and Vietnam have different history, different customs and different religions. They have different connotations of some animals in life. Those proverbs and idioms born from the historical fact, local custom or specific religion convey different messages though they use the same images of animals.

3.3. Similarities and differences of English and Vietnamese idioms about human characteristics through the images of animals

When considering English and Vietnamese idioms about human characteristics through the images of animals, we only find few Vietnamese idioms, which are equivalent to English ones both in meaning and structure.

Many Vietnamese idioms use animals' images with exaggeration while English ones are mostly based on true description of animals' behaviors.

We surely know that a toad can't have hair in its armpit or a tick can't hold a stick. These contrary images are put together to convey the figurative meaning: the first denotes a very vain person and the second alludes to an awkward one. The use of exaggerative images makes these Vietnamese idioms more expressive and shows clearly the critical attitudes of the speakers .

The difference between nomadic and agricultural cultures is the main reason for the differences in syntactic and semantic features between English idioms and Vietnamese ones. English idioms are analytical and based on specific observation whereas Vietnamese ones are expressive, have symmetrical structures and sometimes use exaggerated images. Cows, sheep, mules are familiar images in English idioms while fish, crabs, snakes, birds are easily found in Vietnamese ones.

These differences in the structure make Vietnamese idioms more poetic, more musical and easier to use in everyday life.

PART C

CONCLUSION

Proverbs and idioms are not only product of language but an effectively social communication environment. English and Vietnamese proverbs and idioms reflect distinguished cultural identities between the two countries.

In terms of principles of cultural types, Vietnamese proverbs and idioms mirror images of an agricultural origins with a high frequency of trees, crop, rice, water and some kinds of cattle, etc. Meanwhile, English ones reflect the cultural characteristics of the nomadic origins. This explanation for a great number of proverbs and idioms with the appearances of such great cattle images of a culture images as: horse, bull, sheep, ox.

Teaching and learning a language are teaching and learning a culture. These two elements cannot be separated. By teaching the proverbs and idioms, English teachers can

help their students to penetrate in English culture excitingly and interestingly. Moreover, English language learners, often struggling with a limited vocabulary, find these memorable proverbs and idioms easy to learn and fun to use. Learning idioms and proverbs helps students to remember the structures and vocabularies carried in the idioms and proverbs easily.

It is said that teaching vocabulary is not easy at all and teaching English idioms is no exception, even more difficult because idioms are sequences of words with tight cohesion both in their structures and meanings. Learners often have difficulties in recognizing that they are dealing with an idiom and therefore they are easily confused with the meaning of the idiom in the context.

Proverbs and idioms are inseparable parts of each country's language and culture. Learning English in general and English proverbs and idioms in particular must be embedded in learning English culture.