

Metaphoric meanings of words denoting animals in English and Vietnamese

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ABSTRACT

Animals are considered very important and significant to human life. Human tends to express different emotions and behaviors with the help of animals. However, people who speak English, and people who speak Vietnamese have different ideas for the same animals. This research deals with the metaphoric meanings denoting animals in English and Vietnamese. It aimed to find out the similarities and differences between the two languages. The research data were collected from many dictionaries and books of languages, idioms, proverbs, and metaphors. They were then described and analyzed on the metaphoric meanings under qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Keywords: metaphor, animals, culture

1. INTRODUCTION

From the early days, animals have been human companions. People have considered animals as friends as well as a source of comfort and encouragement. The bond between animals and humans is becoming tighter and tighter since they now can correlate in many ways. Thanks to the intimate relationship with animals, people begin to associate some animal's characters with someone's characters in human lives.

The words denoting animals are considered as an interesting phenomenon in language. Words denoting animals are not only used for conveying the denotative meaning but also communicating and expressing speakers' attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and they are illustrated in example (1) and (2):

(1) I took the **dog** for a walk.

In this example, **dog** is used to refer an animal with four legs, and a tail often kept as a pet or trained for work.

(2) He led poor Amy a **dog's life**.

We do not have the same picture in our mind with the word **dog** in (2). In this example, dog is used to refer to an unhappy life, full of problems, or unfair treatment.

Words denoting animals have various meanings

that make people learning foreign language confused when using them both in English and Vietnamese. Many words related to animals are found in English and Vietnamese languages. However, since there are significant differences in culture, geographical environment, customs, and religion, English and Vietnamese people have different ideas for the same animals. Therefore, it is necessary to help English and Vietnamese learners master more about the meanings of words denoting animals so that they can understand and use them naturally and effectively. That is why the topic "Metaphoric meanings of words denoting animals in English and Vietnamese" is carried out. We hope that the research findings will help us obtain a better understanding about the meanings of words denoting animals in English and Vietnamese.

Due to the constraint of time, referential materials, the study has got certain limitations. The study did not cover all words relating to animals. We just investigated the semantic features of six words denoting animals in English and Vietnamese, namely, DOG, CAT, and HORSE in English and CHÓ, MÈO, and NGỰA in Vietnamese. This research chooses these animals because they are closed to human beings. As a result, human beings know their

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habits and characteristics. Moreover, such animal terms occur in human language more frequently. Although the findings of their typical features cannot thoroughly reflect all animals in nature, hopefully, the research will be a reference for those interested in metaphors relating to animals.

2. DEFINITION OF METAPHOR

Metaphor is a popular concept for scholars at home and abroad. Metaphor (from the Greek: *Métaphora*) is a language that directly compares seemingly unrelated subjects. According to Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary [1, p. 963], "Metaphor is a word or phrase used in an imaginative way used to describe something or somebody else in a way that the two things have the same qualities and makes the descriptions more powerful." In contrast with the belief that metaphor is a rhetorical device, Lakoff and Johnson [2] believed that metaphor is something through which we understand the meaning both in language and thought. Lakoff and Johnson [2, p. 5] state that "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." Koveceses [3, p. 4] defines metaphor as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain." According to Do Huu Chau [4, p. 145], "Metaphor is a way of naming an object in terms of the name of another, based on the similar relationship between them." Ly Toan Thang [5, p. 28] mentions that "According to traditional rhetoric and literature, metaphor, along with metonymy, is considered as one of the two main types of using words figuratively".

3. PREVIOUS STUDY

Metaphor is an essential part of the language, which has received much attention in linguistics because of their universal character. Robert and Barbara [6] conducted three studies on non-human animals' use as metaphors (zoomorphs) for human personality characteristics. Mehri Rouhi [7] mentioned animal metaphors using the theory of cognitive linguistics. In his article, he tries to prove that animal metaphor accords more with the classinclusion model than with Lakoff's correspondence model. Moreover, Huiquiong Duan, Weiwei Cui, and Yidan Gao [8] analyzed

characteristics, differences, and reasons for animal idiom from conceptual metaphor perspectives and tried to probe into some suitable translation strategies. With some previous studies on the metaphor mentioned, the research could contribute more information to this field.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The samples were mainly taken from English and Vietnamese dictionaries of idioms and proverbs. After reading the materials, the researcher will pick out the idioms and proverbs containing the chosen animals for the analysis.

The data in English and Vietnamese will be from English and Vietnamese dictionaries of idioms and proverbs which are well-known and reliable, including the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs [9], Oxford Dictionary of Idioms [10], Từ điển Tục ngữ Việt-Anh, and Anh-Việt thông dụng [11].

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Metaphoric meanings of the word "Dog" in English and "Chó" in Vietnamese

The dog's primary meaning is identified in English and Vietnamese concepts (Oxford dictionary and Vietnamese Dictionary) as a type of animal with four legs, and helps people guard the house. However, it has different implications in the language of the two nations.

In Vietnamese, dogs' images are commonly used to describe the bad people and bad things, for example:

- + A foolish person (*Chó dại có mùa, người dại quanh năm*)
- + A greedy person (*Chó già giữ xương*)
- + Hardships never come alone (*Chó cắn áo rách*)
- + Someone who eats on the sly (*Chó ăn vụng bộm*)
- + A stealthy person (*Chó cắn trộm*)
- + Someone who is in straitened circumstances (*Chó chạy cùng đường*)
- + A haughty person (*Chó chê mèo lắm lông*)
- + A ridiculous man (*Chó mặc váy lĩnh*)
- + A headstrong person (*Chó đen giữ mực*)
- + An aggressive person (*Chó dại cắn càn*)
- + A stupid person (*Ngu như chó*)

In Vietnam, the dog has a low status. Therefore, most Vietnamese idioms and proverbs concerning dogs are used in an insulting sense, usually describing wicked people.

If in the Vietnamese culture, a dog often has an offensive image to others, in the minds of English people, dogs are regarded as man's best friend. A dog has become an essential part of people's daily life. Many English people keep dogs as a part of the family and treat them as a family member. So, dogs usually stand for people or things with positive meanings in some idioms and proverbs.

- + *As happy as a dog with two tails*
- + *Love me, love my dog*
- + *A live dog is better than a dead lion*
- + *He is a good dog who goes to church*
- + *A barking dog never bites*

From the above examples, it is clear that a positive meaning is associated with the dog in English much more than in Vietnamese.

5.2. Metaphoric meaning of the word "Horse" in English and "Ngựa" in Vietnamese

Oxford dictionary and Vietnamese Dictionary defines that horse is a large animal with four legs, a mane, and a tail. Horses are used for riding on, pulling carriages.

In Vietnam, "ngựa" are intimately and directly attached to the lives of rural people. The image of the horse appears with solidarity, love for one another in Vietnamese proverbs: "*Một con ngựa đau, cả tàu bỏ cỏ*". Also, in Vietnamese culture, "ngựa" symbolizes the rich (*Lên xe xuống ngựa*), and especially in welfare (*Chiêu binh bãi mã*). Besides, "ngựa" is used for a straightforward person (*Thẳng như ruột ngựa*), a talented person (*Ngựa hay lắm tật*). However, there are some negative meanings with the images of "ngựa" in Vietnamese such as a devil (*Đầu trâu mặt ngựa*), an aggressive young person (*Ngựa non háu đá*).

In British culture, the horse has long been part of life. "Horse" is used to compare with human activities, habits, and strengths such as: "*Work like a horse*", "*Eat like a horse*" and "*As strong as a horse*". However, a horse is considered a stubborn animal, or a symbol of risks such as: "*Do not change horses in the mid - stream*", "*Do not put the cart before the horse*", "*Three things are not to be trusted: a cow's horn, a dog's tooth, and a horse's Hoof*".

5.3. Metaphoric meaning of the word "Cat" in English and "Mèo" in Vietnamese

In both English and Vietnamese, the **cat** is a small animal with soft fur that people often keep as a pet. Cat catches and kills birds and mice.

Cat's image in most Vietnamese idioms and proverbs is hostile and insulting when it alludes to a person. "Mèo" is used to refer a dull person (*Chó gio, mèo mù*), a person who hides evil things secretly (*Giấu như mèo giấu cú*), a scamp (*Mèo mả gà đồng*), an unfriendly quarrel some person (*Như chó với mèo*), a bragger (*Mèo khen mèo dài đuôi*), a lazy person (*Làm như mèo mửa*).

In English, "cat" carries both positive and negative meanings. "Cat" can connote an ordinary person (*Cat can look at a king*), or someone in authority (*When the cat is away, the mice will play*). In some idioms and proverbs, "cat" implies people with flawed characters. It is considered to be nervous (*Like a cat on hot bricks*), promiscuous (*Alley cat*), imitative (*Copycat*), and unfaithful (*Cat in the pan*).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This research has investigated the metaphoric meanings of words denoting animals in English and Vietnamese. The study was conducted in semantic features of six words relating to animals such as Dog, Cat, and Horse in English and Chó, Mèo, and Ngựa in Vietnamese.

From the analysis and comparison of the animal words in English and Vietnamese, it can be concluded that the animal words in English and Vietnamese culture have some similarities, but there are still significant differences. Due to differences in geographical environment, history, customs, religions, and other aspects, each country perceives some animals' metaphor meanings differently. In fact, in English, the dog has positive meanings while it implies the Vietnamese's negative ones. Besides, horse has some English and Vietnamese similarities since it symbolizes both negative and positive meanings. Besides, in the Vietnamese people's viewpoints, the cat represents terrible things while in the Western's cultures, the cat is associated with good and bad images.

By studying these animal words, we can understand many of the English and Vietnamese cultural values. This study helps us know the cultural connotation for appropriate and successful communication since we live with the world's advancement where people are engaged in more intercultural communication than before. The result of the research may be the necessity for learners of both languages. The analysis will help them better view the similarities and differences about metaphoric meanings of the word related to animals between two languages to avoid misusing and misunderstanding. Besides, teachers can encourage their students to master English by practicing idioms and proverbs that represent higher English learning skills.

The paper is carried out based on the limited data source due to the limit of time and difficulty in approaching sources and references for the study. Moreover, with limited ability and inexperience in conducting research, some weaknesses and limitations are inevitable.

There are still some fields in this topic that need to be explored. So, the study would like to suggest some further research on the following aspects: Pragmatic analysis of animals in English and Vietnamese - Animal idioms in newspapers.

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Nghĩa ẩn dụ của từ chỉ động vật tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt

Huỳnh Thị Út

TÓM TẮT

Động vật được xem rất quan trọng và ý nghĩa đối với cuộc sống của con người. Con người có xu hướng thể hiện cảm xúc và hành động khác nhau thông qua hình ảnh động vật. Tuy nhiên, người Anh và người Việt có những quan điểm khác nhau đối với cùng động vật. Bài nghiên cứu này nhằm hướng tới nghĩa ẩn dụ động vật trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Mục đích của bài là để tìm ra sự giống nhau và khác nhau giữa hai ngôn ngữ. Dữ liệu phân tích của bài nghiên cứu được lấy từ sách, từ điển, thành ngữ, tục ngữ, và ẩn dụ. Sau đó chúng được miêu tả và phân tích dựa trên nghĩa ẩn dụ.

Từ khóa: ẩn dụ, động vật, văn hóa

Received: 11/03/2020

Revised: 10/08/2020

Accepted for publication: 17/09/2020