

Comparison of the Positive and Negative Meanings of Chinese and English Animal Idioms Based on the Corpus

Yaxin Chen

Concord University College Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou Fujian 350117, P.R.China

ABSTRACT

Animal idioms are diverse, have rich positive and negative significance, and at the same time, they have good language expression effects, so one of the important components of language learning is English and Chinese animal idioms. Knowing the positive or negative meaning of animal idioms is necessary for a correct understanding of the relevant sentences. This article selects Chinese and English animal idioms from the corpus for comparative analysis, introduces a cross-cultural communication perspective, explores the possible difficulties and challenges in the use and understanding of animal idioms in cross-cultural communication, and provides some suggestions and strategies to help people better understand and use animal idioms in cross-cultural communication.

KEYWORDS

Corpus; Positive; Negative; Animal idioms

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1 Introduction

Humans and animals are inseparable, because animals are not only important objects for human hunting in the early days, but also an important dependence on human survival. For example, the "dog" was not only a good helper for hunters in ancient times, but also a good friend of human being, which can be found in a large number of representations in many languages. Language is not only the expression of culture, but also the carrier of culture. A form of expression with a specific meaning in language is "idiom", which comes from people's life, and people's life is inseparable from animals, in the day and night with animals, people put their emotions on a certain animal, the characteristics of animals and some characteristics of human beings are connected, so that animals are gradually closely connected with humans, making human language more interesting. Not only that, many animal names are influenced by different cultures, but also have special cultural significance, with strong praise and disparagement. To a certain extent, this reflects the way of life, social values, religious culture of the people. In addition, people develop positive or negative emotional attitudes towards animals during their long years with them, which makes animal idioms also tend to be positive or negative. Ethnic groups have the religions and worship of animals that various peoples believe, and most of these animals reflect the human geography of primitive societies and therefore have special meanings. Therefore, by comparing the similarities and differences of some commonly used animal idioms in Chinese and English, Using the method of corpus linguistics, an in-depth study of animal idioms is conducted to reveal the frequency, context and meaning of animal idioms^[1].and analyzing the reasons for these similarities and differences, the mutual influence of culture and language is revealed, so as to better grasp language knowledge, use animal idioms more accurately, and learn Chinese and Western cultures. Understanding the similarities and differences in animal idioms is

important to correctly understand the words in question and the commonalities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures. In this paper, "fox", "fish" and "bat" were extracted as samples for comparative analysis.

2 Literature Review

In previous studies, there have been many studies on animal words, animal intentions, and animal culture. Explore their similarities and differences in meaning, usage and cultural context. It is of high reference value for in-depth understanding of Chinese and English animal idioms and their application in cross-cultural communication^[2].and almost all of them have reached a common conclusion: in many ways, cultural similarities and differences lead to commonalities and differences in animal idioms^[3]. Four typical idioms have been studied in the translation of idioms, one is about colors, another is about numbers, another is about exaggerated idioms, and one is about personal names. These kinds of idioms are typical idioms. Recent studies have also focused on semantic analysis of animal idioms and the associative meanings and differences of animals in animal phrases and Chinese-English translation strategies for animal idioms, most of which have led to many translation strategies for animal idioms.

At present, the praise and disparagement research on animal idioms is less comprehensive, in my opinion, there is a common problem in the literature, that is, the source of the selected samples is unknown, the combing of animal idioms is not systematic, such studies often do not introduce the source of data, but directly into the comparative analysis of some expressions, which makes the research have the possibility of being influenced by the subjective assumptions of the researcher. Although animal names and idioms are often mentioned together, and although some animal words can represent a particular culture to some extent, animal idioms often have more positive and pejorative connotations in specific linguistic contexts than animal words. On the basis of previous research, this paper selects animal idioms as the center, uses Chinese corpus and English idiom database to collect animal idioms, and compares Chinese and English animal idioms from positive and negative meanings. Introduce a cross-cultural communication perspective, explore the possible difficulties and challenges in the use and understanding of animal idioms in cross-cultural communication, and provide some suggestions and strategies to help people better understand and use animal idioms in cross-cultural communication.

3 Similarities and Differences in the Cultural Meanings of English and Chinese Animal Idiom

(1) Interpretation and comparison of the connotation of fox in English and Chinese

Firstly, taking "fox" as an example, we analyze and compare the similarities and differences between its cultural connotations in Chinese and English, so as to provide some references for readers to correctly understand its related idioms.

In China's long history and culture, "fox" is generally considered pejorative and appears as a cunning character. When foxes hunt, they often paralyze their prey by pretending to be injured or competing with their companions, and can quickly attack the key parts of their prey while they are not prepared. When foxes hunt and pounce on their prey, the long tail with thick hair can help them maintain balance, and the white hair at the tip of the tail can confuse the enemy and disturb the

enemy's vision, so it can protect itself well. In addition, foxes live in forests, grasslands, semi-deserts, hilly areas, and inhabit tree holes or earthen burrows^[4]. They go out in the evening to find food and do not return home until dawn. In order to avoid traps in the forest or hide food, foxes release stench in places where they hide food, in order to remind their companions to protect their food. Based on the understanding of its habits, people's image of foxes tends to be derogatory, and in modern Chinese, there are many idioms similar to "fox tail" and "fox dog friend"; And in English, "as sly as a fox" is as cunning as a fox; "Old Fox"^[5] old and cunning guy; The fox may grow grey, but never good. "It is easy to change, but nature is difficult to change." In the Chinese idiom for "fox", when describing the appearance of a fox, more emphasis is placed on the pejorative meaning. The Chinese word "fox spirit" refers to a charming woman, linking the fox's appearance with a woman's gorgeous appearance. However, compared with the negative perception of foxes in Chinese culture, Western culture is more inclined to positive feelings between foxes and women, and is more used to express appreciation of women's appearance, for example 1. She is a foxy lady. 2. She has wary foxy eyes.

(2) Chinese and British fish culture

Chinese fish culture is quite old and has a strong positive color. The most illustrative of this is the *Taijitu*, known as the "first picture of China": two black and white fish images connected from end to end. These two "fish" are commonly known as "yin and yang fish", so *Taijitu* is also called "*Yin and Yang Taijitu*". The "way of yin and yang" expressed by *Taijitu* is also a philosophical proposition for human survival and development. As far as folklore is concerned, fish is a multi-functional auspicious thing, fish has a strong reproductive ability, the eyes of fish never close, the ancients believe that this is an "immortal" phenomenon, is a symbol of "regeneration", which just meets the requirements of yin and yang transformation, endless life, and no "living thing" is more suitable for Tai Chi patterns than fish.

At the New Year, whether it is on the dinner table or on the wall, almost every family is indispensable for "fish", that is, the so-called "more than every year". Why did the ancients favor "fish" so much? Because fish contains a rich culture. For example, in ancient times, the owner of the pharmacy hung the fish at the door, which meant "healing"; The ancients wanted to make fish with a key, and take the habit of "not blinding" fish to ward off evil town houses; the fish hung on the wall of the ancient house, which means "Like a duck to water". In addition, "using water to overcome fire" to pray for fire prevention and disaster elimination... "Fish" seems to be an auspicious thing in Chinese culture, but in the English expression, it seems to be less kind and derogatory. For example: "a cold fish" refers to an indifferent person; "a dull fish"^[6] refers to a stupid man; "a loose fish"^[4] refers to a bohemian; "fish woma" is often used to refer to the image of a rude, spicy or tigress-like woman; "no matter how good the fish is, it will become smelly in three days", it means a person staying for a long time will attract people.

(3) Chinese and British "bats" Culture

Bats are disgusting and often associate with evil and ugliness, so most idioms related to bats carry negative connotations. However, in Chinese folk life, the bat acts as a mascot. It not only reflects the homophonic culture of Chinese characters, but also reflects the attitude of Chinese towards natural objects. Because "bat" and "fu" are the same sound^[7], many folk paper-cutting patterns use bats, representing happiness and auspiciousness, bats and peaches composed of patterns called *Fu Shou Shuang Quan*, bats and deer composed of patterns called *Fu Lu Shuang Quan*, red bats are especially loved, meaning "*Hong Fu*", and the pattern composed of swastikas and bats is called *Fu Shou Wan Dai*. It is a nocturnal animal with mysterious habits that give a sense of awe. Formally this awe in the

loving, symbolic meaning, yes Chinese attitude towards bats is very friendly. From my understanding, the biggest feature of Chinese is the culture of "harmony". In the face of some unavoidable problems or phenomena, the Chinese measures taken are peaceful coexistence. For conflicts, the emphasis on "resolution" and "turning big things into small things, and small things into small things" is a good embodiment. Therefore Chinese does not easily destroy something, but coexists peacefully with it. In history, we built the Great Wall, and the northern barbarians coexisted separately. Emperor Wudi of Han, who adopted the attitude of eliminating the Xiongnu, fell behind the reputation of being a poor soldier, and I think this is the uniqueness of Chinese civilization.

In the West, bats are regarded as evil, murderous animals, tasted and associated with evil and dark forces, the West's famous blood-sucking zombie incarnation is the ugly bat, so the bat in the West is pejorative, people take an attitude towards it is afraid to avoid, or even resolutely destroyed. For example: 1. "Have bats in the belfry, like a bat out of hell, literally "like a bat flying out of hell", meaning "quickly". 2. "Crazy as a bat" 3. "As blind as a bat" 4. "Going on a bat" means "drunken messing around" 5. "Batting out" means "shoddy"^[7]. Imagine that in hell, the bat flew out in a hurry, and it must have encountered some bad situation. Presumably, it describes the appearance of bats flying from hell in a hurry to escape the flames of hell, and these English idioms about bats usually make Westerners have bad associations.

4 The Different Usages of Chinese and English Animal Idioms in Cross-cultural Communication

Human-to-human communication is a cultural exchange activity that involves multiple issues, and people from different cultural backgrounds have different understandings of animals. That is, foods that are acceptable in one culture may be taboo in another. Successful cross-cultural communication not only requires the communicator to possess good language skills, but also to convey the correct language based on different historical and cultural backgrounds. However, due to cultural differences and language barriers, people from different cultural backgrounds may have different understandings and interpretations of the same animal idioms, making the use and understanding of animal idioms somewhat difficult and challenging. Especially animal idioms, if mishandled in cross-cultural communication, can directly affect the listener's understanding. Therefore, further exploring the meaning changes of Chinese and English animal idioms in different contexts, as well as their usage in different social occasions and cultural traditions, has profound significance.

The same animal idiom has different positive and negative meanings in both Chinese and English languages. For example, to describe a person as foolish and clumsy, in Chinese it is generally referred to as "pig", such as friendly dogs and disgusting dogs. The basic meaning of a dog in both English and Chinese languages is consistent, indicating that it is a domesticated animal with four legs that can help people take care of their homes. But their cultural connotations and meanings vary greatly. Dogs have a positive meaning in most English contexts and can be used to describe trustworthy people, such as helping a dog over a still or an old dog. It is obvious that these statements reflect the cultural psychology of the British people, who view dogs as cute companions and human best friends. For example, in the idiom "love me, love my dog", the status of dogs in the hearts of the British people can be seen. Dogs are brave warriors and loyal friends in their eyes. However, dogs have a bad reputation in Chinese, and Chinese people generally have a aversion to dogs. Therefore, some negative and annoying things are always associated with dogs, such as "*Gou Ji Tiao Qiang*", "*Zou Gou*", and "*Gou Yan Kan Ren Di*" and so on.

The owl of wisdom and the unknown owl. In British culture, owl is a smart and witty bird, which carries cultural connotations such as "shrewdness and wisdom", such as "wise as an owl". However, in the eyes of Chinese people, due to its miserable nighttime calls, people consider it an unknown thing. When people hear an owl's call, they associate it with the imminent arrival of bad luck or misfortune, which is why there is the saying "when an owl enters a house, good things do not come".

A genius bear and a clumsy bear. The associations generated by bears in the minds of Chinese and British people are vastly different. In English, 'bear' describes a person with special abilities, such as 'He is a bear at Math'. However when Chinese people talk about words related to bears, they will think of connotations such as "cowardly and incompetent", such as "look at him like a bear".

The evil bat and the auspicious bat. Bats are disgusting and often associate with evil and ugliness, so most idioms related to bats carry negative connotations. He's a bit batty (He is a bit abnormal); Sometimes there is a worse metaphor, as blind as a bat. In traditional Chinese culture, the bat is a symbol of auspiciousness, health, and happiness, and is commonly referred to as a mascot in the eyes of Chinese people. If there are bats in the house, the owner is very happy, which means that luck has arrived. Especially if five bats come in, it means "Five Blessings at the Door".

The arrogant peacock and the auspicious and beautiful peacock. The British emphasize the haughty side of peacock, such as as proud as a peacock (pride like a peacock), playing the peacock (self-satisfied) and so on. And Chinese people like the beauty when the peacock opens its wings, and it is a symbol of auspiciousness and beauty in Chinese culture.

5 The Indications of the Usage of Animal Idioms in Cross-cultural Background

When using animal idioms in cross-cultural communication, we not only need to follow the historical background of national culture, but also distinguish the principles of use, so as to apply animal idioms more specifically and accurately in various situations, avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Therefore, in the use of animal idioms in both Chinese and English, we need to be familiar with the internal meanings and specific usage scenarios of animal idioms, in order to better reflect the functions of animal idioms and allow both parties to understand each other's culture. To truly master animal idioms, one should persevere in understanding the meaning of animal words. Similarly, to correctly understand the cultural connotations of animal idioms in both Chinese and English, one should read extensively, study cultural differences, and avoid reading without meaning. Only by deeply understanding the cultural traditions of the UK can communication be smoothly carried out, and one truly achieve "confidence" in cross-cultural language communication.

6 Conclusion

To sum up, to a certain extent, Chinese and Western cultures have similarities and differences, and the positive and negative colors of animal idioms also change. Mastering the positive and negative colors of animal idioms is conducive to understanding the commonality and individuality of Chinese and Western cultures, and is conducive to better mastering language knowledge, more accurate use of animal idioms, and learning Chinese and Western cultures.

About the Author

Yaxin Chen is an undergraduate of Concord University College of Fujian Normal University, and her research fields is trans-

culture communication.

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