AN ANALYSIS OF ANIMAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH FOR TRANSLATION IN THE LIGHT OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Presenters

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Contents

• Introduction
• Key concepts
• Methodology
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Introduction

• Being one of the most concerns of language translators.

• Formed in a particular historical period and reflects unique cultural elements such as religions, customs and habits.

→ certain hindrances to the full understanding for English learners & translation majors.

• Traditional linguistics concentrate on exploring the structural and formal aspects of idioms.

• Cognitive linguistics apply a systematic method to review the nature of semantics in idioms.

→ The nature of idioms is not arbitrary, and idioms are systematized by underlying principles of human language, thought and perception.

→ Conceptual metaphors
Key concepts

- Metaphority in idioms
- Conceptual metaphors
- Idiom translation
Key concepts

• Metaphority in idioms
  ✓ One of the essential semantic features of idioms
  ✓ Traditional linguistics: idioms as dead, frozen metaphors that were once metaphorical, then have lost their metaphorical over time and now are equivalent to simple conventional expressions
  ✓ Cognitive linguistics: Many linguists confuse “dead metaphors” with conventional ones. The idiomatic meanings may be determined by the arbitrary conventions of usage (Gibbs, 1994: 273)

Lack of good knowledge of metaphorical roots of an idiom → belief that the comprehension of idioms is the same as knowing the meaning of individual words, which is based on convention.
Key concepts

• Conceptual metaphors
  ✓ “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5)
  ✓ Idioms are based on conceptual metaphors (with two domains of knowledge through a set of systematic correspondences – *mappings*)
  ✓ **HUMANS ARE ANIMALS** (Source D = ANIMAL, Target D = HUMAN. → characteristics of a person (physical and mental states, spiritual and material life) = an animal’s traits.
  ✓ **GREAT CHAIN** metaphor: humans are understood metaphorically as animals and inanimate things (*Somatic, Behavioral, and Emotional characteristics*).
   → useful and efficient for choosing appropriate translation strategies and translation equivalents for animal idioms from English into another language.
Key concepts

- Idiom translation
  - The non-literal meaning of an idiom is motivated by a certain conceptual metaphor.
  - In idiom translation, translation strategies are employed as tools for translators to deal with any rising problems. Several strategies have been proposed: Nida and Taber (1982) - 3 strategies; Baker (1992) - 4 strategies; Ingo (1991) - 4 strategies; Svensén (1993) - 4 strategies.
  - Svensén (1993): (1) Idioms with identical metaphors in SL and TL. (2) Idioms with related metaphors; (3) Idioms with different metaphors; (4) Translating idioms in SL with no metaphorical counterparts in TL.

→ Identify a conceptual metaphor with its source and target domains, establish its mapping system
→ Find out its equivalent conceptual metaphor in the target language, and successfully deal with difficulties in idiom translation.
**Methodology**

**Statistical method**
- Identify AI in a specific dictionary of idioms, classify & calculate their numbers

**Descriptive method**
- Describe linguistic features of AI in the view of CL.

**Comparative method**
- Find out similarities & differences in the Eng. AI & their equivalents in Vnese.
DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION

Oxford Idiom Dictionary for Learners of English (2006) (2nd Ed.) with over 10,000 idioms that are frequently used in English

221 animal idioms

Từ điển Thành ngữ Anh- Anh- Việt (Saigon Translation and Book Center, 2008), providing Vietnamese equivalents of English idioms from the Oxford Idiom Dictionary for Learners of English
DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Categories of AI based on the animal species (vertebrates & invertebrates).

Frequencies of animal constituents

Description & analysis of AI characteristics in the Cognitive linguistics

Reference sources for better arguments

Identification of Idiom Translation strategies (Svensén, 1993) for analysis and translation product based on the mapping systems
Findings & Discussion

• Categorization of animal idioms
• Construction of mapping systems
• A case study on the mapping of English idioms with constituents being the most productive animals
# Findings & Discussion

## Categorization of animal idioms

*Table 1. The distribution of the animal idioms collected from the Oxford Idioms Dictionary for Learners of English (2006)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal species</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VERTEBRATES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphibian (frog, newt)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird (bird, chicken, cock, crow, duck, eagle, goose, hawk, hen, lark, owl, parrot, pigeon, robin, swallow)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish (eel, fish, herring, mackerel, sardine, sprat)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mammal (ape, ass, bat, bear, beaver, bull, calf, camel, cat, cow, dog, donkey, elephant, goat, hare, horse, kitten, lamb, leopard, lion, mare, mickey, monkey, mouse, mule, pig, rabbit, rat, rhinoceros, sheep, tiger, wolf)</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reptile (crocodile, snake, turkey)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INVERTEBRATES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ant, bee, bug, butterfly, flea, fly, hornet, oyster, snail, worm</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>221</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
✓ 68 species

✓ 201 idioms - vertebrates, and 20 idioms – invertebrates

✓ Specifically, *dog* (20/221), *cat* (17/221), *horse* (17/221), *bird* (14/221), *fish* (10/221), *pig* (10/221), *ass* (10/221) are more frequently-used as the most productive in English idioms (others: 1 to 6)

✓ Some idioms with two-species components (two animals being opposite in characteristics or not co-existing, e.g. *cat - dog*, *cat - mice*, *bird - worm*, *wolf – sheep*) → a remarkable feature for translators’ lexical choice in their products

The early bird catches the worm
When the cat’s away, the mice will play
Fight like cat and dog

A sprat to catch a mackerel
A wolf in sheep’s clothing
# Findings & Discussion

## Construction of mapping systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Human</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Somatic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| strength and health | being strong | being healthy/unhealthy | As strong as a horse  
|                  |        |       | Sick as a dog                      |
|                  |        |       | As weak as a kitten                 |
| motion          | moving fast/slowly | acting/reacting fast/slowly | At a snail’s pace |
| hunger          | being hungry | being hungry | Eat like a horse                |
| vision          | seeing well/poorly | see well/poorly | As blind as a bat                |
|                 |        |       | An eagle eye                       |
| **Behavioral**  |        |       |                                   |
| diligence       | being busy for work | being hard-working | As busy as a bee |
|                 |        |       | An eager beaver                    |
| dirtiness       | being dirty | living/behaving in a bad way | Pig it |
| roughness       | being rough, clumsy | behaving unpleasantly | Like a bull in a china shop |
|                 |        |       | Like a bear with a sore head       |
| stubbornness   | unwilling to perform any task | being stubborn | As stubborn as a mule |
| greediness      | eating and drinking too much | being greedy | Make a pig of yourself |
| **Emotional**   |        |       |                                   |
| anger           | being mad | being angry | As mad as a March hare |
| happiness       | being happy to get something | being happy | Like the cat that got the cream |
A case study on the mapping of English idioms with constituents being the most productive animals – DOG, CAT, HORSE

**Conceptual metaphors in dog-related idioms**

- *Dog* = an embodiment of faithfulness and guardianship
- In nomadic cultures: helping human beings with a lot of work (watch their houses, keep their farm animals...)
- In the world: “human’s best friends”.

**HUMANS ARE DOGS**

- Target domain
- Source domain
DOG’S BEHAVIORS/ACTIONS ARE HUMAN’S BEHAVIORS/ACTIONS

As sick as a dog
Be like a dog with two tails
Let sleeping dogs lie
Dog eat dog
A dog in the manger
Dog somebody’s footsteps
Work like a dog
Why keep a dog and bark yourself
You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.
Top dog
There’s life in the old dog yet.

Source domain
being sick
welcoming someone with waving tails
sleeping
eating fellows
keeping a manger
following one’s footsteps
working during day and night
barking
being an old dog
being top
being active and lively

Target domain
→ being in bad health state
→ being extremely happy
→ expecting no disturbance that may cause trouble
→ competing fiercely without care of other people’s feelings
→ preserving a benefit
→ following someone closely everywhere
→ working very hard
→ doing normal tasks
→ being an old/ experience person
→ being powerful
→ being active and enjoy life
DOG’S UPS AND DOWNS IN LIFE ARE HUMAN’S UPS AND DOWN IN LIFE

Give a dog a bad name
A dog’s life
Go to the dogs
Every dog has his/its day
A dog’s breakfast/dinner

Source domain
getting a bad name
having a controlled life
having good days
getting leftovers of all types for breakfast/dinner

Target domain
getting a bad reputation
having no freedom
having success and luck
getting disorder or messy things at work
### IDIOM TRANSLATION STRATEGIES
Distribution of translation strategies of animal idioms (ITSs) proposed by Svensén (1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Idiom Translation Strategies</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Per. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Idioms with identical metaphors in source language and target language (ITS1)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Idioms with related metaphors (ITS2)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Idioms with different metaphors (ITS3)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-idiomatic equivalent with no metaphorical counterparts (ITS4)</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English AI</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Vietnamese equivalent</th>
<th>ITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A dog’s life</td>
<td>A life in which there is not much pleasure or freedom</td>
<td>Sống khổ như chó</td>
<td>ITS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog eat dog</td>
<td>Fierce competition, with no concern for the harm done or other people’s feelings</td>
<td>Cá lớn nuốt cá bé</td>
<td>ITS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every dog has his/its day</td>
<td>Everyone will, at sometimes in their life, be successful or lucky</td>
<td>Sống có khúc, người có lúc</td>
<td>ITS3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be like a dog with two tails</td>
<td>Be extremely happy</td>
<td>Sướng ron</td>
<td>ITS4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vui như tết/ trẩy hội  Sướng quá hoá cuồng/ sướng như điên
Conclusion

• A general picture of animal idioms

✓ About 64 species employed, especially *dogs, cats, horses, birds* and *fish*

✓ A considerate number of idioms with two animals contrasting in characteristics and existence.

→ All of these features should be considered carefully in the process of any translation of animal idioms from English into another language.

• Translating AI - a big challenge due to different cultures with different cognition of specific animals.

→ Require a deep insight of culture, a good understanding and appropriate analysis of the SL idiom and its metaphor for accurate and flexible translation equivalent in the TL.
Conclusion

• The conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE ANIMALS - a good way to understand idiomatic meanings for equivalents with the similar metaphorical meanings in the TL.

• Good analysis of animals’ traits and mapping onto humans’ based on the GREAT CHAIN metaphor.

→ Search for translation equivalents would no longer be the search for identifiable linguistic features, but the search for a complex set of links in the translator’s mind and a certain extent of freedom in choosing of metaphorical images and lexical items.

→ Analyzing idioms for translation under the view of cognitive linguistics is quite applicable and considered a flexible and effective choice for translators/ translation students.
References


ANIMAL IDIOMS IN ACTION

Thank you