

Differences between idioms and proverbs english language essay

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



I must offer my profoundest gratitude to my thesis advisor, M. A Nguyen Ngoc Kien. From finding an appropriate subject in the beginning to the process of writing thesis, M. A Nguyen Ngoc Kien offers his unreserved help and guidance and lead me to finish my thesis step by step. Without his kind and patient instruction, it is impossible for me to finish this thesis. I am also indebted to my friends, who squeeze time from their busy schedule to help me finish my thesis. They are busy with their own thesis and work, but they are willing to give their helping hands as soon as I am in need. The simple phrase, "thank you", cannot present how much their friendship means to me. Finally, I am grateful to my parents for giving birth to me at the first place, supporting me spiritually throughout my life and providing a carefree environment for me, so that I can concentrate on my study. I am so lucky to have them be my parents.

PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale In the world today, there are many languages, of which English is the most widely used. Approximately, 350 million people speak English as their first language and the same number use it as a second language. It is the English language that is used as the language of aviation, international sport and pop music. About 75% of the world's mail is in English, 60% of the world's radio stations broadcast in English and more than half of the world's periodicals are printed in English. It is also the English language that is used as an official language in 44 countries, and as the language of business, commerce and technology in many others. English is an effective medium of international communication now. In Vietnam, English has been considered as a tool of international communication, and the need of learning English is

becoming more and more urgent. It can't be denied that all foreign learners in general and Vietnamese learners in particular desire to master English as the native speakers; however, they usually face a lot of difficulties that prevent them from gaining successful conversations. One of the reasons for these problems is in the way people perceive and use idioms. Each nation's language has similar and different concepts on many fields of life such as human, thinking, behavior, religion, customs and traditions, etc. Words and expressions of idioms have formed the vocabulary system of a language. Idioms are considered as special factors of a language's vocabulary system because they reflect cultural specific characteristics of each nation, including material and spiritual values. Idioms are expressions that are not understandable from the literal meanings of individual components. Each language, English or Vietnamese has a long history with large quantities of idioms that are characterized by such features as conciseness and vividness. Because of the differences in many aspects such as geography, history, religion etc, both English and Vietnamese idioms are closely connected with cultures, and they reveal special national characteristics and are full of rich cultural information. Language is a reflection of culture and culture shapes language. In exploration into the unknown world, idioms reflect the transformation in conceptualization of the universe and the relationship between human beings and the universe. Therefore, idioms as a form of a language reflect culture in a concentrated way. Speech or writing without them lacks meanings and is uninteresting, but overuse or improper use makes the language sound affected and unnatural. English and Vietnamese idioms about animals English idiom This study investigates the affection of

culture on Vietnamese and English idioms through examples.

2. Aims and Purposes of the study

To identify the similarities and differences between animal related idioms in Vietnamese and English. To explore their idiomatic meanings in English and Vietnamese To gain a deeper understanding about the cultural contrast between the two languages.

Scope of the study

Because the time as well as ability is limited, this study focuses on analyzing typical idioms with animal which express Vietnamese and English cultures.

Methods of the study

The first step was that I searched English and Vietnamese comparative idioms related to animals as many as possible, a list of which can be found in the appendix. Another one that I found it is quite interesting and informative about books which list English idioms with relevant Vietnamese ones. Also, the Internet could be utilized as an abundant source of data. Next, selected animals idioms were categorized into 3 group (group 1: same animals with same idiomatic meanings; group 2: different animals with same idiomatic meanings; group 3: English idioms do not have equivalent meanings in Vietnamese). Finally, I clarified some possible causes of differences in idiomatic expressions in terms of history or geographical environment, religion and culture with typical representative examples.

Design of the study

My study is divided into three parts : Part A is the introduction, it includes the rationale, aims and purposes, scope, method and design of the study. Part B is the development, it includes 3 chapters : Theoretical background; findings, interpretation and analyses; and some suggestions for learning English idioms. Part C is the conclusion.

Part B: Development

Chapter I: Theoretical Background

DefinitionsIdiom in EnglishSeveral linguists have given a lot of definitions about an idiom basing on its fixedcharacteristics. For example, " An idiom is a fixed group of words with a special different meaning from the meaning of several words" (Dictionary of English Idioms, 1979). In Longman Idioms Dictionary, an idiom is defined as " a sequence of words has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understood each word separately" (Stern, 1998). In other words, idioms are expressions which have a meaning that is not obvious from the individual words. According to Rosamund Moon (1998), idiom is an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways. In general use, idiom has two main meanings. First, idiom is a particular manner of expressing something in language, music, art, and so on, which characterizes a person or group within a community. Secondly, (and much less commonly in English), an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme, peculiar to a language. Words do not just come individually; they also come in expressions - in-group. Idioms are among the most common of these expressions (Wright, 2002). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary gives the definitions of " idiom": a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of theindividual words (p. 770) and " saying": a well-known phrase or statement that expresses sth about life that most people believe is wise and true (p. 1351). For the Oxford Learner's Dictionary of English Idioms, however, the definition isgiven in the preface, but in an informal style: The word ' idiom' is used to describe the ' special phrases' that are an essential part of a language. According to Jenifer

Seidl and W. Mc Mordie in "English Idiom and How to Use" "an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone." (1979, p. 20) The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics regards an idiom as "an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning can not be worked out from its separate parts" (1992: 198) Three years later, Jonathan Crowther in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (Oxford University Press - 1995) defines idiom as "a phrase or sentence whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and which must be learnt as a whole unit." (1995: 67) In the same year, Dean Curry in the "Illustrated American Idioms" (1995) offered another definition of idiom as follows; "an idiom is the assigning of a new meaning to a group of words which already have their own meaning." (1995: 49) On reflection, it could be seen that there is no conflict between the aforementioned definitions of idiom. Regardless of obvious differences in expressing, they intersect at one point: an idiom is a fixed expression whose meaning can not be worked out by combining the literal meaning of its individual words. Idiom in Vietnamese" Vietnamese idioms are fixed expressions in the form of single words or sentences but totally belong to the spectrum of words. Most of them are encoded, containing artistic stylization and are only part of an utterance." (Từ Điển Thành Ngữ và Tục Ngữ Việt Nam) According to Hung (2007), in Vietnamese, idioms are frequently used fixed expressions; grammatically, they do not have a complete sentence, which means they only equal words or phrases. Idioms do not show any comments, experiences, ethnical lesson or critics, so they often have figurative function, not

educational function. For example, in Vietnamese we say "mặt hoa da phấn". This idiom only bring us a picture of a beautiful and charming woman but not lesson about ethnics or critics. Sharing the same point of view, Hoang Van Hanh, (1994, p. 21) considered an idiom is a fixed group of words which is firm in terms of structure, complete and figurative in terms of meaning, and is widely used in daily speaking . Idiom and proverb Meider (1995, p. 119) has defined the proverb as " a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation". It is undeniable that idioms and proverbs have close relations. The similarities between them, however, are not broad enough to mingle these two concepts together. They still own its typical features that differentiate one from the other. First and foremost, the difference lies in grammar. It is, on grammatical respect, an idiom is a set expression and a part of a sentence rather than a perfect sentence. Hence, it is equivalent merely to a word or a phrase. Typical examples are " Achilles heel", " rotten apple" or " to twist somebody's arm". In contrast, proverb is defined as a fully made sentence, demonstrating the whole idea to judge the value of social relationship, to carry the experience about the life, to provide people with moral lessons or to disapprove of a particular issue. In addition, it might be note worthy to mention again that a proverb is formed on the basis of an idiom. As an illustration, the proverb " do not count your chickens before they are hatched" contains the idiom " count your chickens before they are hatched ". It is a complete sentence whose meaning can be understood as " it is not good to be too confident of success until it actually

happens". Secondly, in comparison with idioms, proverbs bring another different feature in terms of function. Proverbs express the whole idea of judgment, general truth about life or moral lessons. Functionally, a proverb therefore can be considered as a perfect literature work which brings three basic functions: perception, aestheticism and education. Let us have a look at the proverb "every hour of lost time is a chance of future misfortune" to clarify its three functions. The proverb can be interpreted as "a person who does not make use of time will probably encounter mishap sooner or later." That is to say time is such a precious thing that people should make full use of. The proverb is an experience during our life and our work if time is wasted. It is also a lesson in utilizing time. The perceptive function of the proverb is to help people to know the significance of time and the price to pay for squandering time. Its educational function is to give its contribution to a better time usage. Its aesthetic function is to impart the aforementioned contents by using exaggerative and picturesque words which could easily persuade readers and draw the reader into a pleasant acceptance without any embarrassment. Idioms, on the other hand, do not draw a comment, a life experience, a moral lesson or any criticism. They frequently perform an aesthetic function but no function of perception or that of education. Lacking these two functions of perception and education, idioms could not become a perfect literature work. Therefore, idioms belong to the language only. This can be clearly seen through the idiom "a meeting of minds" which means "people thinking in the same way about something, a special understanding between people". Although this idiom is expressed figuratively and imaginatively, which performs its aesthetic function, it brings us neither an

advice nor a lesson about life or society. In conclusion, idioms and proverbs are so alike that people frequently take them into parallel consideration when studying a language. The close relations between idioms and proverbs, however, can not reflect their complete similarities. They are still distinguishable for their differences in grammar and function. The similarities and differences between idioms and proverbs can be summarized in the table as follows:

Table 1: Differences between idioms and proverbs

Expression	Feature	Idioms	Proverb
	Syntactic feature		
	Fixedness		
	Phrase		
	Clause		
	Sentence		
	Semantic feature		
	Non motivated		

+

+

Phrase

+

-

Clause

+

-

Sentence

+

+

Semantic feature Non motivated

+

+

Communicative function Perception

-

+

Aestheticism

+

+

Classification Classification of English Idioms Some authors have classified English idioms into topic groups and countries. They have also listed the amount of idioms belonging to each topic or country.

Idioms by topic

Animals: the birds and the bees
 Body and bodily functions: at arm's length
 Buildings and construction: to drive someone up the wall
 Character and appearance: as cold as ice
 Children and babies: like a kid in a candy store
 Clothes: at the drop of a hat
 Colours: black and white
 Death: at death's door
 Drinking and pubs: to turn water in to wine
 Drugs: close but no cigar
 Food: as cool as a cucumber
 Furniture and household fittings: to cut a rug
 Gambling: to go for broke
 Law: to bring someone to book
 Men and women: man in the street
 Money: for my money
 Music: to call the tune
 Nationality and ethnicity: for England
 Nature: as cold as a stone
 Numbers: to feel like a million
 Person's name: as rich as Croesus
 Place name: to set the Thames on fire
 Plants and flowers: to gild the lily
 Police and crime: to get away with

murder
 Politics: on the stump
 Profession or work: all in a day's work
 Religion:
 at the bottom of the totem pole
 Sex and sexuality: to play the field
 Sport: to drop the ball
 Technology and science: to hit the airwaves
 Time: behind the times
 Transport and travel: to hit the road
 War and conflict: war of words
 Weather: in a fog

Idioms by country

American English: as mad as a wrongly shot hog
 Australian English: to cut down the tall poppies
 British English: by a long chalk
 Canadian English: The Mountie always gets his man
 Indian English: to do the needfull
 Irish English: Even the dogs in the street know
 New Zealand English: across the ditch
 Scottish English: to turn the crack([http://www.usingenglish.com/idiom category/](http://www.usingenglish.com/idiom-category/))
 Basing on parts of speech, Jennifer Seidl - W. McMordie (1988) gave eight groups of idioms as follows:

Key words with idiomatic uses

Adjectives and adverbs: bad, good, long etc
 Nouns: end, line, thing etc
 Miscellaneous: all, how, too etc

Idioms with nouns and adjectives

Noun phrases: a drop in the ocean
 Adjective + noun: a close shave

Idiomatic pairs

Pairs of adjectives: cut and dried
 Pairs of nouns: wear and tear
 Pairs of adverbs: more or less
 Pairs of verbs: hit and miss
 Identical pairs: bit by bit
 Idioms with prepositions: by, for, from etc
 Phrasal verbs: act up, call

something off, make something up to someone etc Verbal idioms: blow one's own trumpet, call a spade a spade, do a bunk etc

Idioms with key words from special categories

Animals: bird, bee, bull etc Colours: black, blue, red etc Numbers, size, measurement: one, inch, mile etc Parts of the body: arm, back, nose etc Time: day, minute, night etc

Idioms with comparisons

Comparisons with as ... as: as bold as brass Comparisons with like: to go like the wind Basing on functions, idioms can be also classified as follows:

Idioms as noun phrases

e. g. peace and quiet (peace/ calm): It is nice to have some peace and quiet. the cat's whiskers (wonderful): She thinks she is the cat's whisker. dog's dinner (over dressed in a showy way): He was dressed up like a dog's dinner.

Idioms as verb phrases

e. g. to jump out of my skin (give a big jump): I jump out of my skin when I heard the bang. to get the bottom of things (find the true the explanation or the state of affair): We need a proper investigation to get the bottom of things.

Idioms as adjective phrases

e. g. as good as gold (generous, helpful, well-behaved): He is as good as gold. hard and fast (can not be changed in any circumstances): There are no hard and fast rules about this.

Idioms as adverbial phrases

e. g. as likely as not (certainly/ surely): He'll be at home now, as likely as not.

Idioms as prepositional phrases

e. g. in a black mood (a bad mood/ temper): Gerry is in a black mood.

Idioms as interjections

e. g. Well, I never! Never say die! Take your time!

Idioms as independent clauses

e. g. A little bird told me (It is not necessary for me to tell you who told me this)

1. 2. 2. Classification of Vietnamese Idioms According to Luong Van Dang, Vietnamese idioms (in " Thành ngữ tiếng Việt") can be classified as follows:

Idioms with three single words or more

e. g. bạn nối khố (a bosom friend) bở hơi tai (fagged out) treo đầu dê, bán thịt chó (He cries wine and sells vinegar) trẻ không tha, già không thương (Neither consideration for the young nor the pity for the old)...

Idioms with a single word and a compound word

e. g. bé hạt tiêu (little body, great mind) câm miệng hến (mute as a fish) có máu mặt (to be in comfortable circumstances)...

Idioms with two compound words

e. g. buôn gian bán lận (to cheat in commerce) nhắm mắt xuôi tay (to die) năm xung tháng hạn (an unpropitious period of time) ...

Idioms as simple sentences

e. g. châu chấu đá xe (David fights Goliath)ếch ngồi đáy giếng (a frog in a well)mèo mù vớ cá rán (The devil looks after his own)...

Idioms with alliterations or compound words

e. g. hì hà hì hục (be completely engrossed in)lảm nhảm lảm nhàm (to drivel)ăn bớt ăn xén (to take a stealthy rake off)...

Idioms with symmetrical comparisons

e. g. nát như tương (as pastry as soy)đen như mực (inky-black)nặng như chì (as heavy as the lead)nguyên nguẩy như mẹ quẩy tôm (to turn away in anger)
...

Idioms with summary comparisons

e. g. như cá gặp nước (feel like duck in water)nnhư đĩa phải vôi (like a scalded cat)nnhư nước đổ đầu vịt (like water off a duck's back)...However, the common structures of Vietnamese idioms are the structures which have two balanced members. Idioms are also formed by joining rhymes (usually interior rhymes) such as bóc ngắn cắn dài (to live beyond one's means), bé xé ra to (to make mountains out of molehills) etc. These structures do not only make idioms easy to say and remember, but they also keep the fixation and unshakeable characteristics of idioms. According to Nguyen Cong Duc (1995), Vietnamese idioms can be divided into two main groups:

Idioms with symmetrical structures

Symmetrical structures consist of two members which have the same forms and harmonious balanced contents (opposite or supplement of each other).

These structures form a large number of idioms in general and idioms showing speaking activities in particular. They are concretized by the following expressions:- AxAy (A: verb; x, y: combinative words)e. g. buôn gian bán lận (to cheat in commerce)ăn không nói có (to be dishonest)ăn thật làm giả (to work perfunctorily) ...- BxBy (B: noun; x, y: combinative words)e. g. điều ong tiếng ve (unfavourable reputation)mồm năm miệng mười (loud-mouthed)mồm loa mép dải (loud-spoken)...- CxCy (C: adjective; x, y: combinative words)e. g. dại mồm dại miệng (foolish tongues)vụng ăn vụng nói (not good at speaking)vụng chèo khéo chống (A bad workman blames his tools)...- Dx Dy (D: numeral; x, y: combinative words)e. g. nửa nạc nửa mỡ (neither flesh nor fish)nửa đùa nửa thật (half seriously)nửa úp nửa mở (equivocal)...Idioms with symmetrical structures can be compound sentences; for example, có mồm thì cắp, có nắp thì đập (to keep silent for good).

Idioms with comparative structures

These are the common structures of Vietnamese idioms. A như (like/as) B is considered as the comprehensive form of comparative idioms. The words such as như, bằng, tày are usually between A and B, and they are concretized by the following expressions:- A như B (A: verb or adjective; B: noun)e. g. nói như vẹt (to parrot)ngang như cua (utterly nonsensical)chua như dấm (sour like vinegar))...- Ax như B (Ax: verb-adjective phrase; B: noun)e. g. nói dối như cuội (to be a colossal liar)nói ngọt như đường (to use honeyed words)nói dẻo như kẹo (to be smooth-tongued)...- A như Bx (A: usually verb; Bx: phrase expressing activity)e. g. dễ như dễ vong (to

soothe)chửi như vện thịt (to abuse someone regularly)chửi như hát hay (to heap abuses on)...- Ax như Bx (Ax: phrase consisting of a verb and an adjective; Bx: phrase expressing activity)e. g. nói dai như chó nhai dẻ rách (to talk constantly)chuyện nở như ngô rang (to chat loudly)chuyện giòn như bắp rang (to chat loudly)...FeaturesFeatures of English IdiomsAccording to many linguists, a group of words which has a fixed structure, indivisible meaning, and can appear in speech like a word is called an idiom. Therefore, idioms can be distinguished by their grammatical and semantic features.

a. Grammatical features

It is very easy to realize that most idioms are fixed expressions. There are no changes in structure, word order and lexicology. We can take the idiom black and blue (of bruises) as an example. It would sound uncanny if we changed it into blue and black. It means that it wouldn't make sense. Moreover, when an idiom is used in a complete sentence, it is hardly change into passive voice. Let us consider the idiom to stuff one's face in the sentence She is stuffing her face with chocolates (She is eating a lot of chocolates); It would be unnatural to say Her face is stuffed with chocolates. However, some other idioms are more flexible; we can make some changes if they don't lose their idiomatic meaning. This means that idioms are only fixed in some of their parts but not all. The alteration of component words can help to form a different idiom of the same or different meaning. Appearing on the mass media is in this way of using. They no longer keep the full form of the idiom but add some more components to make it more vivid, particularly effective when writing articles. We can change the tense of the verb in the idiom to

give someone the cold shoulder (to treat someone in a cold or unfriendly way), or the verb in to have one's finger with to get one's finger. In addition, idioms may take many different forms or structures. Some idioms are noun phrases such as tender age, a black sheep, forty winks, etc. Some are verb phrases such as to spare one's blushes, to do someone proud, to cut one's coat according to one's cloth, etc. The most important thing is that an idiom can have its own regular, irregular or even incorrect grammatical structure. to be at large is an example of grammatical irregularity. The idiom is formed by verb + preposition + adjective. In English, no structure like this is normally accepted because an adjective doesn't usually come after a preposition singly. However, this can be considered as an exception in language.

b. Semantic features

When mentioning the semantic features of an idiom, we often talk about its meaning. A linguist said " the meaning of an idiom is the special chemical mixture of all components' meaning, which is completely new in quality". This means that it is very important to understand idioms metaphorically. We can not usually discover the meanings by looking up the individual words in a dictionary when studying idioms; most of the idioms are metaphorical rather than literal. For example, in order to understand the idiom (to feel) like fish out of water, we have to consider its meaning metaphorically as to feel uncomfortable because of unfamiliar surroundings. Another feature concerning itself with semantics is that idioms can range from positive, neutral to negative meaning. Some idioms have positive meanings such as a

willing horse (a keen worker), to get it into one's head (to deeply understand), or to warm the cockles of one's heart (to make someone feel pleased or happy). Some have neutral meanings as to watch the world go by (to observe the others while doing nothing oneself), etc. And many other idioms are negative. For instance, crocodile tears means insincere tears, to waste one's breath means to talk or give advice without having any effects, or to wash one's dirty linen in public means to discuss or argue about one's personal affairs in public, etc. All those examples show that the nuances of idiomatic meanings are very complicated. They mainly depend on the nuances of their key components. Features of Vietnamese Idioms

In Vietnamese, idioms are considered as very special language units because they reflect Vietnamese cultural characteristics. The forms and contents of idioms are also distinguished by grammatical and semantic features.

2. 1. 2. 1. Grammatical features

Most of Vietnamese linguists have had the same point of view about the forms of Vietnamese idioms. Nguyen Van Tu said " Idioms are fixed expressions whose word components do not have their own individual meanings and become a solid block". He emphasized the combination of the components forming the meaning of idioms. Nguyen Thien Giap (1975), did consider an idiom as a fixed expression. Although Nguyen Duc Dan (1986) didn't focus on the forms of Vietnamese idioms, he dealt with the fixation of idioms. He said " Idioms are language units which have fixed forms". Hoang Van Hanh (1987) attached special importance to the components forming idioms. He affirmed that an idiom was a fixed group of words whose form

was unchanged. It can be said that Vietnamese idioms are fixed groups of words whose forms are unchanged: the fixed combination comes from settled words and expressions such as *bắt cá hai tay* (to run after two hares), *mèo mù vớ cá rán* (The devil looks after his own), *cá chậu chim lồng* (behind prison bars), *ăn chắc mặc bền* (solidity first), *chuột sa chĩnh gạo* (to get a windfall), etc. The fixation shows that we can not change the order of words or use the synonyms (similar words) to replace any components of an idiom in a casual way. This is a basic feature helping us to realize idioms easily. However, in fact, there are some fixed expressions which are not idioms such as *bánh xe lịch sử* (the wheel of history), *gia đình văn hóa* (good family), *khoa học kỹ thuật* (sciences and techniques) etc. Therefore, in order to realize an idiom correctly, we can not only look at this feature but also other ones.

2. 1. 2. 2. Semantic features

There have been a lot of different opinions about the semantic features of Vietnamese idioms. According to Nguyen Van Menh (1971), an idiom introduces an image, a phenomenon, a state, a personality, an attitude, etc. This opinion is quite simple and general. In 1986, he gave his own new point of view: Idioms have their own meanings and nominative functions, and are used in daily speaking. Nguyen Van Tu said " The meaning of an idiom does not come from individual components which may have their images or not. Its meaning can be different from the meaning of each component or does come from each original word". Nguyen Thien Giap focused on the basic semantic features of idioms: Being rich in imagery is a basic feature of

idioms. Idioms express concepts basing on specific images and symbols. The imagery of idioms is made from its metaphor and comparison. Although there have been different ideas about the semantic features of idioms, Vietnamese linguists have all shared the same point of view as follows: Firstly, the meaning of an idiom is a perfect whole which does not come from the meanings of individual components added. Secondly, the meaning of an idiom expresses the reflection of things or concepts. Thirdly, the meaning of an idiom is usually figurative and descriptive. Although many linguists affirm that idioms have their own figurative and imaginary meanings, we shouldn't consider this as an absolute fact. In Vietnamese, there are also some idioms which have literal sense coming from the meanings of their components. They may be comparative idioms such as *nát như tương* (as pasty as soy), *đen như cột nhà cháy* (as black as a sweep) and *bám như đĩa đói* (to stick like a limpet), whose imagery comes from the images compared with activities or properties. Some Sino-Vietnamese idioms such as *nhất cử lưỡng tiện* (to kill two birds with one stone), *bán tín bán nghi* (half doubtful) and *bách phát bách trúng* (to hit the mark one hundred times out of one hundred) also have literal sense basing on the meanings of their components. Relation between Idioms and Culture Idioms are a special kind of speech form that is particular in meaning, grammatical structure and usage. Idiomatic expressions are even difficult for English native speakers because their meanings cannot be determined through an analysis of their individual words. Unlike literal language, it is impossible to explain the idiom from the literal meaning of the individual words. Thus, idioms are difficult to understand and acquire, because they are a combination of two or more

words, which function as a unit of meaning. They usually involve either metaphorical or figurative meanings that can be understood in certain cultural contexts and must not be taken literally. As we all know, language is closely related to culture, and can be said as a part of culture. From a dynamic view, language and culture interact with each other and shape each other. Language is the carrier of culture which in turn is the content of language. We can dig out cultural features from language and explain language phenomena with culture. Idioms as a special form of language exist in both of them and carry a large amount of cultural information such as history, geography, religion, custom, nationality psychology, thought pattern, etc. They are the heritage of history and product of cultural evolution. Consequently, we can learn a lot about culture through studying idioms and in turn get better understanding of idioms by learning the cultural background behind them.

Chapter II : Finding , Interpretations and Analyses

1. Idioms with Animals in English
1. 1. Mouse/Mice appear in English idioms and proverbs with negative meaning. For instance: a quiet person is compared with a mouse (As quiet as a mouse)" mouse" is considered to be very poor (As poor as a church mouse)short-sighted (Mouse that has but one hole is quickly taken) and etc.
1. 2. BuffaloIn English, buffalos do not appear in idioms and proverbs. This is due to buffalos are not the British native animals. Instead of them, idioms and proverbs relating to cows or bulls are found with high frequency.
1. 3. TigerTiger does not appear a lot in English idioms. It also represents strength and power and sometimes denotes something dangerous. For example :- A paper tiger. (He who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount.)
1. 4. CatIn English, " cat" carries

both positive and negative connotations." Cat" can connote an ordinary person (Cat can look at a king) someone in authority (When the cat's away, the mice will play.). In some idioms, " cat" implies people with bad characters. It is considered to be nervous and unable to keep still (Be like a cat on a hot tin roof) promiscuous (Alley cat) imitative (Copy cat) unfaithful (Cat in the pan).

2. 1. 5. Dragon In English, dragon stands for monster, demon or savage. For such consideration, there are few English idioms with the word " dragon". They all bring negative connotations. For example:- It is also used to allude social evil in " Chase the dragon" when the idiom means " to take heroin".

2. 1. 6. Snake In English, snake tends to symbolize the dreaded parts of life. For example: snake in (Snake in the grass) stands for a sneaky and despised person in " It's good to get a serpent's head with your enemy's hand" for an enemy and in Mad as a (cut) snake for someone who is crazy or eccentric.

2. 1. 7. Horse The horse has long been part of life in Britain, a nomadic culture. Many English words and phrases used today derive from the 15 horse. For example:- " horse" in the following idioms is used to compare with human's activities, habits and strength (Work like a horse, Eat like a horse, As strong as a horse)

2. 1.. 8. Goat Goat in English has negative meaning. It denotes a lecherous man. On the other hand, goat stands for an irritable person (Get someone's goat) someone who behaves in a silly way, sometimes in order to make people laugh (act/play the goat) a person of low quality (separate the sheep from the goats).

2. 1. 9. Monkey In some English idioms, it can be used to refer to people who are : artful (As artful (or clever) as a wagonload of monkeys) funny (Be more fun than a barrel of monkeys) restless and agitated (Like a monkey on a stick) person.

2. 1. 10.

Chicken The British people do not use chickens (cock, hen, rooster and chick) as much as the Vietnamese. In English, they use cock (male chicken) for : the defiance (Cock a snook at someone), a confident or arrogant man (Cock of the walk) a person who counts on his position (Every cock will crow upon his dunghill) a well-off life (Live like a fighting cock). 2. 1. 11. Dog The British people consider dog as : their dearest pet (Love me, love my dog) their loyal friend (A dog is a man's best friend) So, it usually stands for people or things with commendatory senses in some idioms and proverbs. 2. 1. 12. Pig In English, pigs are commonly associated with greed of various forms, including: gluttony (eat like a pig) greed (as greedy as a pig) monopolisation of time or resources (a road hog). 2. 2. Idioms with Animals in Vietnamese 2. 2. 1. Mouse The Vietnamese people compare human's actions with those of "chuột". In the following examples: "chuột" denotes cowardly people. (Chạy như chuột, Len lét như chuột ngày) 2. 2. 2. Buffalo Buffaloes are very sturdy animals so they denote : hard-working people or those with strong physical ability (Trâu khỏe chẳng lo cày trưa, Trâu ho bằng bò rống, Khỏe như trâu) 2. 2. 3 Tiger In the Vietnamese culture, it represents: strength and power (Cáo mượn oai hùm, Khỏe như hùm). Because of its strength and beauty, " hổ" usually refers to people with : good characters (Hổ phụng sinh hổ tử) nice appearance (Râu hùm hàm én). 2.. 2. 4. Cat Cat's meanings in most of Vietnamese idioms are negative and derogatory when it alludes a person. " Mèo" is used to refer: a dull person (Chó gio, mèo mù) someone who hides evil things secretly (Giấu như mèo giấu cú) a scamp (Mèo mả gà nõng) an unfriendly, quarrelsome person (Như chó với mèo), and etc. 2. 2. 5. Dragon In Vietnamese culture, the dragon symbolizes the high reputation. In the feudal

society, an ordinary person who passed the national exam and became a mandarin (Cá chép hóa rồng) someone in favorable condition (Rồng gặp mây) is compared with "rồng".

2. 2. 6. Snake In Vietnamese, "Rắn" is associated with- human's evil appearance and behaviors : Mắt như mắt rắn ráo, Len lét như rắn mừng năm.

2. 2. 7. Horse In Vietnamese culture, Horse is used for : travelling and transportation for the rich (Lên xe xuống ngựa) especially in welfare (Chiêu binh bãi mã) an evil (Đầu trâu mặt ngựa) an young aggressive person (Ngựa non háu đá), and etc.

2. 2. 8. Goat For Vietnamese farmers, goat is : not a helpful animal (Bán bò tậu ruộng mua dê về cày) a topic in gossips (Cà kê dê ngỗng). However, goat sometimes has positive meaning. For example: "Treo đầu dê bán thịt chó", it alludes high-quality goods.

2. 2. 9. Monkey When denoting to human, monkey also represents bad qualities. It is used for: a grimacer (Nhăn như khỉ) a person with bad behaviors (khỉ lại là khỉ, mèo vẫn hoàn mèo) a cunning person (Khinh khỉ mắc nọc già) an incompetent person who have high position (Khỉ ngồi bàn nọc)

2. 2. 10. Chicken The Vietnamese deal with chickens a lot in their daily life. There are numerous idioms and proverb relating to "Gà" and it is used in many comparisons. The connotative meanings are related to: human's characters, appearance, state and emotions (Đông như đá gà chọi, Nhác nháo như gà phải cáo, Rối như gà mắt đẽ).

2. 2. 11. Dog Dogs in Vietnamese culture are watchdogs, not pets. They do not bear positive connotation. In the following idioms, dog's image is used to:- compare with human's intellect, emotions, actions and etc. (e. g. Bẩn như chó, Như chó với mèo, Làm như chó cái trốn con)

2. 2. 12. Pig The Vietnamese people compare their bad characteristics with the pig and usually these comparisons are insults. These characteristics

include : dirtiness (Ở dơ như heo)fatness (Mập như heo)stupidness (Ngu như heo). 2. 3. Contrastive analysis of Idioms with Animals in English and Vietnamese Like in many other languages, 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 animals in the wild such as foxes, rabbits, lions, tigers, fish, and birds ... Maybe those points are also the common points for idioms in most languages in the world. We often foist some characteristics of human beings on animals. Lakoff and Turner (1989, p: 193-194) present different metaphorical schemas that show how we conceive animals, and how we apply this folk knowledge to the construction of metaphorical schemas. According to them, the domain of animal life is one of the most elaborate ones, which we use to understand the human domain. And people from different cultures may have idioms that use the same image of animals and carry the same message. The reason for this might be that some animals have the same important role in people's lives in these two cultures, and have the same attributes and features. We have the same metaphors: METAPHORSOURCE TARGET Pig person who is dirty, messy and eat too much Fox clever person Dog and cat enemies Cat and mouse the bully and the weaker

...

E. g. 1: to pig it (ở dơ như heo), to make a pig of oneself (ăn như heo). E. g. 2: as cunning as a fox (ranh như cáo)E. g. 3: argue like cat and dog (cãi nhau như chó với mèo)E. g. 4: cat and mouse game (trò mèo vờn chuột)

a. The same expressions

As we all know, human beings have similar capabilities of thought, similar laws of cognition. So, looking closer to the idioms in English and Vietnamese we can see there are even more equivalent idioms that have amazing similarities in images, form and implied messages. For example:-

bookwormmọt sách- crocodile tearsnước mắt cá sấu- a barking dog seldom bitechó sủa thường không cắn- a dog is valiant at his own doorchó cậy gần nhà- a cock is valiant on his own dunghill gà cậy gần chuồng- to fish in trouble waterthừa nước đục thả câu- even a worm will turn con giun xéo lằm cũng quăn- water off a duck's backnước đổ đầu vịt

b. Different expressions having close meaning

There are some idioms that carry the same messages but contain different images of animals. Although their equivalents are different in expression and show different perspectives, they are similar in meaning. Followed are some illustrations from Lê and Trâm (1986):- birds of a feather flock together ngu tằm ngu, mã tằm mã (p. 35).- every bird loves to hear himself sing. mèo khen mèo dài đuôi (p. 44).- fine feathers make fine birds con gà tốt mã vì lông (p. 49).- a living dog is better than a dead lionngười sống, đồng vàng (p. 25)- when the cat's away, the mice will play vắng chủ nhà gà vọc niêu tôm (p. 98). And from some other sources:- eat like a birdăn như mèo- like a cat on hot bricks như kiến bò chảo nóng- to shut the stable-door when the horse is stolenmất bò mới lo làm chuồngWe can see that the differences don't cause trouble for understanding those idioms because the cognition of both Vietnamese and English people about those animals is the same. 2. 4. The

cross-culture differences. 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 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. Cultural connotations of some animal words in English and Vietnamese are closely related to the religion, customs and the history of the nation. That is why idioms related to animals in these two languages are different in their cultural connotations. And it causes a lot of difficulties for people from one country to learn the language of the other.

Customs

One of the most important elements that differentiate the 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. Each culture highly values the animals that have more contribution to their life. That is why though both languages have idioms using the images of dogs, horses, buffaloes..., the messages carried are varied through cultures. 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 friend. There are many idioms showing the importance of dogs such as:- a house without either a cat or a dog is the house of a scoundrel.- a house is not a home without a dog- old dog for a hard road- love me love my dog- the greater love is a mother's; then comes a dog's; then a sweetheart's.- a man's best friend is his dog Because they are human's best companion, the image of the dogs is usually associated with human being in idioms.

METAPHORSOURCE TARGET dog human being (England) You can find this metaphor in many idioms:- every dog has its day: everyone can be successful at something at some time in their life- to help a lame dog over stile: to help someone who is in difficulty or trouble.- you can't teach an old dog new tricks: people who have long been used to doing things in a particular way will not abandon their habits- give a dog a bad name (and hang him): people who lose their reputation have difficulty regaining it because others continue to blame or suspect them. While dogs are so important in English culture, they are not so highly valued in Vietnamese culture. Let consider the metonymy below: **METONYM**PART 1 PART 2 dog faithful, dependable (England) dog stupidity, cruelty, inferior

(Vietnam) Though dogs help watching houses, Vietnamese people in general dislike the behavior of dogs. So, dog is used to describe the bad guys, those who are cruel and unscrupulous. Bellow are some Vietnamese idioms with their meanings:- *mồm chó không mọc được ngà voi*: nice words never come out from the bad guy's mouth.- *chơi với chó, chó liếm mặt*: be kind to the inferiors, then they will be disrespectful- *chó cùng giứt dậu*: bad guy at the

difficult time may be even fiercer.- chó ngáp phải ruồi: stupid person accidentally says or does right things. Similar to dogs are horses, they are highly respected in English culture whereas they are not as important in Vietnamese culture. In England, horses represent the strength, willing to work and they are the pride of the owners.- as strong as a horse- eat like a horse (eat a lot)- a good horse cannot be of bad color- a horse, a wife and a sword may be showed but not lent- choose a horse and a wife to make. However, in Vietnam horses represent stubbornness. Below are some Vietnamese idioms using the horse's image and their meanings:- đầu trâu mặt ngựa: bad and cruel guys- mồm chó vó ngựa: dogs' mouth and horses' hoof are very dangerous- ngựa con háu đá: the young are always aggressive- ngựa quen đường cũ: hard to rid of bad habits- như ngựa bất kham: as stubborn as a wild horse. Beside typical images like dogs and horses, there still be lots of different connotations of animals in the two languages expressed in idioms such as buffalos, cow ... If English learners do not know about the custom of English culture they will encounter lots of difficulties in communicating, especially with idioms.

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. METAPHORSOURCE TARGET Dragon

power, excellence (Vietnam) Dragon cruelty, fierceness (England) In Vietnamese culture, the dragon symbolizes the high reputation. In the past, when someone passed the national exam and became a mandarin, the case was called " cá chép hóa rồng" (the fish turns into a dragon). And when someone having higher social status visits a lower one, then they use the idiom " rồng đến nhà tôm" (the dragon visits the shrimp). The dragon represents power, excellence, and striving for goals, as well as being a benevolent force, which radiates goodwill, good luck, and blessings. In the feudal society, " dragon" is associated the kings and royal families. Vietnamese people consider themselves " con rồng cháu tiên" which means " sons and daughters of Dragon and Divinity". Whereas in English - a Western culture, it is a kind of evil monster, which can vomit fire and sometimes possess three to nine heads. In English, " to chase the dragon" means " to take heroin" (The Free Dictionary), a " dragon lady" is " a woman who is domineering or belligerent" (Your Dictionary) and the Vietnamese equivalent of that idioms is " sư tử Hà Đông". Only when one understands the religion features of both languages can she/he understands those expressions correctly. Though there are a lot of religions in Vietnam, most of them are imported from other popular country in the past such as China and India. That is why there are very few Vietnamese idioms related to classic references of religions. In contrast, there are a vast number of English idioms originate from Bible and religious references, especially the idioms related to animals. Lyman (2007) stated that: " Animals are often mentioned in the Bible. It is widely quoted sayings that briefly and strikingly express some universal truth or shrewd observation about everyday life." One of the

animals mentioned most in the Bible is the sheep. Sheep are mentioned in the Bible more than 500 times, more than any other animal. The prominence of sheep in the Bible grows out of two realities. Sheep were important to the nomads and agricultural life of the Hebrews and similar peoples. Secondly, sheep are used throughout the Bible to symbolically refer to God's people. METAPHORSOURCE TARGET sheep human being (England) So, in the Bible sheep symbolizes human being that is both innocent and sinful. In English, we can find lots of idioms using sheep's image like:- a lamb to the slaughter: in an unconcerned manner / unaware of any impending catastrophe- a wolf in sheep clothing: an enemy disguised as a friend- separate the sheep from the goats: distinguish between good and bad individuals, or superior and inferior ones- black sheep: The odd/least reputable member of a group- lost sheep: person thought to be on a course of self-destruction- there is a black sheep in every flock: there is no perfect group/family In the pages of the Bible, you can also see lions, leopards, bears and hundreds of other animals, insects, and creatures. Each of them has a special meaning based on the references to the stories in that book. According to Lyman (2007), the following idioms also originate from the Bible:- a fly in the ointment: a little flaw that ruins what otherwise would be something good.- a lion in the path: the obstacle, especially one invented as an excuse for inaction.- a little bird told me: to keep secret, or to claim intuition as, a source of information- the Pale Horse: the death- to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel: to fuss about unimportant issues while assenting too readily in important ones Without understanding the religion as a part of culture, we can not understand the idioms originated from them.

Chapter III : Some suggestions for teaching and learning English Idioms

In spite of a small study, this paper gave me a good chance to have a closer look at the comparison of idioms generally and idioms with animals particularly. Thanks to this study, I could learn about the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese animal idioms. Personally, some useful implications for teaching, communication and translation will be highlighted as follows: Firstly, a deeper understanding in animal idioms is probably beneficial for teaching and learning process. As far as I am concerned, in class most language students take in knowledge isolatedly and passively and rich cultural resources are left aside. The negligence may partly explain why students often forget previous lessons easily and learn with boredom. Imagine the inputs of knowledge for students in that case are considered as separate pieces of jigsaw. With the help of understanding the English culture and its origin of idioms, language learning could turn out to be a good adhesive connecting new and old pieces of information together. Moreover, cultural elements integrated in lessons are likely to increase student's interest and contrastive analysis between the two languages. Furthermore, sometimes teachers should let students guess the meanings of idioms based on teacher's hints or explanations instead of asking students to learn by heart. Gradually, students are able to motivate their cognitive views and get more accurate guesses whenever they encounter new items. In addition, students can adopt these in not only English conversations but also specially their writings to make it more naturally and lively and limit ambiguities. Along with the helpful teaching and learning strategies, this

critical comparison in the light of contrastive analysis enhances not only linguistic competence in English and in Vietnamese but, more importantly, better cultural knowledge as well. Also, deepening cross-cultural understanding will be taken into consideration, which helps students preclude unexpected misunderstandings with native English speakers and highly evaluate the beauty of our mother tongue as well. Last but not least, it is crucial for translators to have profound contrastive analysis related to collocational and idiomatic aspects. To convey conceptual metaphor 'so-called' successfully from the source language to target language and vice versa, translators are supposed to have solid knowledge foundation of both languages. Consequently, they could deliberate when semantic equivalence or translation equivalence should be employed.

Part C : Conclusion

In short, both English and Vietnamese languages are rich in images and have a lot of idioms. And idioms 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 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 idioms born from the historical fact, local custom or specific religion convey different messages though they use the same images of animals. Definitely,

cultural linguistics is considered as a very broad and appealing academic field. Through the process of doing this study, although I just focused on a quite small part about the animal-based comparative idioms with the pattern "as...as", sometimes I found it overwhelming to understand fully this type of idioms multilaterally. However, the more I consulted reference materials, the more interesting the issue turned out to be. Due to the limited time frame and my modest knowledge of culture and language, that some idioms and linguistic views were not covered is inevitable. Anyways, I tried my best as much as possible to convey to readers at least the overview of similarities and differences in English and Vietnamese animal-based idioms of comparison. After contrasting and comparing many idioms, analyzing related concerns, I hold on hope that somehow my paper could be a helpful and informative material for teaching, learning and translation. Furthermore, through my paper I do wish to look for an interesting way to help students take in knowledge instead of learning by heart. Importantly, students could utilize what they have learnt as an effective communicative means but not a temporary solution to the school exam.