

IDIOMS AND PROVERBS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIPS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE - A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS RESEARCH ISSUES

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Abstract: *English has undoubtedly become one of the most extensively used languages in the world. The trend of learning English has demonstrated to learners that concentration is necessary for efficient language use. Comprehending and effectively utilizing English or Vietnamese idioms and proverbs not only enhances learners' self-assurance in communication but also broadens their comprehension of both Western and Eastern cultures. This allows them to develop a communication style and cultural background that are suitable for their home language. Both Eastern and Western cultures frequently employ proverbs and idioms. This article is focused on some similarities as well as differences of the idioms and proverbs between English and Vietnamese. Consequently, to assist close the multicultural divide and establish efficient communication, learners utilize idioms and proverbs linked to relationships in both languages.*

Keywords: *Features; idioms; proverbs; relationships; semantics.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Given the present globalization trend, English has undoubtedly become one of the most commonly used and well-liked languages globally. English is becoming more and more popular as a language to learn as it has long been considered a global communication tool. Idioms are a distinctive means of conveying ideas that can be either literal or metaphorical. Every nation on the planet has its unique colloquialisms. Some of them are distinctive and represent the national culture in that particular area. Conversely, idioms often have numerous meanings in different languages, highlighting the necessity of defying cultural norms and customs worldwide. Acquiring mastery over idioms may instill confidence in learners and facilitate effective communication with speakers of other languages. Idioms can also help pupils adjust to the habits and traditions of other nations or cultures. Numerous research has been done on proverbs and idioms in a variety of settings, for a variety of purposes, and from a variety of viewpoints. On the other hand, no study has been done on the semantic characteristics of relationship-related proverbs and Vietnamese and English idioms.

The purpose of the research is to add new perspectives to the English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs about relationships. This study, in particular, compares the semantic features of proverbs and idioms associated with relationships in Vietnamese and English.

By using techniques like data research methodologies, analytical research, and gathering, this report was created. Sources searched through literary works about Vietnamese idioms and proverbs such as "Thành ngữ Việt Nam" by Nguyen Luc [1] or "Từ điển Tiếng Việt" by Hoang Phe [2]. In terms of English references, there are literary and artistic works by Tom Topor, Sam McBratney, etc. This research is carried out in the following steps:

Step 1: Read and refer to documents: previous research studies and documents related to idioms and proverbs.

Step 2: Select and collect important data for research.

Step 3: Analyze, compare, and contrast the semantic characteristics of the selected pairs of proverbs and idioms.

Step 4: Give results, synthesize, and conclude.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. A theoretical to idioms and proverbs related to relationships in English and Vietnamese

2.1.1. Idioms

An idiom is defined as "an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts" by the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics [3]. The definition of an idiom in the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms [4] is "a group of words in a fixed order that has a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own". Generally speaking, idioms have a deeper meaning than non-idiomatic expressions. For example, "letting the cat out of the bag" conveys a more striking message than accidentally revealing a secret. Additionally, idioms can convey the user's mood, such as approbation, amusement, annoyance, or admiration.

According to "Từ điển Tiếng Việt" [2], idiom is defined as "Thành ngữ là một tập hợp từ đã quen dùng mà nghĩa thường không giải thích được một cách đơn giản bằng nghĩa thường của các từ tạo nên nó".

Idioms often employ fixed language; grammatically speaking, they are merely words or phrases because they are not whole sentences, according to Nguyen Luc in "Thành ngữ Tiếng Việt" [1]. Idioms typically serve a figurative rather than an instructional purpose since they don't provide any commentary, life lessons, moral lessons, or criticism. As an illustration, the idiom "Beauty is only skin deep" or in Vietnamese, it is said "Tốt gỗ hơn tốt nước sơn. Xấu người đẹp nét còn hơn đẹp người" to point out that the quality of the inside is always more important and valuable than the external beauty. The term "beauty" refers to attributes that are considered admirable and deserving in life, such as intelligence, people skills, and a pleasant disposition. Additionally, "Skin deep" focuses on the word "deep,"

which is difficult to view clearly and immediately; instead, one must attempt to uncover it layer by layer. "*Skin deep*" takes on a mysterious and unique quality in this expression. The phrase features the word "*only*" in addition to its two primary, intriguing components. It makes sense that the word "*only*" would denote anything being the best, unique, and valuable version of something that exists in life. Placing the term "*skin deep*" in front of it highlights the variations in internal values and seems to be teaching the reader to respect personality above looks.

As the people said, idioms have a lot of features. An idiom is a phrase consisting of several words, often inflected to create a figurative meaning. It functions as a cohesive semantic unit, equivalent to a literal synonym. It is resistant to interruption by other words and can't be rearranged. Typically, "*break a leg*" means good luck but cannot be changed to "*break legs*" or "*break the left leg*".

Its syntactic structure is unproductive, as a lexeme can only collocate once in an idiomatic formulation. The expression's idiomatic meaning is lost if other words from the same generic lexical relation set are substituted. For instance, "*pull someone's leg*" cannot be changed into "*pull someone's feet*" or "*pull someone's ears*". Lastly, an idiom has an abnormal syntactic structure, with a peculiar grammatical structure. For example, "*That's small potatoes*" means to say something is not important or unnecessary, but uses the plural form instead of "*potato*." These characteristics make an idiom unique and essential in language.

2.1.2. Proverbs

Proverbs are used by speakers to express ideas, give perspective weight in debates, and enliven a subject or conversation. They can be used to subtly express ideas, invoke ancestors' customs, or simply enliven a subject or conversation. In many regions, using proverbs in speech is considered a sign of a skilled orator.

In theory, there are numerous approaches to defining what constitutes a proverb. According to Wolfgang Mieder "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" [5]. Proverbs are "Folk wisdom" that provides general guidance on behavior and life, often reflecting the cultural values and natural surroundings from which they originate. Examples include proverbs about the sea in Hawaiian cultures, elephants in Eastern cultures, and American proverbs about hard work for success. Proverbs are used to support claims, offer teachings, and emphasize common ideals.

However, Vietnamese proverbs have slightly different meaning. Proverbs are described as "*short statements, often expressed with rhythm, which sum up knowledge, life experience, and moral lessons of people*" in "*Từ điển Tiếng Việt*" [2].

Proverbs, like idioms, have remained unchanged throughout history and are often interpreted metaphorically. For instance, "*The pen is mightier than the sword*" suggests that written words can yield more than force or action. Proverbs also use grammatical and theoretical strategies like alliteration, rhyme, parallel construction, repetition of important

words, and potent imagery to make them memorable. This helps readers understand the power of words and the potential of written words.

2.1.3. Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. The majority of its attention is on the relationship that exists between the symbolic elements of a sentence, including words and phrases, and the examples they provide for their references. The term "*semantics*," which was first used by French linguist Michel Bre'al in 1890 [6], refers to a set of awareness that goes from everyday use to higher application. There are three branches in Linguistics: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. While syntax focuses on grammar, structure, and elements' order, semantics deals with the meaning of these components. Semantics, or the study of meaning, is essential to the study of communication, and the necessity to comprehend it grows as communication plays an increasingly important role in social structure.

The way that English idioms and proverbs are organized internally suggests that they are a unique and extremely complicated phenomenon that is exclusive to the English language. That is to say, the semantic and structural properties of English idioms and proverbs are fixed and unique. It is impossible to break down an idiom or a proverb into its component pieces and attempt to extract the conceptual meaning from each one. Furthermore, the meaning of the phrase cannot be explained by applying standard English grammar rules.

There are two types of meaning. The first is the literal meaning. The literal meaning of a word refers to its exact definition as given by a dictionary, while idioms can have both literal and idiomatic interpretations. The sentence "*Today is cold so I wear two jackets*" is a good case in point, it implies that the cold weather is the reason for wearing two jackets for warmth.

The second type is the idiomatic meaning. An idiom or proverb is a group of words with a distinct meaning, often deviating from accepted grammatical and semantic conventions. It can have both literal and idiomatic meanings, conveying not only the information but also the speaker's attitude, feelings, and subtleties. For example, the idiom "*It's a piece of cake*" can mean a piece of cake, but also something very easy to do. Idiomatic meaning extends the meaning of the proverb, illustrating the cultural difference in how it is used concerning others. The literal meaning of the proverb is based on the meaning of each unit, while its idiomatic meaning extends beyond the meaning of each word on its own.

2.2. Contrastive analysis

2.2.1. Idioms and proverbs related to friendship

Among all partnerships, friendship is one of the most divine. It holds the key to all other relationships. In friendship, there are no boundaries or demands. A friendship between two people is nothing less than a spiritual connection. Friendship is defined differently by each individual. For others, it's having faith in someone to protect you from harm. Others see it as unwavering affection. Individuals define themselves according to the

experiences they have had. Friendship is divided into good friendship and bad friendship. In this section, the author analyzes and compares three pairs of proverbs and idioms, two about good friendship and the last is about bad friendship.

“Birds of a feather flock together” – “Nguu tầm ngu, mã tầm mã”

A good friendship is one when the relationship members treat each other well and always support each other. Friendship also starts from similarities in personality or interests. A proverb in English says, “*Birds of a feather flock together*”. The implication is that entities (usually humans) with comparable types, interests, personalities, characters, or other distinguishing qualities have a tendency to associate with one another. The proverb also originates from the natural behavior of birds. When in flight, birds of the same species frequently form homogenous groups in the wild for a variety of reasons, including defense against predators. In the proverb, the image “birds” refers to people, the phrase “of a feather” can be understood in two senses: people in the same family or people with similar interests and personalities. There are two interpretations of the word “flock together”: whereas “birds of a feather” refers to members of the same family, “flock together” refers to a close, strong tie among family members. As for the meaning of “people with the same interests”, “flock together” emphasizes similarities in interests, personalities, and the tendency to easily be attracted to each other and become friends. In Vietnamese, there is a similar meaning proverb that is “*Nguu tầm ngu, mã tầm mã*”. The metaphorical meaning of this is that people who share similar hobbies, personalities, or goals frequently find it simpler to locate and become friends. This idiom also has the meaning of “dichotomous”. That is, it is both positive and negative. However, in Vietnam, the “majority” of people understand the meaning of this idiom more negatively. That is, bad people will find other bad people to socialize and gather. Therefore, when using this proverb, you need to be careful and consider the situation.

Table 1: A comparison of common points between the proverbs “Birds of a feather flock together” and “Nguu tầm ngu, mã tầm mã”

	Birds of a feather flock together	Nguu tầm ngu, mã tầm mã
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning: humans with comparable types, interests, personalities, characters, or other distinguishing qualities have a tendency to associate with one another. - Figures of speech: metonymy - Idiom 	
Differences	- Positive meaning	- Negative meaning

“A friend in need is a friend indeed” – “Gian nan mới biết bạn hiền”

When discussing idioms and proverbs about friendship, it is impossible to overlook the proverb “*A friend in need is a friend indeed*” which suggests that a trustworthy friend or confidant will always be there to support you throughout difficult times. The words of the Greek philosopher Ennius from the third century BC are where the expression “*a friend in*

need is a friend indeed" first appeared and was later quoted in Cicero's work "De Amicitia (On Friendship)". [7] "*Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur,*" which translates to "*a sure friend is known when in difficulty,*" was the Latin proverb.

Comparably, the Vietnamese expression "*Gian nan mới biết bạn hiền*" has all the subtleties of the English proverb mentioned above. By examining the meaning, it is evident that "*a friend indeed*" is equal to "*bạn hiền*" and "*in need*" is equivalent to "*gian nan*".

Table 2: A comparison of common points between the proverbs "*A friend in need is a friend indeed*" and "*Gian nan mới biết bạn hiền*"

	A friend in need is a friend indeed	Gian nan mới biết bạn hiền
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning: a trustworthy friend or confidant will always be there to support you throughout difficult times. - Culture symbols 	
Differences	- Proverb	- Saying

"A fair-weather" – "Khi vui thì vỗ tay vào. Đến khi hoạn nạn đâu nào thấy ai"

In terms of bad friendship, in English, there is an idiom "*a fair-weather friend*". Someone who is just your buddy when things are going well for you is known as a fair-weather friend. In the idiom, the phrase "*fair-weather*" literally means good weather, a metaphor for wealth, fame, and good things happening to a person and it is this money and good things that bring them. These "*friends*" will leave as soon as something bad happens and they can no longer benefit. Vietnamese folk songs "*Khi vui thì vỗ tay vào. Đến khi hoạn nạn đâu nào thấy ai*" have comparable meanings, in comparison. The phrase "*Khi vui*" also refers to "*good things such as wealth or fame*" and the phrase "*vỗ tay vào*" refers to flatterers who gather around to take advantage and then when they encounter difficulties – "*hoạn nạn*" then there was no one left to help.

Table 3: A comparison of common points between the proverbs "*A fair-weather*" and "*Khi vui thì vỗ tay vào. Đến khi hoạn nạn đâu nào thấy ai*"

	A fair-weather friend	Khi vui thì vỗ tay vào. Đến khi hoạn nạn đâu nào thấy ai
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning: A friend who is not sincere and is only there to flatter when everything is going well. - Figures of speech: Metonymy 	
Differences	- Idiom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the special "six-eight" verse poem of Vietnamese. - Proverb/Folk songs

2.2.2. Idioms and proverbs related to love

What does love mean? For people of various kinds, love may mean many different things. Various types of love exist, including those between parents and children, teenagers,

friends, relatives, and married couples. While the meanings of these many forms of love are similar, they are all distinguished by a little bit distinct. Love is the incessant expression of one's concern for another through various gestures, words, or expressions. For two individuals to better comprehend one another, love must be shown externally. Since love gives life purpose and without love, life would be uninteresting, love is deserving of simple sweetness and all of its lovely small problems and baggage.

The article will compare and contrast Vietnamese and English expressions of love, with a particular emphasis on love between couples. To be more specific, this section will focus on the pair “*Love someone to the moon and back*” – “*Yêu bằng cả mạng sống*”. A couple's love is usually incredibly passionate. The movements, attitudes, and behaviors of two people who are infatuated with one another will eventually resemble one another.

An idiom that cannot be ignored when talking about expressing love is “*Love someone to the moon and back*”. The phrase “*to the moon and back*” here, if understood literally, will mean “*the way to the moon and the way back*” and if this idiom is understood literally, it will mean loving someone like distance from the ground to the moon and back. In a figurative sense, the phrase “*to the moon and back*” can also be understood as “*immeasurable*”. Here a metaphor was used to emphasize the intensity of love, love so great that it cannot be measured, just like the distance to the moon and the way back is so far that it cannot be measured.

In 1979, the proverb appeared in the dialogue of Tom Topor's play “*Nuts*” [8] in the line “*When I was a little girl, I used to say to her, 'I love you to the moon and down again and around the world and back again.' And she used to say to me, 'I love you to the sun and down again and around the stars and back again.'*”. Regardless of its exact origins, the phrase gained popularity in the 1990s and 2000s, as seen by its frequent usage in mainstream culture. The picture book “*Guess How Much I Love You?*” (1994) [9] explores the notion of a parent's love for their child as well. The father responds, “*I love you right up to the moon and back,*” to the little hare who tells him in the book, “*I love you right up to the moon.*”. Thus, the proverb can not only be used to refer to the strong love between couples but can also be used to refer to father-child and mother-child love.

Compared with Vietnamese, the sentence with the closest meaning is the sentence “*Yêu bằng cả mạng sống*”. The phrase “*bằng cả mạng sống*” is similar to the symbolic meaning of the sentence, more specifically, similar to “*to the moon and back*”. The meanings of the two sentences also have many things in common, both imply intense, passionate love, love with all one's life. Moreover, both sentences can be also used when discussing the love between parents and children.

Table 5: A comparison of common points between the proverbs “*Love someone to the moon and back*” and “*Yêu bằng cả mạng sống*”

	Love someone to the moon and back	Yêu bằng cả mạng sống
Similarities	- Meaning: imply the passionate love	

	- Can be used for both love for couples and parent-child love.	
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Words choice. Use the phrase “to the moon and back” to metaphorize love as great as the distance to the moon and back. - Metaphor - Idiom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Word choice. Use the word “mạng sống” – “life” to emphasize the great love. - Saying

2.2.3. *Idioms and proverbs related to family bonding*

Family ties are permanent and important for overall well-being throughout life. Family ties, for better or worse, are crucial in determining a person's well-being throughout their lives. Through psychological, behavioral, and physiological processes, the quality of family relationships—including social support (giving love, guidance, and care) and strain (arguments, being critical, and making excessive demands)—can affect well-being. The tight link between family members is characteristic of family relationships that will be covered in this pair of idiom-proverb “*Blood is thicker than water*” – “*Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã*”.

The idiom “*Blood is thicker than water*” is used in English to highlight the tight relationship between family members. This statement can be taken literally to mean that a drop of blood is thicker and denser than a drop of water. The metaphorical sense of this saying—that family bonds are usually stronger and tighter than any outside relationships—is more well-known, though.

The meaning of the proverb “*Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã*” in Vietnamese is the same as it is in English. This statement, like its English counterpart, highlights the love of blood and the affection of individuals who are related. The flow of blood that nourishes the body is symbolized by blood. “*Giọt máu đào*” or “*blood*” is a sign for family members who are related by blood. Additionally, the “*ao nước lã*” or “*water*” represents outsiders and those not linked by blood. In general, individuals who are linked to us but not related by blood are more valued than those who are not, regardless of how far away they may be. Our forefathers' saying, “*Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã*” aims to convey the value of family and relations. A family is a place where we can always go for protection and support, especially during trying times. Family members will support you no matter what, provide you with sacrifices, and show you unconditional love. Individuals who “*share the same blood*” are not the same as strangers, or the “*ao nước lã*” that we shall come across innumerable times during our lives. There will be good people and horrible people, but no one will sacrifice unreservedly for you. They could occasionally exchange their affections for others in exchange for rewards and temptations.

Table 6: A comparison of common points between the proverbs “Blood is thicker than water” and “Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã”

	Blood is thicker than water	Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã
Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning: family bonds are usually stronger and tighter than any outside relationships - Words order - Figures of speech: metonymy 	
Differences	- Idiom	- Proverb

3. CONCLUSION

Idioms and proverbs are considered to be among the most challenging subjects to learn, yet they are fascinating to observe in everyday situations. English proverbs and idioms that have to do with relationships have been examined in this essay. After that, they are categorized and split up into three groups: family, love, and friendship. Certain idioms and proverbs are also contrasted with their Vietnamese counterparts.

The article's key findings are briefly summarized in the conclusion, which also highlights the semantic parallels and contrasts between proverb pairs and proverbs related to relationships. The cultural idioms and proverbs of the two nations account for a major portion of these distinctions.

Everything mentioned in this work is the result of restricted knowledge and expertise. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that this study will make a tiny contribution to understanding the fascinating meaning of the proverbs and idioms of the world language and serve as a resource for individuals who are interested in both English language and English culture, potentially opening up new areas for research.

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THÀNH NGỮ VÀ TỤC NGỮ TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT LIÊN QUAN ĐẾN CÁC MỐI QUAN HỆ - MỘT VẤN ĐỀ CỦA NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỐI CHIẾU

Tóm tắt: Không thể phủ nhận rằng tiếng Anh giờ đây đã trở thành một trong số nhiều ngôn ngữ được sử dụng phổ quát nhất. Việc học tiếng Anh như một xu thế đã cho người học thấy là cần phải phải tập trung để có thể có được hiệu quả sử dụng ngôn ngữ này. Hiểu và biết cách áp dụng thành thạo thành ngữ, tục ngữ tiếng Anh hay tiếng Việt không chỉ giúp người học tự tin trong giao tiếp mà còn giúp họ có được sự hiểu biết rộng hơn nền văn hóa phương Tây và phương Đông, từ đó có thể áp dụng và hình thành văn phong, văn hóa giao tiếp phù hợp với đất nước ngôn ngữ bản địa. Thành ngữ và tục ngữ thường được sử dụng như nét đặc trưng của cả văn hóa phương Đông và phương Tây. Bài viết này nêu bật một vài điểm tương đồng và khác biệt của thành ngữ, tục ngữ giữa hai ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Qua đó người học vận dụng thành ngữ, tục ngữ liên quan đến các mối quan hệ trong giao tiếp ở cả hai ngôn ngữ giúp thu hẹp khoảng cách giao thoa liên văn hóa đạt hiệu quả trong giao tiếp.

Từ khóa: đặc điểm; tục ngữ; thành ngữ; mối quan hệ; ngữ nghĩa.