

# NGHIÊN CỨU THÀNH NGỮ TIẾNG ANH CÓ THÀNH TỐ ĐỘNG VẬT TỪ BÌNH DIỆN ẨN DỤ VĂN HÓA VÀ VẤN ĐỀ DỊCH CHÚNG SANG TIẾNG VIỆT

Nguyễn Việt Khoa\*

Nhiều nghiên cứu về thành ngữ có thành tố động vật trong tiếng Anh và việc dịch chúng sang tiếng Việt đã được thực hiện, nhưng có khá ít các nghiên cứu chuyên sâu về các biểu thức đặc biệt này dựa trên quan điểm của ẩn dụ văn hóa. Bằng cách sử dụng phương pháp định tính, bài báo tìm hiểu 422 thành ngữ động vật tiếng Anh thông qua việc tập trung vào những điểm giống và khác nhau khi so sánh với các biểu thức tương đương trong tiếng Việt. Qua đó, bài báo đề xuất một số giải pháp dịch thuật để xử lý hiệu quả các biểu thức đặc biệt này. Ngoài việc khuyến nghị áp dụng linh hoạt các chiến lược dịch thuật, kết luận của tác giả nhấn mạnh rằng chỉ khi người dịch giải mã và nắm bắt được cách thức hoạt động của các thành ngữ đặc biệt này về cả mặt ngôn ngữ và văn hóa thì họ mới có thể đạt được bản dịch phù hợp.

**Từ khóa:** thành ngữ động vật, ẩn dụ ý niệm và văn hóa, dịch nghĩa đen, ngôn ngữ học tri nhận.

*Quite a few studies have prospectively examined English animal idioms and their translation into Vietnamese, but it is hard to find an in-depth study based on the perspective of cultural metaphor. By employing the qualitative approach, this study examines 422 selected English animal idioms, focusing on the similarities and differences found in comparison with their Vietnamese equivalents. The paper then proposes some solutions to translating these special expressions. In addition to recommending flexible application of translation strategies, the paper emphasizes that only when translators manage to decode and grasp how these special idiomatic expressions work linguistically and culturally can their appropriate translation be achieved.*

**Keywords:** animal idiom, cultural and conceptual metaphor, literal translation, cognitive linguistics.

## A TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH ANIMAL IDIOMS WITH CULTURAL METAPHORS INTO VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

### 1. Introduction

Animals have played an important part in every civilization throughout history. Animals are an inextricable part of any

culture. Stories of talking animals, moral lessons with animals as the main characters, and a huge body of folklore all point to the unavoidable reality that animals are an integral part of any society, modern or ancient, civilized or not (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004).

\* TS., Viện Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Bách Khoa Hà Nội

Email: khoa.nguyenviet@hust.edu.vn

As important cultural elements of all languages, idioms with animal constituents or animal-related idioms (henceforth, *animal idioms*) are always one of the most interesting linguistic phenomena but also language translators' greatest concern regardless of being translated in any language pair. Moreover, the nature of idioms is not arbitrary and that idioms in general and animal idioms in particular are codified by the basic principles of human language, thought and perception (Gibbs et al., 1997; Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It has been observed that idioms are often naturally metaphorical because meaning is not conveyed literally.

Due to cultural disparities, English animal idioms (henceforth, *EAI*s) may use images that are different from those used in Vietnamese animal idioms (henceforth, *VAI*s) to convey similar metaphorical ideas or concepts. This causes certain obstacles for English learners, especially translators to have a full grasp of idioms.

The aim of this paper is in the view of cognitive linguistics to explore and explicate cultural metaphors in *EAI*s within the British cultural context. The paper argues that ultimately metaphors are culturally informed and should therefore be culturally interpreted before any translation is made. With this approach, the study then discovered some insight into the nature of *EAI*s compared to those in Vietnamese and suggested some relevant solutions to the translation problems of *EAI*s into their Vietnamese equivalents.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. *Idioms and metaphors*

Although studies of idioms have been done by many linguists (see Baker, 1992; Giáp, 1998; Moon, 1998; Larson, 1984), there exist different apprehensions of idioms. However, seeking an ultimate definition of idioms is beyond the confines of this article. Therefore, we agree with most linguists that an idiom is a fixed group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from a literal interpretation of the words.

A metaphor is a figure of speech or expression that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d; see also Aristotle, 1970). Newmark (2001, p. 104) deals with metaphors in a more technical terms as “any figurative expression; the transferred sense of a physical word; the personification of an abstraction, the application of a word or collocation to what it does not literally denote, i.e., to describe one thing in terms of another.”

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, however, “the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203). According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980, p. 5) “the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one thing in terms of another one.”

Idiomatic meanings may be specified by arbitrary usage conventions. Take the

Vietnamese *yếu trâu hơn khỏe bò* as an example. The literal meaning is “A weak buffalo is better than a strong ox”. The English version of this idiom is partly *a starving camel is still bigger than a horse*, but in its figurative, non-compositionally usage, it refers to the fact that men are physically stronger than women. It is obvious that if one has a lack of good knowledge of the metaphorical root of an idiom, he never has a full grasp of its comprehension.

Extremely ubiquitous in language, metaphors are intricately woven into the tapestry of language, and it would be a dull, threadbare piece of cloth without them. Metaphors, on the other hand, serve a practical role in addition to adding color and imagery to language (Schumacher, 2020). Metaphors have the ability to clarify abstract concepts that we might not be familiar with, to link us with one another, and even to shape our thought processes. Metaphors assist humans in properly comprehending our surroundings.

## 2.2. Cultural metaphors

A cultural metaphor, as Gannon (2004) defines, is a major phenomenon, institution, or activity in a nation with which most citizens identify cognitively or emotionally and through which it is possible to describe the national culture and its frame of reference in depth, e.g., the Japanese garden. Cultural linguistics is based on the major concepts of cognitive linguistics, it is further grounded in the notion that cognition is both embodied and rooted in culture (Langacker, 2014).

Cultural cognition “embraces the cultural knowledge that emerges from the interactions between members of a cultural group across time and space” (Frank, 2015, p. 476). In this way, as Zibin & Abdullah (2019) contend, language is the instrument by which cultural cognition is sorted and communicated. One of the cognitive devices used to reflect cultural linguistics is cultural metaphor which, in turn, interrelates with language. In other words, cultural metaphors are culturally constructed conceptual metaphors shared in differing degrees between members of a cultural group (Sharifian, 2007, p. 34). These metaphors are used in different cultures to conceptualize various target domains, e.g., mental faculties, emotions, character traits and cultural values, etc.

Kövecses (2005) examines the intricate connection between metaphor and culture, which serves as a vehicle for reflecting concepts in different cultures and communities. Metaphors, as observed by Kövecses, are both conceptual, linguistic, and socio-cultural and thus may reflect different views and experiences in different cultures.

## 2.3. Translation of cultural metaphors

Even for the most experienced professional translators, metaphors remain a real challenge. Metaphors are difficult rhetoric, because they require a lot of ingredients, including the culture of the source language (SL), and the creativity of their author. Metaphors can also be purely novel and original creation by the author,

and this sometimes leaves language translation experts questioning what they mean. Despite its cultural specificity, metaphors are not a case of untranslatability. The only problem is that each metaphor is a challenging phenomenon in terms of unpacking its complexity in an SL and culture and re-packing it in a target language (TL) and culture.

Translation strategies are used as tools for translators to deal with any emerging challenges in idiom translation. Several solutions for dealing with idiom translation have been proposed so far (Baker, 1992; Catford, 1965; House, 1997; Newmark, 1981; Nida & Taber 1969; Pym, 2010).

For example, Newmark (1988, p. 107) presented seven strategies to translate metaphors: (1) Reproducing the same image in the TL; (2) Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture; (3) Translation of metaphor by simile, retaining the image; (4) Translation of metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense, or occasionally metaphor plus sense; (5) Conversion of metaphor to sense; (6) Deletion. If the metaphor is redundant or serves no practical purpose, there is a case for its deletion, together with its sense component; (7) Translation of metaphor by the same metaphor combined with sense. The addition of a gloss or an explanation by the translator is to ensure that the metaphor will be understood. Baker (1992) proposes four strategies: (1) Using an idiom of similar meaning and form; (2) Using an idiom of similar

meaning but dissimilar form; (3) Translating by paraphrase; and (4) Translating by omission. Svensén (1993, pp. 156- 157) provides four strategies: (1) Idioms with identical metaphors in the source language and target language. (2) Idioms with related metaphors; (3) Idioms with different metaphors; (4) Translating idioms in the source language with no metaphorical counterparts in the target language.

It is obvious that numerous ways for dealing with idiom translation have been proposed. They have some characteristics in common in terms of translation equivalence, despite the fact that they are expressed or described in various ways. These models, however, differ slightly in their choice of translation equivalence. As Panou (2013) points out, Nida & Taber distinguish between formal and dynamic equivalence, Newmark between semantic and communicative translation, Catford between formal correspondence and textual equivalence, House between overt and covert translation and Pym between natural and directional equivalence. These linguistic-oriented approaches result in bipolar views of equivalence in translation. Panou sees translating as dealing with culture-bound phenomena and suggests applying target-oriented approaches, which “view the source text as the point of departure” and mostly “focus on the cultural, historical, and socio-political factors surrounding translation” (2013, p. 5).

Newmark’s model is quite generic, and translators are allowed to choose their own translation equivalence. The one by

Baker goes into greater depth and should be omitted if a precise equivalence cannot be discovered. Whereas Svensén's model is currently one of the most widely accepted, owing to its tight ties to cognitive linguistics. However, for the in-depth translation of metaphorical expressions, most researchers seek to distinguish between a "similar mapping condition" and a "different mapping condition" (Kövecses, 2005; Maalej, 2008; Mandelblit, 1995). The SL and the TL use an identical or similar metaphor to conceptualize a particular notion in the case of "similar mapping condition" while they conceptualize a particular notion using a different metaphor in the "different mapping condition" case. Snell-Hornby (1988, p. 56) contends that the fundamental issue with metaphor in translation is that "different cultures, hence different languages, conceptualize and create symbols in varying ways", and consequently "the sense of the metaphor is frequently culture-specific."

Translation becomes more complicated because it has been defined as a cross-cultural communication event involving not only two languages but also two cultures. Metaphor is not only an important figure of speech but also a cognitive tool in the human mind. Therefore, it is essential to carry out metaphor translation from a cultural standpoint.

#### **2.4. Idioms with animal constituents**

Regarding idioms with animal constituents, early linguists mainly focused on classifying the origin of idioms

and describing the expressive function of idioms. Pearsall-Smith (1925, cited in Panou, 2014) divided them into animals according to their communicative functions. Other linguists have classified animal idioms on the basis of animal behaviors and divide animal idioms into pets (like dogs and cats), bird idioms, idioms related to meadows, pack animal idioms, and aquatic animal idioms (Ammer, 1999). In this article, by animal idioms the author means the ones whose constituents have animal names.

##### *2.4.1. Animals in idioms*

There are animal idioms in almost all the languages, especially in farming societies where human-animal relations are closer. Animals in idioms are normally used for personification to characterize human conducts and characteristics (Colin, 2006). Conversely, people also explain the traits of animals with reference to human behavior and anthropomorphize their behavior in relation to human emotions. Moon (1998) states that animals are regarded as lower forms of life than humans and are thus widely used to characterize the negative traits of human beings. However, animals are sometimes used to describe desirable characteristics of humans, as in the term "top dog", which refers to the most important and powerful person in a group.

That animal characteristics are used in denoting human behaviors is very common (e.g., *A lame duck*; *weasels out of something*; *ngựa non hấu đá* (*eager to show one's talent despite not being quite*

*talented*); *ếch ngồi đáy giếng* (*a person of poor knowledge*)). In this case, animals serve as a proxy for the “moralistic and satiric commentary on human behavior and society” (Lambdin & Lambdin, 2002, p. 69).

The ways people think and the cultural characteristics of a particular society are clearly reflected in the way they use animal metaphors. Moon (1998, p. 196) believes that due to certain animal idioms being “grounded in fairy tales and other forms of folk culture”, animals are dealt with differently by different cultures. However, quite a few animal expressions reflect universally shared cultural traditions (e.g., *a wolf in sheep's clothing*).

#### 2.4.2. *Animals in metaphor and metonymy*

It is agreed that the figurative meanings of idioms are motivated by conceptual metaphors and metonymies (Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990; Kövecses & Szabo, 1996; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This is because “human behavior seems to be metaphorically understood in terms of animal behavior” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 124).

The basic *Great Chain of Being* developed by Lakoff & Turner (1989) is defined by attributes and behaviors, and arranged in a hierarchy of which human beings are at the top and natural physical things are at the bottom. This approach offers two forms of mapping: mapping animal characteristics onto humans and mapping human characteristics onto animals Kövecses (2002) suggests that most human beings have a highly general

metaphor that human beings are animals in their conceptual system: animals were personified first, and then the “human-based animal characteristics” were used to understand human behavior (p. 221).

Besides metaphors, the meaning of animal idioms is also motivated by metonyms and meronyms. According to Kövecses & Szabo (1996), metonymy distinguishes from metaphor in that metonymy uses one conceptual domain, rather than two different ones and “involves a stand for conceptual relationship between two entities within a single domain” (p. 338).

Noticeably, the “integrated interaction metaphor-metonymy” pattern suggested by Herreo (2003, p. 142) provides an interesting insight. According to Herreo, metonymy represents another word due to similar characteristics but functions differently. This figure of speech is either based on animal actions, characteristics, or parts. In this type of metonymy, animal behavior is mapped onto human behavior through the metaphor ***people are animals***. For example, *monkey see, monkey do* (the act of imitation or copying usually with limited knowledge and/or concern) where ‘monkey’ metonymically stands for ‘imitation’. Similar examples include *fish* in *she fished for her car key* or *dog* in *Paparazzi dogged the prince all his adult life*.

### 3. Methodology

The methods suggested by Ngọc & Hồng (2019) and Mawlood (2017) in selecting EAI were used in this research

whereby the main criterion for choosing idioms related to animals is that these expressions contain animal names or at least one word for an animal. Some idioms are excluded when they do not directly refer to an animal itself and may refer to different variations of different fields. To avoid unnecessary confusion, we do not count controversial cases such as when it is unclear whether it relates to an animal or a human being (e.g., *keep an eye on something*). We also exclude the idioms denoting something related to the product(s) or animal food in general (e.g., *put all eggs in a basket, not mince words*).

Based on the list of EAIs provided by Mawlood (2017), an initial list of English idioms with animal constituents was made and saved in MS Excel format. This list was supplemented by adding EAIs from the following two English monolingual idiom dictionaries: (1) Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (Oxford University Press, 2009); (2) The Farlex Dictionary of Idioms at <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com>. The meaning and usage of each idiom were then double-checked using the online platform provided by (2). As a result, the author was able to compile a database of 422 English idioms with animal constituents (see <http://nguyen-vietkhoa.edu.vn/2021/04/22/ai/> for the full list).

Most of the translations of the animal idioms were verified using the following three dictionaries: (1) English - Vietnamese Dictionary of Idioms (Tiến, 2004); (2) Collection of Common

Vietnamese - English Idioms, Proverbs and Folks (Hùng, 2007); (3) English - Vietnamese Dictionary of Idioms (Hương & Dũng, 2017).

The collected data were subjected to a thorough qualitative evaluation and interpretation in the cognitive approach as proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) for any contrastive analysis for translation. By “cognitive approach”, we mean when dealing with animal idioms, both the patterns of thinking and acting in British culture and the cultural models of reality in Vietnamese culture must be taken into account and well comprehended. Based on the suggestions and analyses made by Gannon (2011) and Trào (2014), the author first examined the cultural metaphors of SL idioms and put them into relevant categories. An in-depth analysis of the cultural metaphors behind animal idioms is the foundation for the proper translation of EAIs. The data were then analyzed by using the idiom translation strategies and the theories of equivalence suggested by Baker (1992), Nida (1964) and Panou (2013) to identify the types of equivalence of the translated idioms.

## 4. Result and discussion

### 4.1. Brief overview of similarities and differences of English and Vietnamese animal idioms

Language and culture influence and interact with each other. Since humans share a common living environment,

many animal idioms use the same or similar cultural metaphors of the same animal. However, when comparing EAIs and VAIs, animal images with different references were more frequently found. People living in the English and Vietnamese culture systems hold different cultural metaphors in animal images due to differences in living environment, faith, tradition, and sense of value. Based on the theories on conceptual metaphors suggested by Kövecses (2002) and Lakoff & Johnson (1980), cultural metaphors

found in EAIs are put into the following four groups (see also Trào, 2014).

#### 4.1.1. Same animal with same or similar metaphorical meaning

Despite great differences, some universal cultural constants are still found in EAIs and VAIs. Vietnamese and British people have almost the same understanding of the natural instinct and the living behavior of some animals such as fox, wolf, bird, parrot, monkey, snake and pig; thus there are similar associations.

**Table 1:** Same animal, same metaphorical meaning

EAI	Meaning	Cultural Metaphor	VAI
<i>as cunning/sly as a fox</i>	Exceptionally clever, cunning, or shrewd, especially in devious or underhanded ways.	The fox, considered to be a very cunning and deceptive animal, can be used to describe someone cunning, deceitful, sly, and mischievous.	(Kẻ) Xảo quỷ, cáo già
<i>throw (someone) to the wolves</i>	Leave someone to be roughly treated or criticized without trying to help or defend them	The wolf, always regarded as destruction, danger and even evil, is portrayed as a selfish, ferocious and wicked animal that bullies other small and helpless animals.	Thí tốt, ném vào hang cọp
<i>pig out on</i>	Eat gluttonously	The pig is well known for its food-greedy nature, laziness and hygiene problems.	Ăn như lợn
<i>Nurse a viper in one's bosom</i>	An ungrateful or treacherous friend	The snake, as a cold blood animal, often brings negative connotations.	Nuôi ong tay áo, nuôi cáo trong nhà
<i>monkey business</i>	Behaviour that is not unacceptable, dishonest or illegal	The monkey image implies foolishness or ridicule.	Trò khi
<i>(as) free as a bird</i>	Unencumbered; not restrained by anything	The bird represents the subject with a free and broad-minded life, not being bound in one place.	- Hoàn toàn tự do, do tự tại và hạnh phúc - Như cánh chim trời
<i>parrot-fashion</i>	By rote, without knowing or understanding the actual substance of it.	The parrot is used to refer to those who repeat the words well as ideas of others without knowledge.	Học vẹt, như con vẹt



#### 4.1.2. Same animal with different metaphorical meaning

English and Vietnamese people live in different geographical and cultural environments, which influence people's association of cultural meanings of idioms. This explains why the same specific animal has dissimilar cultural metaphors in the two cultures. The dog and the dragon in Vietnamese and in English convey the same conceptual meanings, but the metaphorical meanings of the word 'dog' and 'dragon' in each language are different.

Dogs are also close pets to humans, but in Vietnamese people's eyes, they are considered a symbol of filthy, chaotic, fierce, ignorant and despicable

personalities. In contrast, dogs are regarded as humans' best friends in English culture and are much loved and cherished. British people often associate positive human behaviors with the image of a dog. However, there exist EAs also connoting negative metaphors about the dog-like *work like a dog* or *die like a dog*, but these are quite exceptional.

The dragon is a symbolic creature in the folklore and mythology of Vietnam. To Vietnamese people, the dragon can bring rain (essential for agriculture). It represents emperors, prosperity and power of the nation. However, as for English people, the dragon symbolizes evils or taboos.

**Table 2:** Same animal, different metaphorical meaning

EAI	Meaning	VAI / Literal translation	Metaphorical meaning
<i>every dog has his day</i>	Even the least fortunate person will have success at some point.	Lên voi, xuống chó ( <i>To ride an elephant and then a dog</i> )	To have ebb and flow / ups and downs
<i>sow dragon's teeth</i>	To do something that inadvertently leads to trouble	Mả táng hàm rồng ( <i>To have one's ancestor's tomb buried in a dragon's mouth</i> )	To have a very good luck

#### 4.1.3. Different animal with similar metaphorical meaning

Animals as the farming equipment are often known as draft horses in English, but buffalos in Vietnamese. Buffalos have

long been a mainstay of farming in Vietnam's agricultural development. As time passes, it is endowed with images that have great force and bear the burden of responsibility.

**Table 3:** Different animal, similar metaphorical meaning

EAI	Meaning	VAI / Literal translation	Metaphorical meaning
<i>hold your horses</i>	Wait a moment or be patient	Ruộng sâu trâu nái ( <i>To have low fields and she-buffaloes</i> )	To be(come) rich / well off

<i>twist the lion's tail</i>	To provoke a person or an entity who could prove to be a powerful enemy	Hồ phụ sinh hồ tử ( <i>A tiger must have a tiger cub</i> )	A talented or heroic man will have a talented or heroic child
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To Vietnamese people, the tiger is a powerful predator considered the lord of all animals. The tiger is thus regarded as a symbol of courage, determination and power. Similarly, the lion in British culture is called the king of the jungle and traditionally symbolizes valor, nobility, royalty, strength, and stateliness.

#### 4.1.4. Metaphorical absence

Some animals may have a metaphorical meaning in one language but not in another because of cultural differences in context, traditions, living conditions, ways of thinking, aesthetic beliefs, life experiences, and other factors. Furthermore, some animals may live in one area or country but not in another.

**Table 4:** Metaphorical Absence

EAI	Meaning
<i>to have butterflies in one's stomach</i>	To feel very nervous, usually about something you are going to do
<i>like a bull in a china shop</i>	Very careless in the way that they move or behave
<i>rain cats and dogs</i>	to rain very heavily
<i>an eager beaver</i>	A keen and enthusiastic person who works very hard

There are several EAIs whose implicit meanings do not occur in Vietnamese culture. For example, it is well known that the butterfly is just an insect with no special connotations in Vietnamese. The literal meaning of the idiom *to have butterflies in one's stomach* would be obvious to Vietnamese people. They do not, however, have the image that would provoke fear and anxiety to individuals in English. This causes an inevitable loss of metaphorical vividness. Similarly, in British culture, the bull is used to refer to those who fumble with stuffs, cause trouble or cause breakdown in situations that require delicacy and dexterity. To Vietnamese people, the bull carries no particular metaphor. In fact, Vietnamese people do not often use specific words for

cow or bull. To refer to this animal, Vietnamese people tend to use the word 'bò' which is closely similar to 'ox' in English. Next, although the cat has long become a domesticated animal and raised as a pet in Vietnam, its cultural image is not as vivid as that in English. The cat in British culture has very rich cultural metaphors (e.g., *rain cats and dogs*; *grin like a Cheshire cat*; *have kittens*). Finally, the expression *eager beaver* in English means someone who is too industrious and works harder than they should. Meanwhile, for most Vietnamese people, a beaver is just an ordinary animal and has no cultural metaphor at all.

#### 4.1.5. Equivalence of image and metaphorical meaning

**Table 5:** Equivalence of EAIs and VAIs in terms of image and metaphorical meaning

Group	Number	Percentage
Same animal with same or similar metaphorical meaning	119	27.9
Same animal with different metaphorical meaning	20	4.6
Different animal with similar metaphorical meaning	88	20.9
Metaphorical absence	195	46.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 illustrates equivalence of EAIs and VAIs in terms of image and metaphorical meaning, giving the percentages of the four groups. In the database of 422 EAIs, the largest proportion fall into the group with the absence of metaphorical meaning in Vietnamese, accounting for overwhelmingly 46.5%. Compared with their Vietnamese equivalents, nearly 28% of the EAIs share both similar images and metaphorical meanings while just about 20.9% have equivalence in metaphorical meaning only. The EAIs, which have the same animal images but no equivalence in metaphorical meanings, account for the smallest proportion of just 4.6%.

It is quite interesting to explore the differences between EAIs and VAIs. However, this is beyond the confines of this article. Therefore, the researcher hopes to find an opportunity to dig into this issue in a future study.

#### **4.2. Translation of English animal idioms**

Translating animal idioms is a challenging but inspiring domain of translation studies. The groups identified in Section 4.1 clearly point out the

complexity of translating animal idioms as we must meditate on providing an idiomatic translation equivalent where possible. The challenges the translator may encounter can be divided into two main categories: (1) Non-idiomatic equivalence; (2) Idiomatic equivalence.

Identifying an idiom with animal constituent is a prerequisite for the next steps, which is entirely up to the translator. The truth is that the ability to recognize and understand an EAI correctly determines the successful translation of that EAI.

##### *4.2.1. Non-idiomatic equivalence*

Non-equivalence was a fact that happens in all languages, and it has caused some untranslatable cases (Kashgary, 2011). Thus, when dealing with non-equivalence, it is recommended to focus on levels of linguistic uses in both languages. It is optimal to provide an idiomatic equivalent in the TL. In many cases, however, it is not possible to find any idiomatic equivalent, then the only translation way left is to explain, describe or paraphrase the animal idiom. Translating EAIs in this case will present non-idiomatic equivalents that are

descriptive. This approach drives the translator to use word-for-word translation, explain, annotate, or paraphrase the EAI, or translate figurative/idiomatic meaning only. Certain translation loss is consequently unavoidable.

Due to the lexical or stylistic differences between the two languages, certain correspondence will not always be found. Hence, the strategies recommended to be employed should be omission and paraphrasing. EAIs should be elaborated so that their meaning is better transferred to Vietnamese. It is noted here that the given meaning would not be an exact equivalent or semantic equivalent of the EAI. A few examples are *like a dog with two tails* → *rất vui sướng, hạnh phúc tột độ*; *sow dragon's teeth* → *làm điều gì đó nhằm ngăn chặn rắc rối mà vô tình dẫn đến rắc rối*; *dark horse* → *ngựa ô, người có khả năng hơn họ bộc lộ, lù đù vác cái lu chạy...*

Another problem relating to non-equivalence is the literal translation of EAIs. Most translation researchers believe that idiomatic meanings may rarely be translated literally (Baker, 1992; Larson, 1984; Newmark, 1988). For the purpose of transferring cultural metaphors and information, however, a literal translation of EAIs can be employed as long as it brings about a decent translation effect and causes no misinterpretation of the message of the source animal idiom. A literal translation is also an option where there is no equivalent animal idiom in Vietnamese. It is noted that difficulties would emerge when the recognizable

border between idiomatic and literal translation is not clear. Hence, the translator should not scruple to find them out and discovers whether possible to translate literally. However, for most EAIs, it is necessary to base on the context to employ the appropriate translation solution. For example, *Jenny is a real eager beaver, always getting to the office early and volunteering to stay late*. The animal image of 'beaver' may be unfamiliar to many Vietnamese as this animal's living environment is the temperate Northern Hemisphere. *An eager beaver* is used to refer to the one who is industrious and enthusiastic (perhaps annoyingly so).

There is no equivalent idiom in Vietnamese with an animal constituent depicting an exceptionally zealous person. The word-for-word translation of each will mislead the message of the idiom. For such cases, translating with an explanation or annotation would be a better solution. Obviously, for the translation to be meaningful and effective, the translator may have to choose to ignore a certain element or replace it with another relatively close in terms of semantic domains and cognitive representations. Unless there is a corresponding animal idiom in both form and content in Vietnamese, it is difficult to reproduce the animal idiom used both literally and figuratively in the translation.

*A wolf in sheep's clothing* → *sói đội lốt cừu* is one of the few examples of effective word-for-word translation (or idiomatically *kẻ khẩu Phật tâm xà*). In

many other cases, Vietnamese people will not be able to readily understand EAIs without background knowledge about the etymological and cultural factors hidden behind these idioms. To produce a decent translation, a loss of animal constituents would be inevitable as in the following examples: *fight like Kilkenny cats* → *chiến đấu tới hơi thở cuối cùng*; *I'll be a monkey's uncle!* → *ngạc nhiên vô cùng*; *dog tired* → *mệt nhỏi*.

The advantage of the literal translation of the animal idiom is that it can preserve illustrative images and cultural specificity, contributing to cultural and language exchanges. However, many cases of literal translation can cause misunderstanding or fail to convey the complete domain of meanings of the EAIs, hence reducing the translation efficiency. Although the explanatory and annotated translation methods can convey the message of EAIs, their weakest link is that they are quite lengthy and time-and-space consuming.

It can be seen that a great number of EAIs are translated by means of a non-idiomatic equivalent of descriptive character. As a result, the neutral translation of the animal idiom does not fully reflect the cultural aspects, and the stylistic markedness may vanish (Szerszunowicz, 2008). Based on the position held by Fiedler (2007), we recommend that the EAIs with no equivalent in Vietnamese or with an equivalent based on a different metaphor be approached with great care since it should be examined to what extent the new image is suitable for the context in

English. In brief, it is advisable to express the message of the EAI in a non-idiomatic way to ensure the highest possible translation quality from English to Vietnamese.

#### 4.2.2. Idiomatic equivalence

The ideal scenario in the translation of EAIs is to find idiomatic equivalents in both languages, such as the English idiom *as timid as a hare* which is equivalent to the Vietnamese *nhát như cáy* or *nhát như thỏ đế*. However, languages reflect different realities with different outlooks. As EAIs are linguistic units bearing rich cultural, social, geographic features, etc., finding idiomatic equivalents in translation is never easy and sometimes even impossible. Even when there are equivalents in both languages, they still pose a lot of problems for the translator. Some of the difficulties of having equivalent idioms in Vietnamese are discussed below.

##### 4.2.2.1. Idiomatic translation equivalent without an animal

This way of idiomatic translation expresses the same metaphor in the SL but with different lexical items. An idiomatic equivalent or corresponding VAI can express the figurative or symbolic meaning and effectively convey the cultural message of the EAI. This is the case in which the TL owns an idiom equivalent to the source one in terms of meaning, style, definition, image, or nuance, etc. Let us study these examples.

- *love me, love my dog* → *yêu ai yêu cả đường đi (1)*

- *as poor as a church mouse* → *nghèo rớt mồng tơi* (2)

While (1) can be understood without much effort, (2) requires some elucidation. The reason for this long-used simile is unclear, but most believe that, since churches are not known for storing food, a mouse inside one would fare poorly. The metaphor refers to extreme poverty compared to a mouse in the church with no food (English) and the fact that the upper part of one's palm-leaf raincoat falls off (Vietnamese). Both idioms develop on the same image, i.e., describing extreme poverty. The symmetrical images of *love me – my dog* and *poor – church mouse* are preserved in the target idioms (*love me – my way*), and *poor – rugged raincoat*), evoking a similar effect as the source idiom.

However, in the two languages, corresponding idiomatic images are not always found. Here is an example about idiomatic translation equivalent with very different images and associations: *If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas* → *Gần mực thì đen, gần đèn thì rạng* (3). In this example, the target and source idioms express that *associating with bad people will acquire their faults*. We have a mismatched image pair in English and Vietnamese (*dogs/fleas – ink/lamp*). In this example, no animal image of the source idiom is retained. Even the nuance is completely different (the English idiom uses the image of the dog and its associate, which are fleas, while the Vietnamese one refers to the ink and lamp whose allusions are black and lighted, respectively).

The Vietnamese versions of these examples represent corresponding idiomatic meanings, but comparative images are not analogous, resulting in a loss of a certain amount of English cultural information or characteristics. Also, dissimilar images and associations may stimulate different emotions from Vietnamese receivers leading to different conceptual metaphors.

#### 4.2.2.2. *Idiomatic translation equivalent with a different animal name*

These are interesting cases in which an EAI has the same figurative meaning but a different animal in Vietnamese. Below are some examples:

- *work like a dog* → *làm việc như trâu*

- *a guinea pig* → *chuột bạch*

- *a wolf in sheep's clothing* → *kẻ khẩu Phật tâm xà*

- *lock the barn door after the horse is gone* → *mất bò mới lo làm chuồng*

The animals in the EAIs and those in their Vietnamese equivalents have similar idiomatic animal domains. The figurative and referential field of meaning given by such animals is quite similar in both languages despite different animals. However, there are challenges in finding idiomatic translation equivalents with a different animal land on deciphering connotative meanings of the source and target animal image. The translation of EAIs will be perfect if the English and Vietnamese animal metaphors connote the same or similar objects or entities.

#### 4.2.2.3. *Literal and idiomatic translation equivalents with the same animal names*

There are a few examples of this type, such as *as cunning as a fox*, *pig out on*, *parrot-fashion*, etc. As aforementioned in Section 4.1.1, some universal cultural constants are still found in EAI and VAI. In both languages, all of these expressions are somewhat lexically similar, proving that the shared linguistic and cultural heritage has had a significant influence on both EAI and VAI (e.g., *at a snail's pace*; *Trojan horse*; *a cat has/with nine lives*). It is obvious that the existence of some common cultural denominators between different societies results from cultural exchanges and globalization.

Let us study *a cat has/with nine lives*. This expression describes the perception that cats often seem to escape dangerous situations safely. According to Chính (2019), the expression can literally be translated into Vietnamese as *mèo có chín kiếp*. This translation is acceptable because it not only conveys the figurative meaning of the idiom (even under extreme conditions, one may have other opportunities) but still retains the image of the cat (a symbol for flexibility, dynamism) as well. It is clear that if the literal translation causes no misinterpretation of the message of the source idiom, a literal translation of each element is an option where there is no equivalent idiom in the TL.

### 5. Recommendations for translation of animal metaphors

To express the exact meaning of the SL into the TL, any and every means must be used to ensure meaning accuracy. Failing to convey the meaning of the metaphor is creating a contact chasm, which can never be a positive thing. The same applies for the translation of animal metaphors. To express the same emotion, the translator would need to use any tool at his or her disposal. The most challenging task of all is to preserve the accuracy of the SL while achieving relevance in the target one.

The translator is recommended to first interpret EAI, analyze animals' traits and then map them onto humans based on the conceptual metaphor (humans are animals) suggested by Kövecses (2002) and Lakoff & Turner (1989). That is to say, the translators focus on accumulating cultural knowledge involving EAI and VAI, trying to understand their metaphorical meanings. In other words, the translator should accurately grasp the hidden meanings expressed in EAI and use relevant translation strategies to successfully reveal their rich connotation in Vietnamese.

In brief, to translate animal idioms from English into Vietnamese, the translator must choose the most appropriate strategy or use various strategies, taking into account their peculiarities, function, cultural specificity, semantic and structural unpredictability (Kovács, 2016; see also Newmark, 1988; Svensén, 1993). More explicitly, the

translator could fulfil his or her task of promoting cross-cultural exchange between the two languages and cultures.

## 6. Conclusion

Although animal idioms take up a limited portion in English, they convey a wide range of meanings making interesting examples of cultural influences upon conceptual metaphors and their instantiation in language (Belkhir, 2014). By comparing and contrasting cultural metaphors that EAIs and VAIs hold, it can be seen from this study that animal idioms well reflect the unique characteristics of the two cultures and languages. Despite a small number of idiomatic equivalents, a majority of EAIs have no idiomatic equivalents in Vietnamese. The challenges in translating collected EAIs were analyzed and categorized into the following four groups according to their Vietnamese translation equivalents: Non-idiomatic translation, Idiomatic translation equivalent without an animal, Idiomatic translation equivalent with a different animal name, and Literal and idiomatic translation equivalents with the same animal names. However, collecting enough data for analysis is not always possible. That only 422 EAI were selected in this study is clearly a limitation, which should be addressed in future research.

It is concluded that the translation of EAIs requires the translator to “have a deep insight of culture, a good understanding and appropriate analysis of the source idiom and metaphor in the idiom” before getting its translation

equivalent in the TL (Ngọc & Hồng, 2018, p. 1133). Also, the translator is recommended to accurately grasp the hidden meaning embedded in EAIs and flexibly use relevant translation strategies to convey their messages to Vietnamese. During the translation process, cultural characteristics and specificity must be well taken into account to uncover original cultural metaphors elaborated from EAIs. This is crucial to help better understand EAIs and promote cross-cultural exchange between the British and Vietnamese cultures.

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