

NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỐI CHIẾU THÀNH NGỮ SO SÁNH TRONG MỘT SỐ TRUYỆN NGẮN VÀ TIỂU THUYẾT TIẾNG VIỆT VÀ TIẾNG ANH

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Trong ngôn ngữ của một quốc gia, thành ngữ được quen dùng trong cuộc sống hàng ngày cũng như trong văn học và là một di sản quý báu. Do đó, thành ngữ cần được nghiên cứu từ nhiều góc độ. Để hiểu và sử dụng đúng các thành ngữ, chúng ta cần có hiểu biết về thành ngữ ở các bình diện cấu trúc ngữ pháp, các yếu tố tâm lý, tôn giáo, văn hóa và ngữ cảnh sử dụng. Bài viết này tìm hiểu thành ngữ so sánh trên hai mặt đặc trưng ngôn ngữ và đặc trưng văn hóa tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Đặc biệt là các tác giả đã cố gắng xác định những tương đồng và khác biệt ở bình diện sử dụng đối với các thành ngữ so sánh trong mười bốn truyện ngắn và tiểu thuyết tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt. Với những phát hiện trong nghiên cứu này, các tác giả mong muốn, ở mức độ có thể, giúp độc giả sử dụng đúng các thành ngữ trong những hoàn cảnh giao tiếp cụ thể.

Từ khóa: đặc trưng văn hóa; thành ngữ so sánh tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt; những sự tương đồng và khác biệt.

Idioms, as a part of a language, are commonly used in not only daily communication but also literature and considered a valuable heritage. Therefore, idioms should be studied from different perspectives. In order to understand and use idioms properly, we need to be aware of not only their grammatical forms but also the elements of psychology, religion, culture and contexts of use. This study examines simile-based idiomatic expressions on the basis of linguistic and cultural aspects of English and Vietnamese. In doing that, the researchers attempt to find out the similarities and differences their use in fourteen English and Vietnamese short stories and novels. The findings are expected to help readers, to a certain extent, use idiomatic expressions properly in particular communicative situations.

Keywords: cultural characteristics, English and Vietnamese idiomatic similes, similarities and differences.

A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF IDIOMATIC SIMILES IN SOME ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE SHORT STORIES AND NOVELS

1. Introduction

The fact that little attention has been paid to simile-based idiomatic expressions has led us to select this as the object for

our study. Our investigation is primarily concerned with showing the descriptive and explanatory analysis involving the form of idiomatic similes and some cultural features used in idiomatic similes. We would like to suggest the forms of idiomatic similes, and from idiomatic similes in fourteen short stories and novels we check the uses of characteristic images

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in the idiomatic similes, which will pave the way for the discussion of a wider range of future related studies. The study mainly aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are similarities and differences in the form of idiomatic similes between English and Vietnamese?

2. What are similarities and differences in some characteristic images between Vietnamese and English idiomatic similes used in the short stories and novels?

Idiomatic similes were taken from digital versions of the short stories and novels. In an attempt to find out idiomatic similes, we used the tool *Find* in applications Microsoft Word, PDF Reader and find the words (markers): *like, as* for English ones and *như, tựa, tựa như, như thế, bằng, là, như là, hơn* for Vietnamese ones. Surveying was the technique employed for obtaining data to which observance has been devoted with respect to forms and characteristic images.

2. Definition of idiomatic similes

2.1. Definition of English idiomatic similes

An idiom is “a number of words which, when taken together, have a different meaning from the individual meanings of each word” (McMordie, 2003, p.13). The author of A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics regards an idiom as “a term used in grammar and lexicography to refer

to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit” (Crystal, 1985). The definition of *similes* in Oxford English dictionary is that: “A figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid (e.g. *as brave as a lion*)”. In another dictionary of Oxford dictionaries, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a simile is “a word or phrase that compares something to something else, using the words *like* or *as*, for example *a face like a mask* or *as white as snow*; the use of such words and phrases”. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a simile is “a figure of speech that compares two different things in an interesting way” and similes “are used in literature to make writing more vivid and powerful. In everyday speech, they can be used to convey meaning quickly and effectively, as many commonly used expressions or idioms are similes.”

From the above definitions and what we observed, an idiomatic phrase is a simile and a simple sentence without any idioms can also be a simile as long as this sentence contains *like* or *as* and uses figurative language. Some researchers consider some expressions are both a simile and an idiom, for instance, *as light as a feather* is both a simile and an idiom. Hence, we can conclude that the definition of a simile includes two elements: a simile is a figure of speech and a simile can also

be an idiom. There are many names for the idioms with the forms of a simile: idioms of comparison, comparative idioms, simile-based idiomatic expressions, idiomatic similes, simile-based idioms and in many cases they are simply called *similes*. In this paper, we use the term *idiomatic similes* for idioms with the forms of similes.

From the above analysis, our definition of an idiomatic simile is: An idiomatic simile is a group of fixed words that expresses an idea by using words in a figurative symbolic and emphatic way, using the word *like* or *as* to describe something by comparing it with something else (e.g. *as sweet as sugar*).

Although they are idioms with figurative images, sometimes it is not strenuous to figure out their meanings through the components, for instance, it is easy to understand these idiomatic similes: *as cold as ice* (very cold, frigid), *as busy as a bee* (very busy, up to the neck with work) and as with a lot of figurative language, when talking to someone from another region or someone not speaking in their native language they might not get the meaning of many idiomatic similes, for examples, *to eat like a horse* (to describe someone who always has a big appetite), *to have a memory like a sieve* (about a forgetful person), *as white as a sheet* (when someone's face is white due to fear). In some cases, idiomatic similes are in comparative form: *as hot as hell* → *hotter than hell*; *as happy as a pig in shit* → *happier than a pig in shit*.

2.2. Definition of Vietnamese idiomatic similes

In Vietnamese, with the idioms with the forms of comparison, we temporarily call them *Vietnamese idiomatic similes*.

Hoang Phe defined “an idiom is a common group of fixed words whose meaning cannot be explained simply by the meaning of each word in the expression” (2006). (“thành ngữ là tập hợp cố định đã quen dùng mà nghĩa thường không thể giải thích được một cách đơn giản bằng nghĩa của các từ tạo nên nó”). Professor Do Huu Chau, in the book *Từ vựng ngữ nghĩa tiếng Việt*, considered idiomatic similes as fixed phrases and claimed: “Fixed phrases are general common groups of fixed words ... Hence the factor to confirm fixed phrases is their equivalent to a word in terms of the function in a sentence.” (p.73) (“Nói ngữ cố định là các cụm từ cố định hóa nói chung ... Bởi vậy cái quyết định để xác định các ngữ cố định là tính tương đương với từ của chúng về chức năng tạo câu”). Mai Ngoc Chu claimed that: “Idioms are fixed phrases which are completely structural and meaningful. Their meanings are symbolic or/and vivid” (p.153) (“Thành ngữ là cụm từ cố định, hoàn chỉnh về cấu trúc và ý nghĩa. Nghĩa của chúng có tính hình tượng hoặc/và gợi cảm”). According to Mai Ngoc Chu, idiomatic similes are “idioms whose forms are a comparative form. For

example: *lạnh như tiền, rách như tổ đĩa, cười không bằng lại mặt*” (p.153) (“những thành ngữ có cấu trúc là một cấu trúc so sánh. Ví dụ: *lạnh như tiền, rách như tổ đĩa, cười không bằng lại mặt*.”). Hoang Van Hanh, in the book *Thành ngữ học tiếng Việt*, considered “idioms are **special** complexities of words whose fixed forms and figurative meaning that are widely used in daily life communication, especially in speech.” (p.27) (“Thành ngữ là những tổ hợp từ “đặc biệt”, cố định, bền vững về hình thái cấu trúc, hoàn chỉnh và bóng bẩy về ý nghĩa được sử dụng rộng rãi trong giao tiếp hàng ngày, đặc biệt trong khẩu ngữ”). He classified idioms into two kinds: a. idiomatic similes (*tuổi như hoa, chạy như bay*); b. metaphorical idioms: asymmetrical metaphorical idioms (*đũa mốc chôi mâm son*) and symmetrical metaphorical idioms (*đỏ mỏ hôi trán, dãn mỏ hôi lưng*).

We define a Vietnamese idiomatic simile as follows: An idiomatic simile is a group of fixed words that expresses an idea by using words in a figurative symbolic and emphatic way, using the word *như*, *tày*, *tựa*, *tựa như*, *bằng*, *là*, *như là*, *như thể*, *hơn*, etc to describe something by comparing it with something else. (e.g. *nhanh như gió*). In Vietnamese idiomatic similes, the marker *như* is mostly used.

3. The form of idiomatic similes

3.1. The form of English idiomatic similes

There have been few classifications of the forms of English idiomatic similes and

according to our observation, they are not really clear. Using the terminologies introduced by Richards (1936) to designate the elements of a metaphor, excluding the marker of comparison, an idiomatic simile comprises at most four elements:

- the tenor, which is the entity or process that is compared;
- the ground or the basis on which the comparison is made;
- the marker;
- and the vehicle or standard that is used to establish the comparison.

Using the above terminologies and through our observation, we suggest the forms of English idiomatic similes as follows:

* tenor + marker + vehicle

to have a memory like a sieve (about a forgetful person – sieves have holes in them)

<i>a memory</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>a sieve</i>
tenor	marker	vehicle

In this simile, the ground *forgetful* is implicit.

to have eyes like a hawk (describing someone who sees every small detail)

<i>eyes</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>a hawk</i>
tenor	marker	vehicle

In this simile, the ground *sees every small detail* is implicit.

* ground + marker + vehicle

<i>as</i>	<i>tall</i>	<i>as</i>	<i>a giraffe</i>
marker	ground	marker	vehicle

*** marker + vehicle**

to drink like a fish (to describe someone who always drinks a lot of alcohol)

<i>like</i>	<i>a fish</i>
marker	vehicle

In this idiomatic simile, the ground *drinks a lot of alcohol* is implicit.

3.2. The form of Vietnamese idiomatic similes

Hoang Van Hanh and Mai Ngoc Chu considered that there are four forms of idiomatic similes and we see that the forms and definitions of each component of idiomatic similes are not clear. Through our observation, there are five forms of Vietnamese idiomatic similes. Using the above terminologies, we suggest the forms of Vietnamese idiomatic similes as follows:

*** tenor + ground + marker + vehicle:** *da trắng như ngà, da trắng như trứng gà bóc.*

*** tenor + marker + vehicle:** *lòng và cũng như lòng sung, gan tày liếp*

*** ground + marker + vehicle:** *nhANH như MÁ, dAI như đũa đOI, NHẹ tựa lông hồng, đấT như tÔm TƯƠI, lẠNH như TIỀN, NHANH như GIÓ, NHẹ như bẮC, NẶNG như CHÌ, đẹP như TIỀN GIÁNG TRẦN.*

*** (ground) + marker + vehicle:** In this form, the ground may be disappeared, however, people still understand the idiomatic simile. For example: *(dai) như*

đũa đOI, (đông) như kiển CỎ, (hiền lành) như cục đấT, (chậm) như rùa/sên, (vui) như mở CỜ trong bụng, (rẻ) như bèo, (to) như bỗ tuột CÁP, (chắc) như đINH đONG CỘT, etc.

*** marker + vehicle:** In this form, the ground is not the part of the idiomatic simile. For example:

ăn ở với nhau xử sự với nhau giữ ý giữ tứ với nhau, etc	như chó với mèo
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and some other idiomatic similes: *như nuôi con MỌN, như ngồi trên LỬA, như nở từng khúc RUỘT, như cá GẬP NƯỚC, như chim SỎ LÔNG, như rồng GẬP MÂY, như điều GẬP GIÓ.*

4. The form of vehicles in idiomatic similes in some english and vietnamese short stories and novels

English short stories and novels: 1. All summer in a day (Ray Bradbury); 2. New moon (Stephene Meyer); 3. The choice (Nicholas Sparks); 4. The last song (Nicholas Sparks); 5. Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone (J.K Rowling); 6. Harry Potter and the chamber of secret (J.K Rowling); 7. Dry September (William Faulkner). Vietnamese short stories and novels: 8. Bạc đẽ (Nguyen Cong Hoan); 9. Cơ hội của Chúa (Nguyen Viet Ha); 10. Đức Phật, nàng Savitri và tôi (Ho Anh Thai); 11. Biển và chim bói cá (Bui Ngoc Tan); 12. Chuyện làng cuội (Le Luu); 13. Giàn thiêu (Vo Thi Hao); 14. Đồi thế mà vui (Nguyen Huy Thiep).

Table 1. Statistics for the form of vehicles

The form of vehicles	Vietnamese		English	
	No	%	No	%
Words	78	79.59	44	44.44
<i>Nouns</i>	67	68.36	44	44.44
<i>Verbs</i>	7	7.14	0	0
<i>Adjectives</i>	3	3.06	0	0
<i>Numerals</i>	1	1.02	0	0
Phrases	7	7.14	52	52.52
Clauses	13	13.26	3	3.03
Total	98	100	99	100

Through the above table, we can see:

4.1. Words as vehicle:

Words as vehicle in English have the ratio 44.44%, are much less than Vietnamese vehicles that have the highest ratio 79.59%. In English idiomatic similes, we do not see verbs, adjectives, numerals as vehicle, meanwhile, in Vietnamese idiomatic similes, we see seven verbs, three adjectives and one numeral. Some English similes: *as clear as a bell*, *swift and sleek as a deer*, *as dark as a blackboard*, *as good as word*, *as tall as a giraffe*, *like a sculpture*, *as smooth as glass*, *like hell*, etc. Some Vietnamese similes: *đông như kiến*, *nói như trạn*, *đỏ như máu*, *cười như nắc nẻ*, *vui như hội*, *hiền như đất*, *giở mặt như giở bàn tay*, *cao như núi*, *nặng như đá*, *nặng như cùm*, *vững như bàn thạch*, *nhẹ tựa như lông hồng*, *tội tày giời*, *đen như mực*, *tĩnh như sáo*. Adjectives as vehicle: *có mắt như mù*, *có tai như điếc*, *có mồm như câm*. A numeral as vehicle: *trước sau như một* and seven verbs as vehicle are: *đẽ như bôn*, *đẽ như chơi*, *khóc như mưa*, *chạy như bay*, *giống nhau như lột*, *nhớ như in*, *giống nhau như đúc*.

Some examples to illustrate:

Mr Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat on the wall outside was showing no sign of sleepiness. It was sitting *as still as a statue*, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of Privet Drive. (J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone, p.8)

Tâm *chạy như bay* về nhà gọi Hoàng. Anh đang ngồi đọc Pie đệ nhất. Bỏ đi đánh chén. Mẹ lúi húi giặt ở sân sau. (Nguyen Viet Ha, Cơ hội của Chúa, p.23)

Mãi ông Thắng mới hiểu điều Huy nói có nghĩa là lái xe cho thủ trưởng phải hội tụ đủ ba tiêu chuẩn: *có mắt như mù*, *có tai như điếc*, *có mồm như câm*. (Bui Ngoc Tan, Biển và chim bói cá, p.498)

Cái chết của Từ Vinh là một tấm *gương tàn liếp*. Diên Thành hầu giết Từ Vinh mà vẫn vô can, bởi ông ta mượn tay pháp sư Đại Diên. (Vo Thi Hao, Giàn thiêu, p.46)

4.2. Phrases as vehicle

Phrases as vehicle in English account for 52.52%, the highest percentage in English idiomatic similes, and are much more than Vietnamese vehicles that are only 7.14%. Some English idiomatic

similes are: *like a moonless night, look like a pig in a wig, as normal as talking on the phone, like an angry bull, like a dried apricot*. Some Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *như vớ được vàng, được lời như cỏi tấm lòng, giỏ mặt như giỏ bàn tay, như xát muối, đau như đứt từng khúc ruột, da trắng như trứng gà bóc, như xé ruột xé gan*.

Some examples are:

Aside from latching themselves onto Molly like fuzzy barnacles, they tottered and toppled and whimpered and cried, all of which seemed like nature's way of making them adorable enough so their mother wouldn't eat them. (Nicholas Sparks, *The choice*, p.51)

Bà từng đau như đứt từng khúc ruột khi Siddhattha bỏ nhà đi tìm chân lý. (Ho Anh Thai, *Đức Phật, nàng Savitri và tôi*, p.692)

Chủ quán là chị Nho, mũi dọc dừa, răng khềnh, mắt sáng sánh và da trắng như trứng gà bóc. (Le Luu, *Chuyện làng Cuối*, p.149)

4.3. Clauses as vehicle

Clauses as vehicle in English have the lowest ratio 3.03% and are less than

Vietnamese vehicles that account for 13.26%. English idiomatic similes: *like water slops from a bucket, like a bomb that may go off at any moment, being treated like a dog that has rolled in something smelly*. Some Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *chắc như đinh đóng cột, như điều gặp gió, được lời như cỏi tấm lòng, mừng như bắt được vàng, chạy như ma đuổi, nhân bảo như thần bảo, giã như đĩa phải vôi, khóc như cha chết, hùng hục như trâu húc má, như sấm dậy, như sét đánh, như ong vỡ tổ, như kiến đốt*.

Some examples are as follows:

And then, exactly a year ago, Hogwarts had written to Harry, and the whole story had come out. Harry had taken up his place at wizard school, where he and his scar were famous... but now the school year was over, and he was back with the Dursleys for the summer, back to being *treated like a dog that had rolled in something smelly*. (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*, p.3)

Mụ Đất vôi vãi bỏ trở về. Chùng dăm bảy chục mét mụ đứng vụt dậy *chạy như ma đuổi*. (Le Luu, *Chuyện làng Cuối*, p.123)

5. Statistics for characteristic images of idiomatic similes

Table 2. Statistics for some of characteristic images of vehicles

Vehicle	Vietnamese		English	
	No	%	No	%
Animals	19	32.75	21	39.62
Natural phenomena	18	31.03	11	20.75
Plants	7	12.06	11	20.75
Religions	3	5.17	7	13.20
History – Culture	5	8.62	1	1.88
Parts of the body	6	10.34	2	3.77
Total	58	100	53	100

Through the above table, we can see that names of animals as vehicle and natural phenomena as vehicle in both English and Vietnamese idiomatic similes account for the highest ratio: 39.62%; 32.75%; 31.03% and 20.75% respectively; vehicles which are history, culture and parts of the body account for low ratio.

5.1. Names of animals as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *as green as a fresh pickled toad*, *let out a howl like a wounded dog*, *like multi-coloured ants*, *a bellow like an angry bull*, *as thick as a python*, *as ugly as an old bird*, *being treated like a dog*, *like a great bulldog*, *breathe like a winded rhinoceros*, *look like an underfed vulture*, *look like a wrinkled tortoise*, *like a scarlet snake*, *butterflies in the stomach like birds*, *look like a pig in a wig*, *as tall as a giraffe*, *barrel like an enraged bull*, *swift and sleek as a deer*, *like a mouse being trodden on*, *like an angry goose*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *trần như nhộng*, *khỏe như vâm*, *lầm như trâu*, *chạy lông không như ngựa*, *kêu như vạc*, *nhánh như cắt*, *lao vào như thiêu thân*, *câm như hến*, *cười như nắc nẻ*, *ngu như bò*, *giãy như đĩa phải vôi*, *hùng hục như trâu* húc mả, *nhẹ tựa lông hồng*, *run như dế*, *tĩnh như sáo*. Some examples are:

In the extended silence, the *butterflies in her stomach began to feel like birds*, and all she could think was that she'd done something wrong. (Nicholas Sparks, *The last song*, p.300)

Nói đoạn, đắc trí, ông Trường Sắc cười xòa, mà ông Ba Tuần cũng ôm bụng, gò lưng, mép soạc đến mang tai mà *cười như nắc nẻ*... (Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Bạc đẽ*, p.10)

Chú Hảo lại hát:

"Tiền lên đi chân trời rực hồng

Thân nam nhi phỉ chí tang bồng

Coi cái chết *tựa như lông hồng*

Kìa mấy ai da ngựa bọc xương... " (Nguyen Huy Thiep, *Đời thế mà vui*, p.3)

5.2. Natural phenomena as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *have a face like thunder*, *one's eyes shine like moon*, *as quiet as a stone*, *as cold as ice*, *dark like a moonless night*, *like a lost moon*, *like leaves before a new hurricane*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *như điều gặp gió*, *ầm ầm như sấm*, *lông như lửa đốt*, *cao như núi*, *nước mắt như mưa*, *nhánh như chớp*, *tiền nhiều như nước*, *hiền như đất*, *nặng như đá*, *khóc như mưa*, *như gió*, *nhánh như vũ bão*, *như sấm dậy*, *như sét đánh*, *tựa như tiếng sét bên tai*, *ngựa xe như nước*, *hạt lệ như sương*. Some examples are:

Before you, Bella, *my life was like a moonless night*. (Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon*, p.514)

Sẵn một phản ứng quen thuộc, *nhánh như chớp*, thằng Hiếu ngẩn người thối phụt ngọn đèn dầu ở mặt hòm rồi cầm cái môi rơm đang cháy, quay đầu vào phía trong. (Le Luu, *Chuyện làng Cuội*, p.77)

5.3. Names of plants as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *like a fire in dry grass*, *look like a radish with bad sunburn*, *like a small melon*, *as brightly pink as flowers*, *bald like a potato*, *one's skin is like a dried apricot*, *shake like a leaf*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *lông và cũng như lông sung*, *tươi như hoa*, *im như bồ thóc*, *xanh như tàu lá*, *nhiều như*

nấm, rẻ như bèo, rụng như sung. Some examples are:

A boom of thunder startled them and *like leaves before a new hurricane*, they tumbled upon each other and ran. (Ray Bradbury, *All summer in a day*, p.4)

Các Company *như nấm* sau mưa, nơi liên doanh của quan chức cơ hội với bọn buôn lậu liều lĩnh. (Nguyễn Việt Hà, *Cơ hội của Chúa*, p.47)

5.4. Religious images as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *look like an Easter egg, look like a baby angel, beautiful as an angel, like hell, look like an angel, looks like a fitting haunt for vampires, look like a god*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *nhân bảo như thần bảo, đẹp như tiên, chạy như ma đuổi*. Some examples are:

The contrast between the two of us was painful. He *looked like a god*. I looked very average, even for a human, almost shamefully plain. (Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon*, p.35)

Ngay cả những ngày mê mẩn và tìm cách chiêm dụng bằng được cô Đất *đẹp như tiên* giáng, ông vẫn không thể bỏ được thói quen hoảng hốt sợ, dù nó không hề biết gì sự dan díu của ông ở dưới quê. (Le Luu, *Chuyện làng Cuội*, p.21)

5.5. History, culture as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *look like a desert rat*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *như mở hội, đông như quân Nguyên, nói như trạng*. Some examples are:

"You're a fine white man," the client said. "Aint you?" In his frothy beard he *looked like a desert rat* in the moving

pictures. (William Faulkner, *Dry September*, p.2)

- Không hy vọng gì đâu. Bánh vẽ đấy. Rồi lần lượt tất cả các đồng chí thuyền viên đều được đi tàu vận tải ngoại thương, trước tiên là những người có thành tích trong sản xuất, có thâm niên cống hiến với xí nghiệp. *Nói như trạng* mẹ. Ông Lê Mây đấy..." (Bùi Ngọc Tan, *Biển và chim bói cá*, p.214)

5.6. Names of parts of the body as vehicle

English idiomatic similes: *like a blushing in the face, a voice as oily as one's hair*. Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *giở mặt như giở bàn tay, được lời như cời tấm lòng, đau như đứt từng khúc ruột, mặt dày như cái mặt mo, như xé ruột xé gan*. Some examples are:

A stooping man had appeared behind the counter, smoothing his greasy hair back from his face. "Mr. Malfoy, what a pleasure to see you again," said Mr. Borgin in a voice *as oily as his hair*. (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets*, p.39)

Thì đúng thế còn gì nữa. Người ta phổ biến, tôi ngồi, *mặt dày như cái mặt mo* ở trên huyện ấy. (Le Luu, *Chuyện làng Cuội*, p.137)

6. The similarities and differences in the forms and cultural characteristics

6.1. The similarities

In both Vietnamese and English idiomatic similes, vehicles are words, phrases and clauses. Vehicles that are mostly used are animals and natural

phenomena. Although the culture of the two nations is different, ways of thinking and looking at the world of English and Vietnamese is somehow similar. Hence, both Vietnamese and English express ideas and concepts in the same way. In fact, a large number of Vietnamese idiomatic similes are similar to English idiomatic similes in terms of both concepts and images to express. For example: *as black as coal* - *đen như than*; *as cold as ice* - *lạnh như băng*; *as fresh as a daisy* - *tươi như hoa*; *as valuable as gold* - *quý như vàng*; *as green as a leaf* - *xanh như tàu lá*; *as hard as a stone* - *cứng như đá*; *as hot as fire* - *nóng như lửa*; *as light as a feather* - *nhẹ tựa lông hồng*; *as red as blood* - *đỏ như máu*; *as silly as a calf* - *ngu như bò*; *as slow as a snail* - *chậm như sên*; *to stick like a leech* - *bám dai như đĩa*; *as pretty as a paint* - *đẹp như tranh*; *spring up like mushrooms* - *mọc lên như nấm*; *as quickly as lightning, like a streak of lightning* - *nhANH như chớp*.

6.2. The differences

As we can see, there are three forms of English idiomatic similes and five forms of Vietnamese idiomatic similes. Vietnamese idiomatic similes employ more markers than English idiomatic similes. In the case of words as vehicle, nouns, verbs, adjectives and numerals appear in Vietnamese idiomatic similes meanwhile in English idiomatic similes, we only see vehicles which are nouns. Characteristic images of idiomatic similes are different due to differences in culture. Vietnam has the cultural tradition of the wet rice production. Therefore, there are

often characteristic images in Vietnamese idiomatic similes such as:

Animals in agriculture: *buffalo, ox, turtle, snake, chicken, duck*, etc. For example: *như tằm ăn rỗi, làm như trâu, khỏe như vâm, như gà bới, như kiến đốt, như bò đội nón, sùng sục như trâu húc mả, dai như đĩa*. In English idiomatic similes, we see animals such as: *bull, rhinoceros, deer, bulldog*, etc and these animals are strange to Vietnamese people, and Vietnamese people do not see them as characteristic things. For instant: *swift and sleek as a deer, as tall as a giraffe*.

Plants in tropical climate: *ngô, lúa, thóc, sung, củ tam thất, cây tre, thị*, etc. For example: *nổ như ngô rang, lúng búng như ngậm hột thị, lòng và cũng như lòng sung, cứng như rễ tre, im như bò thóc, đen như củ tam thất*, etc. Whereas plants in temperate climate such as: *raddish, melon, potato, apricot*, etc appear in English similes. For instant: *the skin like a dried apricot, a nose like a small melon, bald like a potato, look like a radish with bad sunburn*.

The weather, geography and the culture of English speaking countries and Vietnam are different, we should understand the differences to translate the idiomatic similes precisely.

English idiomatic similes: *as swift as a deer*, we will translate it as: *nhANH như sóc, nhanh như thỏ hay nhanh như chớp*; *as dark as a pitch*, we have Vietnamese equivalents such as: *đen như mực, đen như cột nhà cháy, đen như củ súng, đen như củ tam thất, đen như cuốc, đen như*

hạt na; as ugly as an old bird, Vietnamese people often say: *xấu như ma*, if we translate it into Vietnamese as *xấu như một con chim già*, people will not understand this idiomatic simile; as quiet as a stone, if we translate this idiomatic simile as *câm như đá*, people are not familiar to it, we should translate it into Vietnamese as: *câm như hến*, *câm như thóc* or *im như thóc*. Some other examples are: *as dry as a bone* - *khô như ngói*, *feel like duck in water* - *như cá gặp nước*, *as tall as a giraffe* - *cao như sếu*.

Vietnamese idiomatic similes: *chậm như rùa*, English people do not use *as slow as a turtle*, when we translate it into English, it should be *as slow as a snail*; *khỏe như vâm (voi)*, we should not translate it into English like this: *as strong as an elephant*, we should translate it as: *as strong as a horse* because English people are familiar to the image of a horse; *ăn như rồng cuốn*, *ăn như mỏ khoét*, we should translate them as *eat like a horse* because these idiomatic similes are used to describe someone who always has a big appetite; *sướng như tiên*, meanwhile it would be *as happy as a king* in English. Some other examples are: *chắc như đinh đóng cột* - *as sure as eggs is eggs*, *as sure as death/ faith/ a gun*, *as sure as I'm standing here*; *chật như nêm* - *be packed like cucumbers in a barrel*, *packed in like sardines in a tin*; *dễ như trở bàn tay*, *dễ như chơi* - *like a knife through butter*, *as easy as ABC*, *as easy as rolling off a log*, *as easy as pie/ as winking*; *đắt như tôm tươi* - *sell like hot cakes*; *như có lửa đốt ở*

trong lòng - *feel like a cat on hot bricks*; *như đĩa phải vôi* - *like a scalded cat*; *như sét đánh ngang tai* - *like a bolt from the blue*; *rẻ như bèo* - *as cheap as dirt*; *trần như nhộng* - *as bare as the palm of your hand*, *as naked as my mother bore me*, *as naked as a picked bone*.

The same components but the dissimilar content: Some images of comparison can appear in both Vietnamese and English idiomatic idioms but the meaning of the two idioms are quite different. That is because the meaning of components differs in culture. For example, in the idiomatic simile *rõ như ban ngày*, the Vietnamese want to indicate an event that has nothing fishy. Meanwhile English people use the idiom *as bright as day* to describe a light room, besides, when the weather is fine and sunny, English people say *It's as bright as day*. Whilst Vietnamese people apply the idiomatic simile *chắc như đinh đóng cột* to something steady, *as hard as nails* in English idiomatic simile means a quite strict person.

7. Implications and conclusion

7.1. Implications

For translation, the idiomatic similes should be found in the text, the translator should always be alert to idiomatic similes, and thus different components of the idiomatic simile should be identified. Since target readers may not have the knowledge needed to interpret the simile, the translator will first assess their

background knowledge. If he believes that the target readership has the knowledge required, he will leave the simile unchanged; if the target readership does not, some modification to the source simile may be required, for instance, he can add some explanatory information. Some techniques for translating idiomatic similes: literal translation (retention of the same vehicle); replacement of the vehicle with a different vehicle; reduction of the simile, if idiomatic, to its sense; retention of the same vehicle plus explication of similarity feature(s); replacement of the vehicle with a gloss; omission of the simile. Some examples: 1. Keep the same idiomatic simile: *as black as coal* - Vietnamese equivalent: *đen như than*; *as white as snow* - Vietnamese equivalent: *trắng như tuyết*; *as cold as ice* - Vietnamese equivalent: *lạnh như băng*. 2. Replace another simile, but keep the original meaning: *as smooth as butter* - Vietnamese equivalent: *mượt như nhung*; *as pale as a ghost* - Vietnamese equivalent: *xanh như tàu lá*; *as happy as a king* - Vietnamese equivalent: *sướng như tiên*. 3. Keep the same simile, but spread it (bring its topic or point of similarity): *Life is like the hound equivocal*, when being translated into Vietnamese, it can be: *Cuộc sống không thể đoán trước được, có lúc nó làm tôi đau khổ, có lúc lại bao bọc và che chở cho tôi*. In some cases, because of different cultural features, a combination of more than one strategy is needed to convey the meaning. If the translator uses two or three methods as

explanation, paraphrasing or adaptation, translation would be simpler and the message will be rendered in a better way.

Culture plays an important role in the course of the idiom interpretation. It, therefore, requires enhancing cross-cultural awareness and needs open-minded understanding of the culture of the second language from different aspects. Learning idiomatic expressions in English may bring some benefits for EFL learners. Firstly, learning the idiomatic expressions of another language will be a guide to understanding the characteristics of that culture as idioms constitute an important cultural element of the language. Secondly, it helps them grasp the peculiarities of the English language. It is advisable for teachers to raise students' awareness of similarities and differences between Vietnamese and English idiomatic similes. When teachers teach their students a certain English idiomatic simile, they should let them guess the Vietnamese idiom and find out the equivalent to that idiom, make a comparison and explain why it is similar or different. It is really useful for them to have a long-term memory about that idiomatic simile.

7.2. Conclusion

Culture and idioms have the entwined relationship, idioms have been created in culture, so learning idioms helps us know about the culture of a country. Idioms also contain characteristics of a language, hence understanding idioms helps us understand the language more deeply. There are limited research publications in

the field of idioms in both English and Vietnamese language which must be considered critically. It should be taken into better consideration in the field of language teaching and learning. We should study the use of idiomatic expressions in the written productions for students on different proficiency levels and write more textbooks, books and dictionaries on the use of idioms.

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