

Comparative Study of English and Chinese Idioms

Salome Tsikhiseli

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

Abstract: Our article is about “Comparative study of English and Chinese Idioms”. Its main researching subject is idioms, which are expression of people’s experiences, opinions and emotions. They are playing a very important role in any languages. It is very interesting to make a comparative study of English and Chinese idioms. The phraseological unit as a special form of language, contains a lot of cultural information such as: history, geography, religion, traditions, national psychology, etc. We can say that it represents the historical heritage and cultural development of the product. Hence it follows that studying idioms gives us opportunity to learn more about the culture, and vice versa. The topic is very important to us, as far and different are genetically studied languages from each other. The study of phraseological units in different languages gives us the perspective to thoroughly study the specific language typology, different psychology and culture, also identify the stylistic features of the language. The main subject of our research is the study of Chinese and English idioms on the structural and semantic levels and their translation specificity. For fulfill the main goal, it is necessary to make three different definitions:

1. What is the general definition of expressions and aspects of idioms and in particular what do English and Chinese Idioms mean. 2. How often have idioms used in different styles and different time of authors. 3. How much English and Chinese expressions match to each other.

It is clear that the deep knowledge of idiomatic expressions helps to any person to increase the level of eloquence, also it is possible to expand own language with studying idioms of other languages and using them in our ones.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions, English and Chinese idioms, comparative study, translation specificity.

Idiomatic expressions as a special form of the languages contain great cultural information such as: history, geography, religion, ethic, national psychology, etc. The main goal of our research is to study English and Chinese idioms at the structural and semantic levels and to analyze their comparative study, for this it is necessary to determine the methodology of research, which will be carried out in several stages:

1. General definition and aspect of idiomatic expressions, in particular, what are the meanings of English and Chinese idioms.
2. Use English and Chinese idiomatic expressions with different styles of texts and different time authors.
3. Comparative study of English and Chinese idioms at semantic and structural levels.

There are quite a wide variety of alternatives to defining idiom and its importance, we consider several options:

1. Idiom is an expression that cannot be formulated as separate entities

[Longman Dictionary, 1985].

2. Idiom is represented as a phrase, structure or expression used in the language as separate units and creates different meaning by its constituent parts [Webster's New World College Dictionary, 1996].

At the beginning of the 20th century, various linguistic works have focused on the phenomenon in different languages, except for a substantial amount of words, solid words that are distinguished with special artistic and expression. The existence of these terms was known earlier, but before that they were not considered as the subject of linguistic research. Swiss linguist Charles Bally who is the founder of the phraseology, considered the phraseological units in an independent viewpoint and embodied four groups of words: a) free of expression; b) ordinary expression ; c) phraseological rows ; d) Phraseological unity. Although the theories proposed by him today have changed and moved to another level of development, he is considered one of the founders of the phraseology and his works are taken into account. English idioms also belong to the same period as Charles Bally's works. The founder of English phraseology can be considered L. Smith, who tried to explain the etymological basis of idiomatic expressions. At the time of identification of specific etymological groups of idioms Smith has created diverse groups of different semantic fields. In 1944 was published Murat Roberts' work "The Science of Idiom", in which the idiom was considered a somewhat unusual perspective, in particular, in the idiom is a mental monument of history that is created by ethnos, people, and even grammar should be considered in the context of idiom.

The first conference about translating machines was held in 1952. Its organizer had a report, which clearly shows that may arise problems when do translation of idiomatic expressions from one language into another language. As we know, only a part of such translation will have meaning - even the wrong meaning. According to one of the researchers Alan Hill, idiom is a group of morphemes and words that does not depend on the meaning of its constituent parts.

After that many theories have evolved in the definition of idiom. There were many contradictory and many identical ones. Idiomatic expressions are the best way to express language characteristics. At the same time, expressions originate from the cultural, historical and traditional roots of the country, which represent the peculiarities of each countries. The fact is that English and European languages have more in common than English and Chinese, but there are some interesting similarities between the idiomatic expressions of different languages.

Let us now discuss about the origin of Chinese Idioms (成語) and their history. The history of the origin of Chinese idioms, based on the available source [Grace Feng, 2012], is related to the combat period of BC 403-221. In modern Chinese, we find more combination of idiomatic expression than in old one (古代汉语). The authors of modern literature often use phrases that are strongly rooted in Chinese poetry or famous people's stories related to the historical facts. During the learning of Chinese, we often found four successive words. In any case, except for exceptions, Chinese idiomatic expressions are transmitted by four hieroglyphs. A large number of homophones in Chinese language complicates the understanding the exact meanings of expressions. That is why the Chinese are starting to learn idiomatic expressions and use of their dictionaries from the middle school.

The number of Chinese idioms is about 5000 [Grace Feng, 2012], but this number is likely to be due to the following reasons:

1. A lot of Chinese idiomatic expressions have synonyms, which are based on the same history, but the difference is one or two extra hieroglyphs, Perhaps, this fact is explained by a large number of local dialects in Chinese Language.
2. Some phrase are used in the sense of idiom but do not satisfy the structural criterion of the latter, four-word verbal expression and its semantic side.

Some Chinese and English idiomatic expressions are similar or characterized by partial metaphorical similarities, which are easily understood. To clarify this, we present a few examples:

“Golden age” - “黄金时代”

“Achieve two things at one stroke” - “一箭双雕”

“To loss one’s marbles” - “失去理智”

There is a great difference between English and Chinese cultures and this distinction poses a big dilemma to the lexicographers. Every country possesses a special heritage and has a native language, and in this case the English and Chinese idiomatic expressions have different origins, they differ in their morals, but in the most cases, different countries share the rules and beliefs of each other, for example, the most Englishmen prefer to communicate through Euphemisms,

and Chinese are using the same method too [Dai Lisheng,2009]. The examples of the word "die" in Chinese language are similar too:

"to pass away" – “去世, 与世长辞”

"to go west" - “归西天”

"to join the majority" – “会见祖先”

As mentioned above, the main goal of our research is to study English and Chinese idioms at the structural and semantic levels and to analyze their comparative study. We can safely say that idiomatic expressions represent historical heritage and cultural development. Hence, we have the opportunity to study idiomatic expressions, learn more about the culture of different countries, and vice versa, we can learn deeply the idiomatic expressions of different countries by studying cultural heritage. The field of the study is the phraseology - idioms, which study was conducted on two linguistic bases, based on Chinese and English languages. According to the limited examples discussed above, we can conclude that as more studied languages are far from each other, as more important results can be given to the comparative analysis of English-Chinese languages. As a result of research, it is possible to study the typology of the specific languages, their differential psychology and the formation of language stylistic peculiarities. It is also possible to enrich your own language by translating the phraseology of the second language and by establishing them in your language.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dai Lisheng, Understanding English and Chinese Idioms from a Cultural Perspective, 2009.
- [2] Grace Feng, read a Chinese history, learn a Chinese idiom, 2012.
- [3] Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985.
- [4] Tan Peng, Chinese Idioms, 1986.
- [5] Wang Ziyu, On Idiom and Their Translation from Chinese into English, 2007.
- [6] Webster's New World College Dictionary 3rd Additional, 1996.
- [7] 汉语成语大词典海南出版社