
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Contrastive Analysis of Plant Proverbs in English and Vietnamese

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| ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates how plant metaphors in Vietnamese and English proverbs reflect cultural values through an analysis. It contends that proverbs serve as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge. The essay demonstrates the influence of cultural context on metaphorical language by contrasting proverbs that convey similar meanings ("Every rose has its thorn" and "Hồng nào mà chả có gai"). Additionally, it examines proverbs that convey the same meaning but employ distinct metaphors, such as "Cơm tẻ là mẹ đẻ" versus "Corn is the staff of life." In conclusion, the essay recognizes culture-specific proverbs and asserts that comprehension of them promotes effective intercultural communication.

| KEYWORDS

Contrastive Analysis; Plant Proverbs; English; Vietnamese

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

We have long acknowledged the English language as an indispensable means of international communication. Educators in Vietnam are increasingly acknowledging that reading proficiency is a critical determinant of academic achievement, and this recognition is gaining traction in English. Despite dedicating a significant amount of focus to English language instruction and acquisition, tangible results have yet to materialize. Despite possessing a satisfactory understanding of English vocabulary and syntax, it is abundantly evident that Vietnamese English learners seldom experience comfort when conversing with Westerners in English. This phenomenon is attributed to an inadequate understanding among individuals regarding the traditions and principles of the countries where English is the native tongue. Understanding a country's culture is one of the most critical aspects of language acquisition. The lexicon used by native language speakers often mirrors their cultural background. However, due to the frequent use of idioms and proverbs, individuals who are learning a language may find it challenging to comprehend such expressions. Additionally, it is not uncommon for second-language learners to encounter difficulties in recalling particular expressions and proverbs, let alone comprehending their appropriate usage. Certain English idioms and proverbs are more accessible for learning and practical implementation due to their resemblance to Vietnamese expressions. Students will benefit from a comparison table for more challenging terms that lack Vietnamese linguistic equivalents. Consequently, it is critical that the instructor consider both the parallels and distinctions between idiomatic expressions and proverbs in the respective languages. Because this becomes second nature, it will benefit students who are attempting to acquire English as a second language. Plants are among the most frequently occurring images in idioms and proverbs. The image of the plant heavily influences verbal and written communications, not only in Vietnam but also in other English-speaking nations. Plants have historically reflected various aspects of human nature, including but not limited to appearances, virtues, personalities, ideas, and emotions. Despite this, the existence of numerous civilizations across the globe demonstrates that idioms and proverbs from English and Vietnamese share both commonalities and distinctions. An examination of the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs is the focus of this essay.

1.1 What are proverbs?

1.1.1 Definitions:

Constable (2010) claims that the proverbial book presents itself as an anthology of sage proverbs that have been assembled from the writings of several different individuals. These proverbs are the product of years of accumulated wisdom that have been transmitted from one generation to the next. Proverbs are a useful tool used by families and other communities to disseminate folklore, highlight the diversity of cultural traditions, and set expectations for conduct (Information and Communication Technologies in the College of Agriculture Sciences, 2001). Proverbs are valuable national resources that may be used in almost every part of a person's life. Nguyen (2007) often shortens and rhymes them, which facilitates memorization of the content.

Meider (2004) stated that many proverbs have both a connotation and a meaning. This is especially pertinent to our inquiry, which focuses on plant proverbs. As a result, it is more productive to investigate them in terms of their culture, religion, and other factors (Meider, 2004). According to Le & Tram's (1986) research, "proverbial comparisons" (such as "as alike as two peas"), proverbial interrogatives ("Does a chicken have lips?"), and twin formulas are all examples of subgenres of this type of writing (e.g., "The taller the tree, the sweeter the plum") (Meider, 2004). Wikipedia classifies proverbs into the following four categories:

- Alliteration: repeating the first syllable. (For example, forgive and forget.)
- Parallelism: being similar in concept and structure (for example, while the grass grows, the horse starves.)
- Rhyme: Being sown in rhyme (For example, no herb will cure love.)
- Ellipsis: contraction (for example, as the tree, so the fruit)

1.2. Classification of plant proverbs:

Two cognitive theories of proverb use include metaphor and symbolic action, according to Bradbury (2002). Regardless of whether a theory informs the production and dissemination of proverbs, pictures of plants are always present in consumers' minds. By necessity, these images are distinct and graphic. Stated differently, it might be a fruit variety, tree, flower, etc. Suková (2010) categorizes plant proverbs into the following subgroups in light of this recognition:

- *Tree proverbs*: This category comprises proverbs that include at least one "tree" word or its subordinate lexeme (e.g., giant oaks grow from small acorns) (as the tree falls, so must it lay).
- *Part of tree proverbs*: As the name suggests, this kind of proverb makes reference to a tree. For instance, "thorn," "leaves," "root," etc.
- *Fruit proverbs*: The bulk of proverbs are of this kind, both in Vietnamese and in English. These are proverbs where the image of "fruit" emerges and is central to their meaning. We might use the word "fruit" in the proverb "A tree is known by its fruit" or the word "apple" in the proverb "A rotten apple spoils the barrel."
- *Other plant proverbs*: According to Suková (2010), there are "lexemes that are neither trees nor do they have distinct blossoms" among the proverbs of this category. Take note of terms like "weed," "straw," and "grass," among others.
- *Flower proverbs*: These proverbs may be seen as collections of words with at least one lexical unit that has to do with flowers or flower varieties. One well-known adage that already counts as a floral proverb is "Every rose has its thorn" or "As the tree grows, so does the fruit."

1.3. Metaphors for the notion and meaning of provided metaphors in proverbs.

The MacMillan Dictionary defines a metaphor as "a form of comparison". This implies the idea of comparing one thing to another. As the use of metaphor in a variety of language situations demonstrates (Buss, M., and Jost, J.), metaphor is "a valid method of communicating something that cannot be expressed in any other way." Black, in his book "More About Metaphor," asserts that the value of a metaphor lies in its realization in discourse, its contextual placement, and its ability to avoid confusion among others.

Richard's concept of a metaphor was the basis for Holman's (1985) definitions of "tenor" and "vehicle" in "A Handbook to Literature." "A Handbook to Literature" contains Richard's definitions. "The tenor is the idea that is being expressed or the subject matter of the comparison; the vehicle is the image that is being used to convey this thought or issue" (Holman, 1985).

Take the proverb into consideration: "Don't judge a tree by its bark." Combining "tenor," which refers to a person's appearance, with "vehicle," which refers to a tree or its bark, creates the figurative meaning of a phrase, often known as the "hidden message" behind literal words. The preceding example's imagery of "tree" and "its bark" conveys the idea that we shouldn't judge someone just by their looks.

It has been shown that metaphors have a quality that allows them to transfer characteristics from one domain to another (Haser, 2005), demonstrating that analogies have a cross-domain property (Lakoff, 1993). The brains of the transmitter and receiver are

responsible for determining how one region connects to another. To understand what a metaphor means, you must first be able to think of a picture or symbol and then connect it to a certain situation.

2. Images of plants in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs:

Humans and plants are the only living things known to exist in the universe. An intimate and mutually beneficial relationship between humans and plants has existed for a very long time. It dates back to the earliest days of human existence on Earth and spans millennia. Plants provide a variety of benefits to humans, including habitat (such as fields and forests), food and supplies, and even assistance in times of war. The fruitful link between the two languages has maintained and elaborated upon compilations of English and Vietnamese proverbs. These wise sayings compare the characteristics of individuals, such as their experiences, thoughts, and emotions, to those of plants. Let's consider these examples:

➤ **Plants in proverbs refer to human:**

- Don't judge a tree by its bark. => We shouldn't judge anyone by their appearance.
- An apple doesn't fall far from the tree. => Children resemble their parents.
- A rotten apple spoils the barrel. => An immoral person can have a bad influence on a group.

➤ **The plant proverbs are reflective of actual events:**

- Corn is the staff of life. => Corn is one of the main supplies for people.
- While the grass grows, the horse starves. => Good things cannot happen if we don't get to work.

➤ **Plant proverbs ideas**

"Root" implies a foundation or causes.

- Money is the root of all evil. => Money causes trouble.
- Fruits are an achievement.*
- Forbidden fruit is the sweetest. => The great satisfaction when we accomplished an almost impossible task.
- The higher the tree, the sweeter the plum. => We can have great success even in difficult situations.
- Life is just a full bowl of cherries. => Life is full of satisfying moments.

Flowers signify success and accomplishment.

- Every rose has its thorn. => Every achievement is accompanied by challenges.
- Under the thorns grow the roses. => We can have great success even in difficult situations.

"Other plants" is shorthand for unfavourable conditions.

- Don't let the grass grow around your feet. => Don't let it be too late to do things.
- Weeds grow apace. => Bad things happen fast.

3. A contrastive analysis of plant proverbs in English and Vietnamese:

3.1. Similar expressions:

Proverbs reflect a nation's culture, morals, and traditions to some degree. Given that no two nations are identical, it stands to reason that the collections of proverbs in each country are singular. However, human brains, with their capacities to think, see, remember, and replicate ideas, function similarly. When it comes to proverbs, individuals from Vietnam and places where English is the primary language still share a number of comparable phrases. People from the two groups base these expressions on similar ideas and shared experiences.

English	Vietnamese
Every rose has its thorn.	Hồng nào mà chẳng có gai.
Forbidden fruit is the sweetest.	Quả cấm là quả ngọt.
A drowning man will catch a straw.	Chết đuối vớ cọng rơm.
Weeds grow apace.	Cỏ dại mọc nhanh.
Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm.	Khi gió cả mới biết cây cứng mềm.
As fresh as a daisy.	Tươi như hoa.

3.2. Many other phrases share similar meanings, including the following:

Compared to the proverbs that are the same but in two different languages, the ones that are distinct tend to account for a greater percentage. Despite the differences in the "vehicle" or the comparison picture, the idea and value remain the same. The following are some pairs of English and Vietnamese proverbs that correspond to one another (Le & Tram, 1986; Nguyen, 2007).

English	Vietnamese
Corn is the staff of life.	Cơm tẻ là mẹ đẻ.
Every bean has its black.	Mía có tốt, sấu mới lành.
There's a small choice of rotten apples.	Không có cá, lấy rau má làm ngon.
When the grass grows, the horse starves.	Há miệng chờ sung.
The fairest rose at last withered.	Măng mọc có lứa, người ta có thì.
Make hay while the sun shines.	Uốn tre từ lúc còn non, dạy con từ thuở con còn thơ ngây.

3.3. Cross-cultural differences

Proverbs have an important role in the transmission of rich cultural traditions, the dissemination of folklore, and the communication of anticipated rules of behavior, not just in the family but also in other communal contexts. In 2001, the College of Agriculture Sciences emphasized the importance of proverbs in transmitting rich cultural traditions, disseminating folklore, and communicating anticipated rules of behavior. The phrase "garden of proverbs" refers to a compilation of historical, political, social, and cultural elements of one's life. This definition is rather straightforward. A person's culture, which includes the norms of behavior they adhere to in daily life and the principles they hold dear, has a significant impact on the mental processes that underlie the formulation and interpretation of proverbs. So far, we have presented some proverbs about plants that exemplify the differences between English and Vietnamese cultures.

Another factor that influences the variations in the chosen "vehicle." is the plant's familiarity with the human population. For example, in the majority of Western countries, "corn" is considered to be one of the primary meals consumed on a daily basis, yet in Vietnam, "rice" is the most essential component of nearly all recipes. It is not common to see the word "đậu" (bean) in Vietnamese proverbs, despite the fact that it is one of the five grains that are traditionally eaten in Vietnam. However, this is the case with the proverb "every bean has its day" ("mía có tốt sấu mới lành"); "bean" has the meaning of "mía" (sugarcane), which is readily available in rural areas of the provinces and is typically used. In a similar vein, "lúa," "rau má," and "măng" are all viable options because of how casually they are used in Vietnamese.

In addition, the act of interacting with the natural world and living one's life is what gives rise to the creation of proverbs, particularly those pertaining to plants. They also serve as markers of the ideas and concepts that demonstrate how individuals view themselves in relation to plants. The term "măng," which means "the newest, youngest, and freshest," is another option for expressing the blossoming beauty of young women. Many languages and cultures often use flowers to represent women.

The above discussion has provided an explanation as to why a significant number of proverbs, both in English and Vietnamese, are unable to be located with any parallels in terms of plants. Here are some examples to illustrate this principle:

Vietnamese exclusive plant proverbs:

- "Người đẹp vì lụa, lúa tốt vì phân" (The tailor makes a man): Different looks make people different.
- "Mạnh vì gạo, bạo vì tiền" (Money makes the mare go): Money is the power to deal with anything.
- "Trồng dưa được dưa, trồng cà được cà". (As you sow, so shall you reap): People will have to accept whatever result of their actions.
- "Xay lúa thì khỏi bế em". (A man cannot spin and reel at the same time): People cannot do two things or be at two places at the same time.

English exclusive plant proverbs:

- As like as two peas in a pod (Giống nhau như hai giọt nước): Two things are exactly alike.
- He that loves the tree loves the branches (Yêu nhau yêu cả đường đi, ghét nhau ghét cả tông chi họ hàng): When people are in love, they love everything about their lovers.
- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree (Cha nào con nấy): Children resemble their parents.
- The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence (Đứng núi này trông núi nọ): Some people can never be satisfied with what they already have.

4. Conclusion

This article's scope is not broad enough to investigate the comparative analysis of plant proverbs in Vietnamese and English in any more depth. In spite of this, it has helped to increase both our general awareness of plant metaphors found in proverbs and our understanding of the consequences these metaphors have for the communication activities of both languages. Language learners can improve their command of a language by developing a comprehensive awareness of the functions of proverbs in both culture and language.

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