

Article

The Role of Animal Metaphors in SLT: A Comparative Study Based on the Idioms of Chinese and Brazilian Portuguese

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Abstract: Teaching metaphorical language, especially idioms, is widely recognized as one of the most challenging areas in second language teaching. This complexity arises because it poses a significant cultural challenge, as well as a pedagogical one, requiring learners to navigate unfamiliar cognitive frameworks. Regarding idioms related to animals, these expressions vary greatly in meaning and application due to the fundamentally different natural environments, historical developments, and cultural backgrounds of Brazil and China. Consequently, the expressions and metaphorical meanings of animals such as dogs, cats, chickens, cows, and horses in idioms will serve as the core focus of our study. By systematically comparing animal-based idioms in Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese, we will be able to determine the underlying cultural meanings of these fixed expressions, thereby revealing the distinct worldviews embedded within each language. Furthermore, this comparative analysis aims to provide practical, evidence-based suggestions for both teaching and learning methodologies in cross-cultural educational contexts. Using the rich cultural heritage of idioms as an active teaching aid, combined with engaging pedagogical tools such as visual illustrations, contextualized stories, and dynamic interactive exercises, will significantly help students understand and internalize these animal idioms that deeply reflect cultural identity. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader field of applied linguistics by demonstrating how targeted metaphorical instruction can enhance intercultural communicative competence and facilitate more effective second language acquisition.

Keywords: animal metaphors; idioms; second language teaching; chinese; portuguese; comparative linguistics

1. Introduction

Regarding the metaphor of language and the value of all phenomena it encompasses in second language teaching, a substantial body of literature has explored this topic. It has been pointed out that what student discourse typically lacks is conceptual fluency. Before proceeding with further analysis, it is crucial to define and understand what our object of study is and what it includes from macro to micro levels.

Metaphor refers to the use of one word or phrase to imply the meaning of another word or phrase, usually by comparing two things that are essentially different. Metaphor is founded on our everyday experience and commonplace knowledge. In language learning, the understanding and use of metaphors is a complex process, especially in second language teaching, because metaphors are often deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. The importance of language teaching depends on this. Metaphor has been redefined as the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning [1].

Animal metaphors, as a type of metaphor, metaphorical expressions with animal images in languages, convey specific emotions, concepts, or social values through the imagery of animals, and are an important component of language and cultural instruction.

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In recent years, the research on animal metaphor has mainly focused on the descriptions of animal names and animal metaphors in different languages, the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic study of the nature of animal metaphor [2]. There are also some comparative and contrastive studies of English and Chinese animal metaphors focusing on cultural differences in meanings but not a deep analysis of cognitive reasons.

Metaphorical phenomena are very common in idioms. Idioms have complex natures, and many scholars have provided different interpretations. Although the Oxford English Dictionary offers a general definition, "The specific character or individuality of a language; the manner of expression considered natural to or distinctive of a language; a language's distinctive phraseology." However, authors have further defined idioms as lexical anomalies, frozen or near-frozen expressions whose lexical composition belies their semantic meaning and that must be described and understood *in situ*, based on corpus evidence. In simpler terms, the most important consideration for idioms is that the overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent parts [3]. After synthesizing the research findings of various scholars on the nature and functions of idioms, the following fixed characteristics of idioms have been identified:

1. Metaphorical: Idioms are the product of social communication, and there is a relationship between the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning in expression.
2. Analytical Content: The meaning of an idiom is not predictable solely from the meanings of the individual words that constitute it.
3. Formal rigidity: Refers to the fixed and unchanging form of idioms.
4. Idiomatic expressions: An idiom is not composed of just a single word.

Regarding its classification, it is important to emphasize the difference between transparent idioms and opaque idioms. The syntactic structure of transparent idioms is equivalent to their idiomatic meaning, such as "cão de caça vem de raça (a hunting dog comes from its fine breed)." In contrast, opaque idioms have a structure that is separate from their idiomatic meaning, such as "soltar os cachorros (release the dogs)." Because of this, such classification will impact teaching methods [4].

In addition to defining and conducting academic research on idioms, it is clear that the most important property of idioms is that they are the legacy of culture and tradition [1]. They encapsulate centuries of life within a specific sociolinguistic context and geographical environment, and they are the core and soul of language communities, a part of linguistic life.

2. Methodological

The essence and meaning of the above linguistic metaphor phenomena, as well as the specific meanings of idioms, raise the question: why is it so crucial to teach idioms? What status does the metaphorical meaning behind animal names hold in idioms? This is mainly based on the following aspects:

Firstly, idioms act as a lubricant that makes language fluent [3]. Therefore, in foreign language learning, proficiency in idioms contributes to enhancing overall communicative competence. Idiomatic expressions lend language a unique flavor, making it diverse, distinctive, and colorful. Similarly, in cross-cultural communication, the study of idioms can help language learners understand two cultures, gain a deeper insight into the customs and habits of the host country, and promote a profound understanding of its cultural background. For instance, when traveling abroad, if students cannot understand these idioms, they may feel frustrated and distressed in cross-cultural communication. Idioms are numerous and frequently used in verbal communication, making them a noteworthy aspect of language learning and acquisition.

Secondly, idioms are teachable and learnable. This is because research in the field of cognitive linguistics has shown that memory plays a significant role when learning these fixed expressions [2]. Therefore, on a methodological level, idioms are fixed expressions that need to be memorized.

Finally, not all idioms can be compared with expressions in other languages. This is because many idioms originate from ancient mythological fables, and customs [5]. These

idioms evolve and change over time; they are in a constant state of flux. To ascertain the essential roots of their cultural significance, we must rely on linguistic, cultural, and even anthropological factors, as well as a diachronic perspective on language. This reflects the importance of linguistic metaphor in teaching idioms, as will be discussed later.

Therefore, how should students approach idioms when teaching idioms?

Many scholars have discussed this issue. As is evident, learning idioms presents a series of difficulties for both Chinese language learners and Brazilian Portuguese learners. The main reason is that they do not understand the culture and stories behind the idioms of the two languages, which often leads to their inappropriate use of idioms in certain contexts. Some researchers believe that students learn idioms through a non-active mode. The non-active mode refers to the situation where students' cognitive structure begins to search for metaphorical meanings with communicative solutions only when they realize that the literal meaning of the idioms is not suitable for the context. Other studies emphasize the importance of understanding the meaning of idiomatic expressions within their context. Experimental findings suggest that advanced English learners can more easily understand and produce second language idioms by using knowledge of their first language when the idioms are interchangeable, while unrelated idioms are more difficult to comprehend [5].

In cognitive linguistics, conceptual information and associative information profoundly affect people's understanding of things [6]. Conceptual information refers to the core meaning that represents a concept, while associative information refers to an individual's experiences and perceptions of reality. Among these, associative information is determined by the specificity of culture. Idioms in linguistic culture contain not only conceptual information but also associative information, which are important aspects for cultural markers and research. But what problems might arise when teaching idioms?

The diversity and metaphorical nature of idiomatic expressions present special challenges in language learning and teaching, especially in second language acquisition and intercultural communication [7]. How to teach idioms and which idioms to teach are subjects of varying opinions, which mainly depend on which features of the idioms are emphasized. Idioms with higher transparency and ease of analysis, as well as those with lower transparency and more difficult metaphorical meanings to discern, and those with cultural roots that are hard to detect, have all received attention and study from scholars.

Although transparent idioms are easier for students to recognize than obscure ones, the importance of metaphor in understanding opaque idioms is emphasized, as the cultural motivations behind these metaphors are not recognized unless the origin of the idiom is well known [1]. It has been proven that transparent idioms are easier to recognize in the early stages of learning, whereas opaque idioms require students with more advanced language abilities to learn.

Idioms related to animals reflect the cultural attitudes held by a specific language. Animal idioms reflect the cultural information contained within the concept of animals and are associated with traditions, customs, attitudes, and fables within a culture. It is this "cultural dependency" that makes it difficult for learners who do not belong to the same language to master, as learners cannot instinctively identify clear semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic patterns as native speakers do. Therefore, in the process of second language teaching and learning, it is necessary to recognize that these opaque idioms can become recognizable through analysis and understanding, and belong to controllable learning units. When students learn the semantics of idioms, to some extent, it is driven by the concepts and cultural stories involved in the idioms, such as learning through explanations by teachers, cartoons, movies, literary stories, or even songs. Moreover, students are more likely to acquire those idioms whose literal meanings are close to their metaphorical meanings, that is, idioms with high transparency [8]. This context provides the necessary semantic information for the learning of idioms, which makes the text coherent and is crucial for extracting metaphorical meanings.

3. Animal Metaphors: A Cognitive Linguistics Approach

3.1. Previous Considerations

Animals are very common in life, and the use of animal vocabulary can evoke a variety of different expressive meanings. Language is full of idiomatic expressions related to animals, and the metaphorical meanings these expressions refer to go beyond the extension of the literal meaning of the animals themselves [2]. For example, "JiaoTuShangYouSanKu" (a cunning rabbit still has three burrows) refers to wild rabbits digging multiple burrows to evade predators, allowing for flexible escape routes. Similarly, the phrase "one should not present elegant items to ignorant people" uses the metaphor of pearls and pigs to convey the idea that valuable things may not be appreciated by those who lack the capacity to understand their worth. However, can these common linguistic expressions be recognized as cognitive representations of the animal metaphors contained within idioms? Although we may uncover the inherent meanings of animal vocabulary and the connotative meanings they derive, it is not a simple task to fully grasp the semantic value of these animal idioms. For instance, does the idiom "JiaoTuShangYouSanKu" necessarily evoke the association between rabbits and cunning? If this idiom is used to describe investment and financial management, does it truly imply a negative connotation?

Upon a thorough understanding of metaphorical meanings, conducting a comprehensive and extensive analysis and comparison of animal meanings becomes crucial [8]. This comparison involves ancient and contemporary perspectives, spanning across multiple disciplines. From historical philosophy, geography, and anthropology to public perspectives, each angle reveals topics related to animal metaphors from different viewpoints.

It should be noted that these metaphorical meanings are often closely related to the etymology of the words or phrases, while the vast majority of language users are unaware of these etymologies. Therefore, linguists cannot overly rely on factual, though often trivial, etymological information when attempting to elucidate the practical significance of idioms [5].

Animals have been closely related to human life since ancient times. Having been endowed with meaning for over two thousand years, they embody different metaphorical meanings across various cultures. At this juncture, it is necessary to mention some historical references. One of them is the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who explored the use of metaphors in his work on rhetoric and emphasized the importance of animals in metaphorical expressions. Aristotle believed that metaphor constitutes an integral part of human thought and expression, enabling us to describe and understand unfamiliar things through familiar ones. Animals, being a part of human life, naturally become common elements in metaphorical expressions. For example, describing someone as a "sly fox" or a "brave lion" not only enriches linguistic expression but also reveals cultural perceptions and moral evaluations of these animals by people. He interpreted metaphor as a mechanism of renaming and transference, which he later developed into a theory of comparison that significantly influenced the traditional study of metaphor.

The research of metaphor in China boasts a rich and ancient tradition, with roots dating back to the Pre-Qin dynasty. Mozi defined metaphor as a tool to further elucidate a point, while Confucius emphasized the ability to draw analogies as a path to understanding [1]. During the 3rd century BC, Xunzi frequently used animals in nature as metaphors to illustrate philosophical principles. For example, he used the crab, with its six legs and two pincers but lack of burrows, to argue for the necessity of focused learning. Similarly, he employed the metaphor of a fine horse that may leap but cannot go ten paces, contrasting it with a slow horse that succeeds through perseverance, to emphasize the value of persistence.

Furthermore, animals also play an important role in religion and mythology, where their images are used to explain natural phenomena, human behavior, and social structures. For instance, the snake is regarded as a symbol of temptation and sin, the elephant is seen as a symbol of wisdom and strength [9]. The animal metaphors in these

religious and mythological traditions not only influence people's religious beliefs and worldviews but also profoundly affect their language and culture.

Different cultures may have completely different metaphorical meanings and evaluations for the same animal. Some animal idioms have similar or contrasting metaphors in Spanish and Chinese. Animal metaphors can evoke certain types of material, sensory, and emotional associations [10]. Therefore, in cross-cultural teaching and communication, to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences, it is essential to carefully understand and use animal metaphors. Examining the practical application of each animal metaphor in the idioms of two languages can provide valuable insights.

3.2. Dog

Brazilian Portuguese has two terms for "dog": "cão" and "cachorro." "Cão" is the general term, whereas "cachorro" refers specifically to a puppy. In Chinese, the terms for "dog" are "Gou" and "Quan." "Quan" is primarily used in written language and ancient Chinese, while "Gou" serves as the general term [11]. Interestingly, the pronunciation of "cão/'kɛw̃/" in Brazilian Portuguese closely aligns with the pronunciation of "Gou" in Chinese.

Dogs have consistently served as important companions in human affairs [12]. Across diverse cultures, their symbolic significance is often associated with loyalty and bravery, evoking virtues such as faithfulness, honesty, sincerity, kindness, intelligence, and liveliness. However, in Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese, the metaphorical connotations of dogs differ from these common symbolic associations.

3.2.1. Same Metaphor

A metaphor for individuals who do not show their emotions [13].

In both Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese, dogs are metaphorically used to describe individuals who maintain a low profile or possess real abilities but do not flaunt them. This often carries a negative connotation [14]. For instance:

Cão que ladra (ou late) não morde is equivalent to the Chinese expression "A barking dog doesn't bite," along with idiomatic variants such as "A barking dog seldom bites" or "Silent dogs are more dangerous." These expressions metaphorically use the image of a dog to depict a negative trait, often implying a derogatory undertone. The metaphorical meaning of dogs also appears in other idioms, such as "Be wary of silent people and dogs that do not bark," emphasizing caution towards individuals who conceal their emotions. This shared metaphor reflects a cultural resonance regarding dogs in both Brazil and China [15]. While these idioms may exaggerate certain traits, they vividly illustrate the negative perception of dogs in these cultures. It is important to note that such perceptions often arise from specific cultural and historical contexts and may not be universally applicable.

A metaphor for powerful and high-status individuals [16].

Quem bate no cão, bate no dono is similar to the Chinese idiom "To beat the dog while looking at its master," which means that when punishing someone, one must consider their superior. In Chinese, such idioms are often used in informal contexts to remind people to consider not only the issue at hand but also the underlying relationships and influences. This idiom highlights the importance of acknowledging social relationships and power structures when addressing interpersonal matters [17]. Metaphorical expressions like these play a significant role in cross-cultural communication, aiding in the understanding of cultural contexts and social frameworks. They are often employed to navigate complex interpersonal relationships, represent power dynamics, and convey social norms and moral principles. In essence, it advises against offending powerful or influential individuals to avoid unnecessary trouble.

Depois da onça morta, até cachorro nela mijá (Even after the leopard dies, dogs urinate on it) corresponds to the Chinese idiom "Rely on someone's power to bully others" or "Use one's position to dominate others." This metaphor satirizes those who exploit

others' power to oppress the weak, reflecting shared cultural attitudes in Brazil and China towards dogs while encapsulating deeper social perceptions and moral judgments [18].

A metaphor for an unseemly person [19].

Dogs, as human companions, often endured harsh conditions before the modern era.

Vida de cachorro (ou cão) in Brazilian Portuguese, "live a dog's life" in English, and "Living like a dog" in Chinese are used to describe extremely harsh living conditions. The idiom "Doing the work of an ox but eating the food of a pig" carries a similar metaphorical meaning [20]. Historically, neither pigs nor dogs were associated with favorable living conditions.

Da boca do cão, não tires o pão (Impossible to get bread from a dog's mouth) aligns with the Chinese idiom "A dog's mouth emits no ivory." Here, "ivory" symbolizes something precious [21]. This idiom implies that a dog's mouth cannot produce good or refined words and is often used to describe individuals who speak coarsely or behave uncivilly. It can also metaphorically refer to actions or speech lacking decency, elegance, or noble qualities.

3.2.2. Different Metaphors

The word for cão (dog) often metaphorically refers to something unfortunate, greedy, or lazy in Brazilian Portuguese, while a few idioms metaphorically refer to someone as capable, carrying a connotation of misfortune and pity [22].

Entrada de leão, saída de cão (coming like a lion, leaving like a dog) describes a person or thing that starts with great momentum and immense power but ends up being insignificant and powerless like a dog. This idiom originates from an English idiom, "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb."

Quem nasceu pra cão morre latindo (born to bark, dies barking) captures the essence of a dog spending its entire life in unceasing bark, symbolizing persistence if not always productivity. In Brazilian Portuguese, the metaphor of a dog is employed to embody the concept of weakness and incompetence, highlighting cultural perceptions [19].

Cachorro molenga só come sobras (lazy dogs feast on scraps) and não pergunte a cachorro se ele quer linguiça (a dog's desire for sausage needs no asking) both use the dog image to describe human laziness and greed. Additionally, Portuguese uses the life habits of dogs as a metaphor for human laziness and greed [10, 19].

Perro velho não aprende (an old dog is not easily domesticated) reflects a broader cultural understanding that, over time, individuals or entities may become less amenable to new training or management, as is often the case with an old dog that resists learning new tricks [8].

Estar (Ficar) na várzea sem cachorro (standing in a swamp without dogs), by linking a dog with a swamp, the latter serving as a metaphor for encountered difficulties, conversely highlights the dog's years of experience, aiding its owner in escaping the swamp's predicament [9]. Additionally, a small number of idioms in Portuguese use "dog" as a metaphor for "capable."

In Chinese, "Gou" often conveys a sense of aversion, typically described from perspectives of social status and behavioral habits.

"HuaHuBuChengFanLeiGou (Drawing a tiger and ending up with a dog)" where the dog appears as the antithesis of the tiger. "LaiGouFuBuShangQiang (A mangy dog cannot be propped up against a wall)" serves as a metaphor for someone who, no matter how much help is given, shows no improvement or promise. "Gou (dog)" in the sayings "HaoGouBuDangDao (A good dog does not block the path)," "GouYanKanRenDi (seeing lower in dogs)," "GouTouJunShi (Dog-headed military strategist)," and "GouPiGaoYao (dog skin plaster)" refers to people who behave improperly, interfere with others' affairs, create obstacles for others, or are useless. The depiction of a dog in Chinese idioms frequently conjures images of humility's opposite, delicateness, and flattery, steeped in adverse moral connotations [12].

The idiom "RenAiFuDe, GouYaoQiongDe (people love the rich, dogs bite the poor)" and "RenMuGouYang (human-like dog)" use the dog's begging and groveling posture as

a metaphor for sycophancy and the preference for the rich over the poor. For instance, the phrase "GouNaHaoZiDuoGuanXianShi (a dog catching mice meddles in cats' business)" metaphorically describes those who like to interfere in others' affairs and are busybodies. Chinese culture sometimes portrays dogs in a negative light, associating them with lower social status and undesirable behavior [1, 15].

"ErBuXianMuChou, QuanBuXianJiaPin (a son never thinks his mother ugly, and a dog never shuns its owner's home however shabby it is)," "RenDuoRenQiang, GouDuoYaoSiLang (more people, more strength; enough dogs can kill a wolf)," and "HaoHanHuSanCun, HaoGouHuSanLin (A hero protects three villages; a loyal dog guards three neighbors)" illustrate that in Chinese culture, one can occasionally encounter idioms featuring dogs, which, though rare, often carry neutral or positive connotations, primarily underscoring the unwavering loyalty of dogs [14, 16].

The idiomatic use of "cǎo (dog)" in Portuguese with a positive connotation is often replaced in Chinese with "Long (Chinese dragon)" or "Hu (tiger)."

In contemporary Brazilian culture, dogs are often regarded as loyal, brave, and trustworthy companions. In Brazilian idioms, there are many commendations for dogs, which are often used to describe human loyalty, friendliness, and bravery. In contrast, while there are occasional positive descriptions of dogs in Chinese, more frequently, dogs are associated with derogatory or unfavorable connotations. Chinese people tend to use "Long (Chinese dragon)" and "Hu (tiger)" as symbols of dignity, auspiciousness, and nobility. In Chinese culture, "Long" and "Hu" have always been symbols of good fortune and power, often used to metaphorically describe outstanding or noble individuals [10]. This difference reflects the varying perceptions and emotional attitudes towards the same animal across different cultures.

The idiom *cão de caça vem de raça* (a hunting dog comes from its fine breed) is frequently employed metaphorically to signify genetics and heredity, occasionally underscoring the parental influence on offspring. The common Chinese idioms "LongShengLongZi, HuShengHuEr (dragons give birth to dragons, tigers give birth to tigers)" and "LongYouLongZhong, FengYouFengTai (dragons have dragon offspring, phoenixes have phoenix siblings)" emphasize the role of genetics. From this perspective, Brazil's animal worship of dogs contrasts with China's veneration of large creatures such as dragons, phoenixes, and tigers. *Cão de outro bairro, não venha ladrar neste* is similar in meaning, implying that a dog from another neighborhood should not come here to bark, suggesting that outsiders cannot hold their ground. Chinese employs "dragon" to express this metaphor instead of "dog" in the idiom "QiangLongBuYaDiTouShe (a powerful dragon cannot crush a snake in its old haunts)."

By comparing the idioms pertaining to dogs in Chinese with those in Brazilian Portuguese, it becomes evident that the metaphorical use of dogs in Brazilian Portuguese may not carry strong pejorative connotations, and the extent and perspective of such pejorative meaning vary from those in Chinese. Despite the unique interpretations of the dog image in both cultures, there exist shared aspects in certain areas. Therefore, when engaging in cross-cultural communication, special attention must be paid to these cultural nuances behind animal metaphors to avoid conflicts caused by misunderstandings. This insight underscores the necessity for educators to explore the cultural nuances of animal metaphors in the target language when engaging in second language instruction, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation for intercultural communication.

3.3. *Cat*

Cats are closely connected to people's lives. Brazilian Portuguese idioms include terms such as "gato (cat), gata (female cat), gatinho (kitten)," while in Chinese, the term is "Mao (cat)."

3.3.1. Same Metaphors

The word "cat" in Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese is often metaphorically associated with the image of cunning and conspiracy. In Brazilian Portuguese idioms, the cat frequently represents a negative image [6].

Bom amigo é o gato, porém, arranha (good friends are cats, yet they can scratch you) uses cats as a metaphor for insincere friends, outwardly affectionate and flattering, but backstabbing and scheming behind their backs. Similarly, De noite todos os gatos são pardos (all cats are gray at night) uses the cat image as a metaphor to convey the difficulty of distinguishing the good from the bad [10, 13].

Passar manteiga em focinho de gato/cachorro (spread cream on the cat/dog's mouth) expresses that cats and dogs are equally insatiable; if entrusted with the management of finances, it will ultimately lead to loss [14]. In Chinese, the phrase "foxes look at chickens, and the more they look at them, the less they look at them" uses foxes, the natural enemy of chickens, as a metaphor to describe individuals who appear responsible on the surface but are actually stealing from within.

The Chinese phrase "a thieving cat never mends its ways" compares the difficulty of changing bad habits once they are formed [22]. In English, this concept is expressed as "a leopard can't change its spots." Additionally, "is there a cat that doesn't crave fish" refers to the greed of officials in the past, using the habit of cats stealing food as a metaphor for human greed. Furthermore, "after a cat achieves success, it becomes full of pride" satirizes petty individuals who become arrogant after gaining power.

The idioms *tirar castanhas do fogo com a mão do gato* (using a cat's paw to fetch chestnuts from the fire) and the Chinese phrase "fetching chestnuts from the fire" both trace their origins back to a 17th-century fable by Jean de La Fontaine. In the fable, a monkey tricked a cat into fetching chestnuts roasting in the fire. The chestnuts ended up being devoured by the monkey, while the cat had its fur singed. These idioms use cats as a metaphor for cunning tactics, describing situations where individuals are used by others, take risks for others, but ultimately gain no benefit for themselves.

3.3.2. Different Metaphors

The metaphorical image of cats in Brazilian Portuguese is relatively diverse, while in Chinese, it is more singular. In both languages, cats metaphorically imply cunning and conspiracy. In Brazilian Portuguese, the image of a cat can carry both positive and negative connotations, reflecting people's varied attitudes toward cats in different contexts [11].

The phrase "gato miador, mau caçador" (a meowing cat is like an incompetent hunter) metaphorically represents incompetence [4, 20]. However, in other idioms, such as "a bom gato, bom rato" (alert cats, cunning mice) and "muito sabe o rato, mas mais sabe o gato" (rats are very cunning, but cats are even more cunning), cats symbolize cleverness and intelligence.

The expression "viver como cão e gato" (live like cats and dogs) uses the natural instinct of cats and dogs to fight as a metaphor for being in a combative environment, similar to the concept of "water and fire in a state of conflict." In Brazilian Portuguese, cats are also often associated with noise. For instance, "ser um saco de gatos" (cats in a pocket) refers to people who are frequently together, implying that such proximity often leads to conflicts and arguments. Similarly, the Chinese expression "teeth and tongue also bite each other at times" uses the relationship between teeth and tongue to describe a quarrelsome situation.

Additionally, Brazilian Portuguese frequently uses the word for cat to express affection for these animals. Phrases like "casa em que não há cão nem gato, é casa de velhaco" (a house without cats and dogs is a house of scoundrels) and "quem não tem cão caça com gato" (if there are no dogs, cats hunt) highlight the significant role of cats in people's lives, portraying them as a source of joy and an enhancer of life's richness.

3.4. Chicken

Chickens are also common poultry in people's daily lives [1]. In Brazilian Portuguese, there are galo (rooster), galinha (hen), pinto (chick), and peru (turkey). In Chinese, the terms include Ji (chicken), GongJi (rooster), MuJi (hen), and XiaoJi (chick). Since turkeys were not bred in ancient China, the term "chicken" in idioms does not encompass turkeys.

3.4.1. Same Metaphor

In the idioms of both languages, chicken is often used as a metaphor for a weak or insignificant existence. Similarly, in Chinese, the chicken is often used metaphorically to refer to something weak and insignificant [12].

Galinha sem ovos, não dá em jeito nenhum (a hen that does not lay eggs) compares a person or thing that contributes nothing or is worthless to a hen that does not lay eggs [1]. Here, the "galinha" serves as a metaphor for useless people or things.

Estar como um pinto (just like a little chick) uses "pinto (chick)" as a metaphor for a person's disheveled appearance. Chinese also uses "LuoTangJi" (a drowned chicken/a chicken in the soup) to describe a person's disheveled appearance [13].

JiLeiShiZhiWuWei, QiZhiKeXi (chicken ribs, tasteless to eat, yet regrettable to discard) is used to describe a situation where something or someone has little value, yet it seems a pity to completely give up [8].

ShaJiYanYongNiuDao (why kill a chicken with an ox-slaughtering knife) implies "Ji" (chicken) as a metaphor for something weak, which does not require the use of an "ox-slaughtering knife" (NiuDao), a tool with greater capability. Therefore, the entire idiom metaphorically suggests using excessive ability for a minor task, similar to using a cannon to kill a mosquito.

YiRenFeiSheng, XianJiJiQuan (When one person ascends to immortality, even their chickens and dogs become celestial) uses chickens and dogs as a metaphor for insignificant minor characters.

NingZuoJiTou, BuZuoFengWei (better to be the head of a chicken than the tail of a phoenix) and NingWeiJiKou, WuWeiNiuHou (better be the head of a chicken than the tail of an ox) metaphorically suggest that one would rather be in charge in a small place than be subject to others in a larger setting. Ji (chicken) is used metaphorically to refer to small places, small units, or minor positions, whereas the corresponding terms Feng (phoenix) and Niu (cattle) refer to promising large places, units, and positions [4, 15].

These Chinese idioms all convey metaphorical meanings of weakness, worthlessness, or insignificance through the image of a chicken. Furthermore, in Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese, the chicken is often used as a metaphor for a combative or arrogant person.

- Onde canta galo não canta galinha (the rooster crows, it's not the hen's turn to speak) emphasizes the rights and status of the rooster.
- Muito pode o galo em seu poleiro (the rooster struts in the coop) metaphorically describes a contradictory behavior pattern where an individual is domineering and overbearing within the family but cowardly and submissive towards the outside world.

Both of these idioms in Portuguese use the galo (rooster) as a metaphor for status and discourse power, highlighting the strong hegemony of a patriarchal society. Chinese often uses the term WoLiHeng (domineering within one's own group) to pejoratively describe these acts of male hegemony.

3.4.2. Different Metaphors

The metaphor of a chicken as a symbol of the weak is a commonality between Portuguese and Chinese. However, when comparing metaphors such as rooster and hen, the differences between Portuguese and Chinese are highlighted [14]. In Portuguese, the rooster often metaphorically represents the stronger party, while the hen symbolizes the weaker one.

Entrar cantando de galo e sair cacarejando (upon arrival, the rooster crows cock-a-doodle-doo, upon departure, the hen clucks guggle-guggle).

Dois galos não cantam no mesmo terreiro (two roosters do not crow in the same yard) is used metaphorically to imply that two strong individuals cannot coexist together. In this context, Chinese uses the metaphor "tiger" in "YiShanBuRongErHu (two tigers cannot share one mountain)" to refer to the strong [21].

Pé de galinha não mata pinto (a hen's foot does not kill a chick) expresses the love of a weak hen for her offspring, metaphorically suggesting that even the cruelest person would not harm their own children. Here, the hen and chick both metaphorically refer to

the weak. Chinese also uses "tiger" as in "HuDuBuShiZi (tigers do not eat their own cubs)" to express the same meaning.

Additionally, the word *galinha* (chicken) is also used metaphorically to refer to the value that chickens bring, usually in the positive aspects that people need [2].

De grão em grão a galinha enche o papo (the chicken fills the grains bit by bit), through the natural world's example of a chicken pecking grains to satiate its hunger, metaphorically illustrates the power of accumulation and persistence.

Impingir peru por galinha (replace the turkey with a hen) is a metaphor for substituting the fake with the real, or the bad with the good. *Mais vale pão hoje de que galinha amanhã* (today's bread is better than tomorrow's hen) metaphorically suggests that immediate benefits are the most realistic. These idioms contrast the hen with the turkey and bread from the opposite perspective to highlight the value of the hen [12, 21].

Although the animal metaphor of the chicken appears in both Brazilian and Chinese cultures, the cultural connotations and contexts behind it differ. Therefore, in second language teaching and intercultural communication, it is important to cautiously understand and interpret these animal metaphors to avoid unnecessary conflicts caused by misunderstandings.

3.5. Cattle

The Chinese word *Niu* encompasses cow/ox, while in Brazilian Portuguese, there are *boi* (ox) and *vaca* (cow).

The metaphor of cattle is expressed differently in idioms of Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese. Cattle are valued for their significant labor capabilities, used metaphorically to represent strength and ability. However, Chinese often conveys a positive and complimentary meaning, whereas Portuguese expresses a negative and unfavorable attitude.

Falou o boi e fez mu (said ox but drew a mule) uses the poorer labor of a mule to highlight the important productive capacity of the ox from the opposite perspective, expressing mostly dissatisfaction with the results. In Chinese, there is "*HuaHuFanLeiQuan*" (painting a tiger but ending up with a dog) to express a similar meaning and emotion.

Tem boi na linha (an ox on the tracks) uses the metaphor of an ox on the railroad tracks to symbolize the difficulties that hinder or interfere with the development of things. In Chinese, the phrases "*LanLuHu*" (tiger blocking the road) and "*BanJiaoShi*" (stumbling stone) are used to describe obstacles or difficulties [21].

In Brazilian Portuguese, cattle are mostly portrayed as weary, laborious, and cumbersome figures [15].

Pé-de-boi (ox hoof) metaphorically describes human exhaustion and hard work. *A vaca foi para o brejo* (a cow walked into a swamp) uses the metaphor of a cow entering a swamp to describe someone's foolishness. Because a cow is heavy and would sink and get stuck, it would require the help of people to get out.

Cattle are often associated with negative images such as arrogance and being difficult to tame in Brazilian Portuguese.

Anel de ouro não é pra focinho de porco (ou touro) (do not put a gold ring on the nose of a pig or a bull, meaning bulls do not recognize precious things) uses the unfamiliarity of a gold ring with pigs or bulls as a metaphor for people who do not recognize valuable items [19]. This metaphor reflects the negative evaluation of the heaviness of cattle in Brazilian culture. In this context, Chinese uses the phrases "*YouYanBuShiJinXiangYu*" (having eyes but failing to see gold inlaid in jade) and "*MaiDuHuanZhu*" (keeping the ornate box but returning the pearl) to express similar ideas.

Portuguese sometimes uses the predicament of cows as a metaphor for the problems encountered in human life.

Boi na terra alheia vira vaca (the bull turns into a cow in someone else's field) uses the metaphor of an ox not adapting to its environment to describe people who lose their ability when they move to a new place.

Quem come uma vaca magra alheia, paga uma gorda (eat a skinny cow from someone, return a fat cow) metaphorically suggests that people should be grateful. The Chinese idiom "DiShuiZhiEn, DangYongQuanXiangBao" (a drop of water kindness should be repaid with a gushing spring) conveys that even a small favor received should be repaid with great gratitude.

Boi de guia é que bebe água limpa, boi lerdo só bebe água suja (the lead cow drinks clean water, slow cows only drink dirty water) metaphorically illustrates the importance of making wise choices in complex environments. "Boi de guiar" and "boi lerdo" vividly depict the different attitudes and behaviors of two distinct individuals when facing choices. Chinese often uses phrases such as "XianLaiDeChiRou, HouLaiDeKenGuTou" (early comers get the meat, latecomers gnaw the bones) and "XianLaiDeChiRou, HouLaiDeHeTang" (first arrivals feast on meat, latecomers sip the broth).

In contrast, the metaphorical use of "Niu" (cattle) in Chinese is often positive, emphasizing its strength, diligence, loyalty, and productive value. "Niu" is a metonymy for diligence and dedication, praised for its steadfast image. Phrases such as "GengNiuNongJiaBao, DingYaoZhaoGuHao" (the plowing cattle, the farmer's treasure, must be well taken care of), "NiuShiNongJiaBao, YouQinWuNiuBaiQiZao" (cattle is a treasure to the farmer's household, the early riser starts the day in vain without cattle), and "LanNeiWuNiuKongQiZao" (without cattle, waking up early is useless) illustrate the importance of cattle, which reach the level of "YiTouNiu, BanGeJia" (a cattle, half a home). Chinese often uses "Niu" as a metaphor for courage and dedication, as seen in "ChuShengNiuDuBuPaHu" (a newborn calf is not afraid of a tiger) and "FuShouGanWeiRuZiNiu" (willingly become a willing cattle for the generation). In Chinese idioms, "Niu" represents both the image of diligence and hard work, as well as energy and vitality.

The positive images above reflect the admiration and respect for cattle in Chinese culture. Cattle have been an important means of production for Chinese agricultural civilization, making significant contributions to the development of agricultural society. In China, the majority of cattle breeds are water buffalo and Chinese yellow cattle, which are known for their gentle and amiable temperament. The Chinese people have long held a reverence and affection for cattle. As early as the Western Zhou Dynasty, policies were introduced to protect draught oxen. The Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties all continued policies to protect plow oxen to ensure the needs of social productivity.

In summary, the differences in the metaphor of cattle between Brazilian Portuguese and Chinese are more prominent and significant. In cross-cultural communication, it is essential to deeply understand the cultural connotations and contexts behind the cattle metaphor to more accurately interpret them, thereby promoting communication and understanding between different cultures.

It is noteworthy that with the acceleration of globalization, the exchange and integration between different cultures are becoming increasingly frequent. In this process, animal metaphors, as cultural symbols and linguistic carriers, are also facing new challenges and opportunities. On one hand, it is important to delve deeper into and appreciate animal metaphors in different cultures to promote cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding. On the other hand, efforts should be made to actively learn from and integrate the excellent elements from different cultures to enrich and develop language and culture.

4. Methodology

It is evident that idioms, due to their high frequency in discourse, require special attention in language courses and intercultural communication. Moreover, they should not be placed in a secondary position in learning. Most textbooks written for second language learners, such as those learning Chinese or Brazilian Portuguese, include

idiomatic expressions at the end of teaching units, followed by exercises that fail to reveal the complexity of idioms and their close connection with everyday language. This approach to textbook compilation and teaching often results in unused and impractical learning of idioms, unrelated to actual language learning and usage [4]. From a methodological perspective, these biases and language attitudes towards learning idioms are detrimental to language learning. When dealing with idioms, teachers and students should follow three main objectives:

Master the meaning of idioms. Chinese and Brazilian Portuguese learners should first be aware that idioms are closely connected with the culture and history that produced them. Their top-level structure always tells a story, which proves the rationality of their underlying meaning. In this way, learners will realize that the metaphorical meaning and cultural background of idioms suddenly endow them with tangible and real-feeling meanings. This attitude and awareness towards idioms are very important. When learners are faced with other unknown idioms, this can cultivate their methods for analyzing and decoding the meaning of idioms. Another way to grasp the meaning of idioms is through cross-cultural language comparison.

Master the structure of idioms. Under normal circumstances, idioms are recognized and remembered for their unchanging and relatively stable structures. The fixed structure is a significant advantage of idioms, although some idioms can flexibly express meaning in discourse [2]. Therefore, when conducting idiom teaching and cross-cultural communication, what should be presented first are the fixed idioms, followed by their variants and flexible usage in discourse.

Master the function of idioms [9]. Idioms themselves are powerful carriers of information that are quite easy to alter to meet certain stylistic requirements. For instance, in text types such as essays, speeches, advertisements, or hosting documents, the use of novel idioms creates a high level of expected interactivity between the author and the readers or listeners.

However, how do we integrate these aspects that require attention into the reality of the classroom? We can adopt a wide variety of different teaching methods to meet our teaching objectives. Second language traditional learning typically designs teaching activities such as pairing, guessing, and fill-in-the-blanks to promote the understanding of idioms, and encourages the production of idioms through sentence construction and situational conversations.

Therefore, activities utilizing this concept in the classroom include learners identifying which are metaphors and what the conceptual metaphors behind them are. These teaching activities should provide systematic instruction in the use of metaphorical language, while they also need to explain the pathways through which animal metaphors are integrated into human cognitive understanding.

The most common exercises in the classroom include describing idioms (showing literal and metaphorical meanings) and performing idioms (comparing literal and metaphorical meanings in a vivid and lively manner). These connections may generate idiomatic mental images and promote understanding. Another widely adopted method is paraphrasing or copying. For instance, when teachers instruct on the cultural background or fables behind idioms, students are required to paraphrase or copy them down, attempting to present them using as many different expressions as possible. When students engage in personalized creative writing, they will find it easier to remember the language they have used. Of course, idioms can also be explored through recitation and student activities. These activities are presented in the classroom and further reinforce their understanding of idiomatic metaphors.

However, as this article illustrates, revealing the similarities and differences between idioms in two languages through cross-cultural comparison can be a quite beneficial and powerful teaching tool. Whether it is advance explanation or post-practice explanation, both methods are effective ways to preserve the deep meaning of idiomatic expressions. Only when students have mastered the meanings of idioms can they understand and apply them more deeply [13, 17].

Furthermore, as indicated by the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)," it is extremely important for students to be exposed to texts of different types and genres. To gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic characteristics of different types of vocabulary, we can analyze idioms and discuss those found in movies, television programs, newspapers, comics, Facebook, and so on [20]. Teachers can also omit idioms from paragraphs and let students complete the paragraph with idioms fitting the context, then provide the omitted idioms. In this way, students will see how they can deduce the meaning of the idiom from the context.

In today's technological advancements, we should not forget the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the classroom. The internet is a vast domain filled with a variety of information and data, where students can search for and learn different types of idioms on these websites. Teachers act as guides, selecting some useful links to provide to students, in order to strengthen and enhance the students' ability for autonomous learning. In the classroom, we can also utilize new technologies to carefully select materials and applications, all of which must include basic everyday idioms. During the activation phase, students greatly enhance their learning outcomes by practicing idioms within context. Multi-sensory inputs such as visual and auditory on the internet contribute to the learning of idioms [14]. Lastly, it depends on the output of language, using idioms to depict situations in life to complete the expressive function, thereby enhancing their intercultural communication skills.

5. Conclusion

The systematic presence of metaphor linguistic expressions reflects not only the operation of individual mental structures but also the workings of different cultural models. Two large categories of causes bring about cultural variation in metaphor: the broader cultural context, which refers to the governing principles and key concepts in a given culture, and the natural and physical environment in which a culture is located. In summary, three aspects are emphasized:

Firstly, in a broad sense, metaphor teaching in language, especially idioms, is very complex. Therefore, the issues need to be addressed not only from the perspective of teaching but also from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. It is evident that these fixed expressions should be included in the curriculum due to their high frequency in discourse, rather than being placed in a secondary position.

Secondly, it is crucial to teach idioms as part of culture. For the purpose of communication, it is indispensable to study the culture of idioms because these expressions are created within specific contexts and often cannot be discovered through an analysis of the components and literal meanings of the idioms themselves. Each animal has a specific semantic content in idioms. When this semantic content is explained and conveyed to students, they are able to connect the literal and metaphorical meanings, thereby deducing the function of idioms within the context. The semantic differences of animal metaphors in idioms among different countries are caused by culture, customs, or purely natural environments.

Thirdly, as active participants in learning a second language, teachers should make students aware of the importance of learning idioms. Once students understand the connection between the culture and influencing factors of idioms, they are more likely to comprehend and successfully complete cross-cultural language communication.

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