

# *The Connotation and Chinese Translation of English Animal Idioms*

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**Abstract:** Animal idioms have rich associative meaning and cultural connotation, and have become the focus of many scholars. It is of great significance to study animal idioms. The purpose of this paper is to explore the connotation of English Animal Idioms and their Chinese translation. Firstly, this paper studies the connotation of animal idioms from the historical and cultural background, discusses the Chinese translation methods of English Animal Idioms from two aspects of partial correspondence and complete non correspondence, and expounds the points that should be paid attention to when using the translation method. Taking English idioms in "horse" as the research object, this paper discusses the cultural differences between Chinese and English. The experimental results show that from the frequency search in coca, we can get the frequency of each idiom sample and the context of the sample use. In the total frequency part, wild horse is the first 176, dead horse is the middle 132, and high horse is the lowest 79. We can conclude that the use of high horse is less than wild horse and dead horse. Because of the great love for horses, the images of horses in Chinese and English are not exactly the same. So the impression of horses is not always positive. Chinese tend to actively use horses, while English speakers tend to use them to identify or describe human and non-human beings, regardless of their preferences.

## 1. Introduction

Language is a tool for human beings to express their thoughts and feelings [1-2]. Based on the common recognition of social members from different regions, nationalities and social groups, language reflects the geographical characteristics, economic development, local customs and social customs of the people who use the language in a conventional way. Therefore, language reflects culture and is restricted by culture at the same time. In English idioms, the frequency of animal

idioms is especially high. Whether it's TOEFL, IELTS, postgraduate exam, reading English articles, or communicating with foreign students, we often encounter many idioms with animal metaphor. Cats, dogs, cattle, black horses, lame ducks and other animals in our daily life, which are very obscure, have performed unexpected meanings and usages.

If we understand these idioms from the perspective of Chinese, it will often lead to misunderstanding. Because Chinese and English people have different ways of thinking and cultural backgrounds, they often have different understandings of the attributes and characteristics of animals with cultural meanings. English animal idioms bear different national cultural characteristics and cultural information from Chinese. They are closely connected with cultural traditions and cannot be separated. A large number of animal idioms in English carry rich cultural connotation and are restricted by culture. The translation of animal idioms should be placed under the background of cultural research. By analyzing the origin of idioms, and taking into account the national cultural tradition, cultural content and cultural psychology of English and Chinese different registers, we can achieve cultural fax to the maximum extent.

Idioms are the essence of language. They are a set of words or words, or even a sentence of special meaning. They can not be guessed from the literal meaning of their components. Throughout history, animal is closely related to human life. People tend to associate some animal with certain characteristics or characteristics with the same characteristics. Some animal idioms have entered human language. Van Trao Nguyen has achieved this goal by discovering the duality of human evolution, more animal idioms, and analyzing the causes of different images such as living environment, religious beliefs, customs and habits [3]. For many language learners, learning idioms is a hard battle. Therefore, Al-Houti revealed the attitude of college students towards English idiom learning. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to reveal the importance of learning idioms, the difficulties of learning idioms and the attitude of idiom learning strategies. In addition, it also tries to determine whether age and years of study have an impact on students' attitude towards learning English idioms. Participants were 218 female university students from the Kuwait Institute of basic education (CBE). Five point Likert scale was used for questionnaire survey. The data analysis of the questionnaire reveals learners' preference strategies and sources of difficulties in learning idioms. The results show that students have a positive attitude towards English idiom learning. When age is taken into account, the results are significantly different [4].

Based on the theory of conceptual integration, this paper makes a detailed analysis of metaphorical English Animal Idioms and metonymic English animal idioms by combining quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis. Through the analysis, the author finds that: first of all, metaphorical English animal idioms are far more than metonymic English Animal Idioms in terms of quantity, and most of the collected idioms belong to mirror network and single domain network, which proves that conceptual integration theory has a strong explanatory power for revealing the cognitive process behind English Animal idioms, It also provides a new perspective for the study of English Animal Idioms in the future.

## 2. Proposed Method

### 2.1. The Connotation of Animal Idioms from the Perspective of Historical and Cultural Background

When we learn English animal idioms, if we have some knowledge of their historical and cultural background, it will help us to remember and apply them. When we translate them, we can also express the meaning of the original text more accurately according to the specific context. Animal idioms can be divided into several types according to their sources:

- (1) From mythology

Myth is a story about immortals or deified ancient heroes. It is an innocent explanation and beautiful yearning of ancient people for natural phenomena and social life [5]. For example: heavy rain. Why is rain associated with cats and dogs? According to Nordic mythology, cats are considered to have a great impact on the weather. When cats jump unusually, sailors say (there is a strong wind in the cat's tail). They sensed the coming of the storm from the cat's activities, so the cat was regarded as a symbol of "Torrential Rain". It is also said that there is a fairy who is in charge of wisdom, poetry, war and agriculture. He often takes the dog with him as a signal of wind. In this way, the dog is regarded as a symbol of strong wind. Dog (strong wind) comes with cat (heavy rain), isn't it downpour?

(2) From legend

Legend refers to the oral narration about someone or something. As the song of the swan, it is said that the swan will keep silent all his life, but will sing an extremely beautiful and moving song before dying [6-7]. The ancient Greek philosopher explained that the Swan sang because it was happy, and the reason why it was happy was that it was going to serve the God of music in ancient Greece. The swan was holy, so he let his soul into a swan body, resulting in the fable: all the souls of the poets entered the Swan body. So later generations use "swan song" to compare the "final works" of poets, composers, writers, actors, etc., which is also the form of its Chinese translation. Now it is also used to refer to anyone's final efforts [8]. And a person's "swan song" is usually regarded as the best work of this person.

(3) Derived from historical stories or events

There have been many famous historical stories or events in history. Later generations often express their contents in a simple way, which becomes idioms after a long time. For example, a white elephant[9]. Hundreds of years ago, the number of white elephants was very small. The king raised all the white elephants. It is illegal to enslave a white elephant because it is a God. The king used the white elephant to punish any courtier who made him unhappy. He sent a white elephant to the courtier and watched the situation. He knew that the elephant had a large amount of food and that the courtiers had to sell their assets to feed the elephant. As expected, the courtiers could not make money for the white elephant, and the gift of accepting the white elephant finally led to bankruptcy [10].

As we all know, elephant is the largest land mammal, and also the largest animal to eat. Whether it's a white elephant or a black elephant, it has a big belly full of discontent. However, the number of white elephants has always been very small, and they are regarded as gods in parts of Asia. Therefore, "white elephant" means "heavy burden", referring to waste with a lot of money and little use. Perhaps the longer it is kept, the more money it will spend, and ultimately it will not help. Maybe it refers to something with too much repair and use cost [11]. A white elephant may also refer to a car, a ship, a house or a business that requires you to invest continuously but does not receive enough profits.

(4) From some works

Black horses, for example. The first novel to use this word describes a horse race, how the two horses who were originally the most vocal fell behind, while a black horse who had never been noticed rushed through the stands to win with the momentum of sweeping leaves in the wind. In political life, it is also known as the "black horse" that an unknown candidate wins a nomination or election when running for public office.

(5) From Proverbs

Proverbs are fixed sentences that are popular among the people. They reflect profound truth in simple and popular words and are the summary of social life experience. For example, early bird, whose Chinese translation is "the early bird gets / catches the worm", comes from the proverb "the early bird gets / catches the worm"[12].

(6) From fables

Fable is a form of metaphor to explain certain truth, which is the most short and concise form in literary works. For example, to kill the goose to get the eggs originated from the Greek fable, which said that there was a countryman who killed the goose that could only lay golden eggs because he was rich and eager. He thought that he could get all the gold in his imagination at one time, but he got nothing [13]. Now we use this metaphor to mean that we only want immediate interests and have no long-term plan. In Chinese translation, we should follow the collocation rules of Chinese idioms. We should not say "kill goose to get eggs" but "kill chicken to get eggs". Although the metaphors are different, they have the same meaning [14].

## 2.2. Chinese Translation of English Animal Idioms

The theoretical basis of English Chinese translation of animal idioms and the translation of standard animal idioms are typical cultural translation. The school of cultural translation holds that the communication between languages of different nationalities is essentially the communication between cultures of different nationalities. In order to achieve cultural facsimile, the translation of animal idioms should integrate "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" on the premise of considering foreign cultures, so as to make the translated version full of spirit and form.

(1) Partial correspondence

Although the animal names in English idioms are different from those in Chinese idioms, they have the same figurative meaning and rhetorical color. In this case, when we translate English into Chinese, we may as well apply Chinese synonymous idioms directly. The usage of Chinese synonymous idioms is a way to analyze the original language and cultural content, get its meaning, understand its spirit, and then express it with the tempered translation language. Not only does the target language keep the original flavor, but it also needs local flavor when necessary. That is to say, changing the metaphor and adopting the standard Chinese and the customary expression way accepted by the Chinese, otherwise, the effect of fax will not be achieved. For example: the man is the black sheep of family. There are two mistakes in the Translation: one is that the image of the vehicle in the Chinese people's mind is not clear; the other is that the similarities between the body and the vehicle are not pointed out. If the "black sheep of the whole family" is replaced by "black sheep of the whole family", the meaning of the metaphor will be clear at a glance. For example, all your piteous words for the tenants are no more than crocodile tears. According to the ancient Western legends, crocodiles eat people and animals, and shed tears at the same time. It is a metaphor that bad people pretend to sympathize with the victims. But if you take pity on the tenants, it's crocodile tears. The vast majority of Chinese readers, except young people, will be confused. It's easier to understand and accept if you translate the former part of the Chinese synonymous idiom "crying for the cat and mice, false compassion" into Chinese: "if you pity the tenants, it's all crying for the cat and mice". Because "the cat cries for the mouse, the false compassion" this kind of view is well-known in China.

(2) Not at all

English animal idioms are different from Chinese in terms of literal, overall and practical usage. In this case, there are three translation methods to choose from:

1) Free translation is to express the meaning of English idioms in accordance with the context. For example: all right, I black myself. But it's the last time. we were cat's paws, that's all

Come on, I blame myself for being blind. But I'll never do it again. We were taken in by others, nothing else.

Another example: His newly employed woman servant was extremely lazy and ate a lot, more than a white elephant.

2) Literal translation and annotation (avoid putting on the "long gown and mandarin jacket" to the "foreigners", and embody the original cultural fax. )In translation, special attention should be paid to the exotic atmosphere, that is, the so-called "foreign atmosphere". Here, "foreign atmosphere" refers to the preservation of the foreign cultural features contained in the original language, so as not to bring the unique Chinese color to the English language. How can we do this? We use the method of literal translation annotation, because sometimes literal translation can keep the vivid image of the original text, supplement or enrich the Chinese vocabulary, make the translation fresh and powerful, and annotation can show the original meaning truthfully. This translation method is especially common in political language. For example, lame duck, dark horse, kangaroo court, which often deals with cases without authorization, may be a real court with unfair decisions, dishonest or stupid judges; It may be that a group of people without jurisdiction set up a private court. Prisoners in prison sometimes set up kangaroo courts to decide whether a prisoner violates some of the prison's impractical procedures.

3) The combination of literal translation and free translation. In English, "dragon" is also associated with "strength and power", but its metaphorical meaning is derogatory. It is associated with ferocious and cruel beasts, often reminiscent of the dragon guarding treasures in ancient Western legends and myths. In Chinese translation, on the one hand, we can use literal translation to keep the animal image of the original text, and at the same time, we can use free translation to add words with emotional color to translate them into "angel like children, dragon like mothers."

In a word, English animal idioms are seldom equivalent to Chinese idioms, most of them are completely different, especially allusion idioms. As we all know, allusions are mostly concentrated with vivid and vivid stories. Although the writing is simple, the connotation is very rich, with strong expressive force, and also contains the essence of national culture. The structure of allusions is fixed, the meaning is beyond the words, it has lost the referential meaning, it only has pragmatic meaning, so it can't be translated directly; and free translation or applying Chinese synonymous idioms will lose the cultural characteristics of the original text. In order to give consideration to the literary features and meanings of idioms and allusions, and introduce the traditional culture of British and American countries to the Chinese readers in time, we might as well adopt the method of combination of literal translation annotation or literal translation free translation mentioned above to achieve the maximum functional similarity between the translation and the original.

### **2.3. The Following Two Points Should Be Paid Attention to When Using the Above Translation Methods**

#### **(1) National characteristics of Animal Idioms**

In the long-term historical and social development, English and Chinese not only form different totem worship, but also produce different aesthetic psychology through different observation and experience of various animals, showing different national personality, even for the same animal, they also give different symbolic meaning or value standards.

The most typical difference between English and Chinese animal idioms is the attitude towards dogs. Dog is a humble animal in Chinese. In Chinese, most of the idioms related to dogs contain derogatory meanings: "friends", "dogs jump the wall", "wolf in the heart and dog in the lung", "dogs are nosy with mice", "dog legs", etc. Although the number of pet dogs has increased greatly in recent years, and the "status" of dogs seems to have changed, the derogatory image of dogs remains deeply in the Chinese language and culture. In Western English speaking countries, dogs are regarded as the most loyal friends of human beings. English idioms about dogs have no derogatory meanings except for some of them are influenced by other languages. In English idioms, the image of dog is often used to describe human behavior. For example, you are a lucky dog, every dog has

his day, old dog will not learn new tricks, etc. "Sick as a dog" is used to describe a person as "very sick". On the contrary, Chinese people love cats very much. They use "greedy cat" to describe greedy people, often with the element of intimacy. In western culture, "cat" is used to describe "a woman who harbors evil". In the eyes of Chinese people, "goat" is a commendatory term, while British people regard goat as a lecherous and lecherous person. Chinese people often describe a person's social status as "being a cow and a horse", while India worships the cow as a deity and a national totem. In the streets of India, cattle can go wherever they like, and they can eat anything on the food stall at will. As a result, cattle became a problem, however, no one in India would kill or eat beef. In the west, horse is the symbol of aristocracy, horse raising and riding represent a way of life.

For example, in Chinese, "dragon" is a mythical animal in ancient myths and legends. It can walk, fly, swim, and rain. It is the symbol of ancient emperors. As the Chinese nation regards itself as the descendant of the dragon, the Chinese word "dragon" has a specific cultural connotation. For example, "dragon son, dragon grandson", "dragon flying and Phoenix dancing" and "dragon leaping and Tiger Leaping" all have the emotional color of praise. However, in English, the word "dragon" is derogatory, it is a ferocious and cruel beast, which often reminds people of the dragon guarding the treasure in the ancient Western legends and myths.

#### (2) On the degree of cultural facsimile in the translation of Animal Idioms

Cultural fax not only refers to the faithful original language, but also seeks the best translation method under the consideration of foreign culture. It requires the target language to accurately reproduce the meaning, mode and style of the original language from the perspective of cultural meaning. In other words, it is to embody the "form and spirit" of the original language in the original language. It can be seen that the study of cultural fax is the key part of the translation of animal idioms. The reason why the translation of animal idioms is not so easy is that the language reflects the culture. Once the language enters the communication, there will be problems in understanding and expressing the cultural connotation, which requires the translator to have bilingual ability and relevant cultural knowledge.

### 3. Experiments

#### 3.1. Data Acquisition

In this paper, several common English animal idioms are analyzed under the framework of CIT, and the research materials are taken from the NTC English idiom dictionary published by the Central Compilation press. The author carefully selects 121 English Animal Idioms from the corpus, and divides them into two types: metaphorical animal idioms and metonymic animal idioms, and divides each type of idiom into four types of networks. See the appendix for details. As the source of this corpus, NTC's English idiom dictionary is the most scientific reference for Contemporary English idiom expression. This dictionary covers more than 6500 forms, about 5500 entries and 6000 definitions. Controlled vocabulary is used in the interpretation and example sentences of this dictionary, which has unique effect on language learners. Moreover, this dictionary emphasizes that users need to understand the meaning, usage and appropriate context of idioms. These definitions and examples provide enough information to enable English trained people to parse idiom expressions. Finally, the dictionary relies on clear, simple and well written examples to guide the user to understand the meaning and proper usage of each idiomatic expression. In a word, this dictionary helps non-native English speakers to improve their cognitive ability of idioms.

This paper also uses English corpus to understand the context of horse idioms, so as to find out the use of horse idioms. The usage of the dictionary is as follows. First, look up the dictionary and find out the entries in Maxi. Then select these metaphorical and metonymic items. Then, according



to the metaphorical meaning of these idioms, we summarize them. Among a large number of Maxi languages in Chinese, the four word Maxi language is the first source. There are 380 kinds of horse idioms, among which 55 kinds of "horse" take the first place, the second is 146 kinds, the third is 55 kinds, the fourth is 115 kinds, and the others are 15 kinds. The scope of these idioms includes war, speed, people's mental state, etc. They are usually used in formal occasions, such as speeches, best wishes to family members and friends who are leaving, all for wealth and career. There are also quite a number of idioms that can be related to human and non-human objects.

### 3.2. Experimental Method

The theory of conceptual integration lays a theoretical framework for this paper, and combines quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis as a research method, aiming to clarify the integration process of meaning construction of animal idioms, reveal the understanding mechanism behind them. The author takes English animal idioms as the research object and reads a large number of relevant academic journals and books. In the process of reading, we find the limitations of previous studies on the understanding of English animal idioms. As the latest methodology in linguistics, conceptual integration theory has great power in explaining natural language phenomena. Therefore, based on the theory of conceptual integration, this paper explores the understanding process of English animal idioms. Secondly, this paper uses the combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. According to the procedure of quantitative research and qualitative research, all the animal idioms in the dictionary are collected, and the most typical examples are selected as the analysis data. From the English Idiom Dictionary of NTC, 121 commonly used English animal idioms are carefully selected. Due to the limitation of time and space, it is impossible and unnecessary to analyze the listed animal idioms. This paper only gives a detailed description of some of them. Specifically, the selected animal idioms are divided into metaphorical animal idioms and metonymic animal idioms, and an idiom is used to show the whole integration process of meaning construction of each network type. In other words, in the four integrated networks, there are eight idioms used to reveal the process of meaning construction. To match the interpretation, the graphs for each sample network are analyzed.

The analysis of examples of "horse" idioms involves the meaning and metonymy of metaphor, that is, the brief description of metaphor and metonymy of horse idioms in dictionaries, with the emphasis on the discovery of these two cognitive mechanisms. This paper includes the word "horse" and other deviations and idioms contained or related to it, provided that they are metaphorically applied to human beings, and they have more basic conceptual metonymy. They are arranged according to the physical properties and the behavioral characteristics implied when they are applied to human beings and metonymy.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Understanding Process in Integrated Network

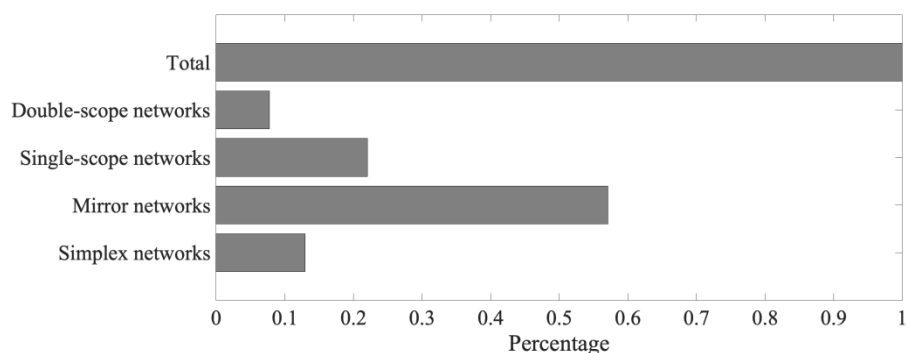
#### (1) Metaphorical Animal Idioms

The integrated network mainly includes single frame network, frame network, unilateral network and bilateral network. In this paper, these four networks are collectively referred to as simplex network, mirror network, single scope network and dual scope network. According to different cognitive models of human beings, animal idioms are divided into metaphorical animal idioms and metonymic animal idioms. In this part, this paper focuses on the understanding process of metaphorical animal idioms in four integrated networks, and divides four typical animal idioms into four categories, and analyzes them in the corresponding integrated networks. Before the analysis,

first of all, in 77 metaphorical animal idioms, the specific number and percentage of four kinds of networks are shown in Figure 1.

*Table 1. Percentage of four types of networks in metaphorical animal idioms*

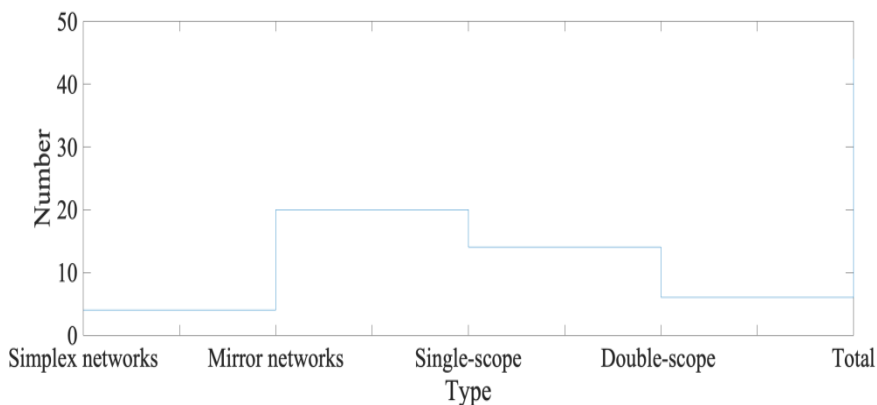
Type	Number	Percentage
Simplex networks	10	12.98%
Mirror networks	44	57.14%
Single-scope networks	17	22.07%
Double-scope networks	6	7.79%
Total	77	100%



*Figure 1. Percentage of four types of networks in metaphorical animal idioms*

## (2) Metonymic Animal Idioms

As two different cognitive mechanisms, metaphor and metonymy are very different. At the same time, there are subtle relationships and interactions between them. Metaphor usually consists of two concepts. One is explained on the basis of the other. The cognitive basis of metaphor is "similarity". Its main pragmatic function is to use the source domain to understand the target domain. Metonymy makes it possible for people to use more familiar aspects to identify unfamiliar aspects of a certain category. The cognitive basis of metonymy is proximity. Its pragmatic function is to help people identify unfamiliar or imperceptible aspects of a category. Metonymy can be generally divided into two categories: whole metonymy, part metonymy and part metonymy. These two categories include things and parts, components, events and other sub categories. It is also important to master the related knowledge of metonymy, because it helps us to classify different idioms and have a relatively correct understanding of idioms. The percentage of four kinds of networks in metonymic animal idioms is shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. Percentage of four types of networks in metonymical animal idioms*



## 4.2. Idioms about "Horse"

### (1) The metaphor "horse" in English

All these idioms can be explained by conceptual metaphor. Generally speaking, horses are aimed at people. Let's start with the phrase. As a given form, these three metaphors are constructed as indefinite article "a" + Adjective + horse. In these phrases, a horse plays the role of a person or an object. These obvious examples are based on the idea that humans are horses. The unexpected winner in the competition is the black horse, the purposeful politician is tracking the horse, the member who will sell is the Trojan horse, and many people like clothes and shops. The expression of clothes horse comes from the device people use to hang up wet clothes to dry. It's made of wood and wire. It looks a bit like a horse. After washing a car of clothes, your clothes horse may be covered by clothes. According to the corpus of coca, these idioms can be found in magazines, novels, newspapers and spoken English.

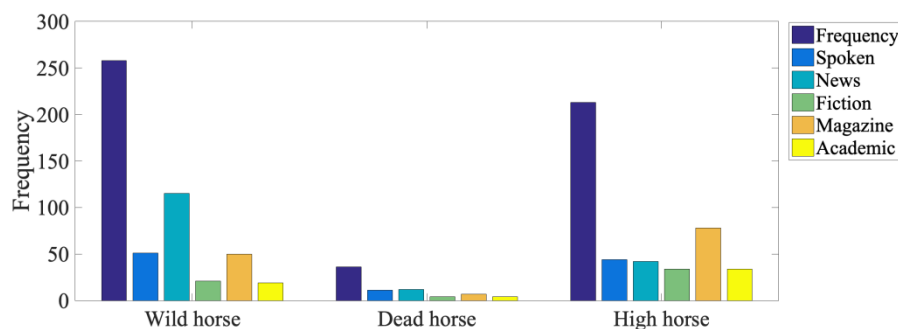


Figure 3. Metaphorical meanings of horse idioms applied to people

Based on the frequency search in coca, we get the frequency of each idiom sample and the context in which the sample appears. As shown in Table 1, three samples of Maxi language mainly appear in newspapers, magazines and oral English. When these idioms are regarded as metaphors, they are used to judge people and express their attitudes towards them. They are metaphorical in nature.

### (2) Metonymy "horse" in English Idioms

From the frequency search in coca, we get the frequency of each idiom sample and the context of the sample. In the total frequency part, wild horse is the first, dead horse is the middle, and high horse is the lowest. We can conclude that the use of high horse is less than wild horse and dead horse.

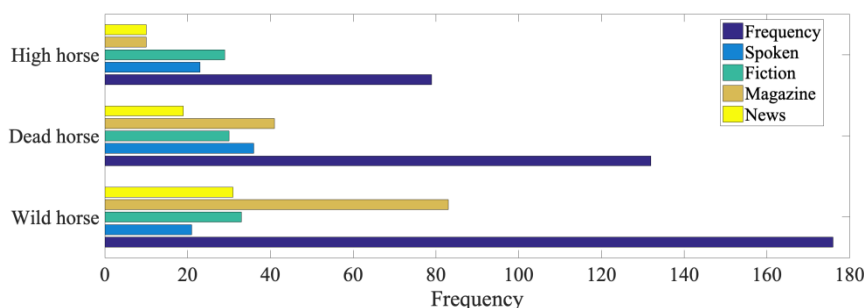


Figure 4. Metonymic meanings of horse idiom applied to nonhuman being

Because of the great love for horses, the images of horses in Chinese and English are not exactly the same. So the impression of horses is not always positive. Chinese tend to actively use horses, while English speakers tend to use them to identify or describe human and non-human beings,

regardless of their preferences. The basic reason for the similarities and differences between the two languages is that, first of all, horse plays an important role in the development of human beings, whether in China or in English speaking countries. Secondly, the conceptual mechanism of "human is animal" is rooted in the cognitive process of people entering the field of metaphor and metonymy. This mechanism shows its universality, because people are likely to quote some abstract ideas to simple and common objects such as animals.

## 5. Conclusion

In English and Chinese, the abstract images of animal metaphors are closely related to their characteristics, which are inevitably influenced by different cultural backgrounds and thinking norms. Animal metaphors in English and Chinese proverbs or idioms are printed by the similarities and differences between the cultures of the two countries. A comparative study of them can help language learners learn a language effectively and make language learning much easier. In this paper, we list some familiar animal metaphors in English idioms, and make a brief analysis in order to better understand them.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the idioms about horses in Chinese and English, summarize their characteristics in each language, in order to form a normative cognition; make a further extension of the previous studies on horse idioms, so that people have a more specific and detailed understanding of horse idioms, on this basis, reveal the different status and role of horses in the two cultures. First, with the help of the authoritative idiom dictionary, all idioms related to horses in the two languages are screened out. Then, the English Corpus (COCA) is used for corpus analysis and data statistics to reveal the emotional color and usage situation of the idioms, Then, from the perspective of metaphor and metonymy in cognitive linguistics, we can further analyze the ontology and the vehicle contained in the cognitive domain of each idiom.

The methods used in this paper are comparative analysis and cognitive analysis. Through comparative analysis, we can find the surface similarities and differences between English and Chinese Maxi. It must be noted that the idioms of horses are limited to describing people or their characteristics or behaviors. In order to go beyond the surface revealed by comparative analysis, this paper adopts cognitive method, because cognitive method provides a more subtle methodology and theoretical model for the interpretation of selected samples. Based on the analysis of the data in the cognitive model, this paper holds that there are conceptual process metaphors and metonymies in the selected idiom samples, reveals the conceptualization process of horse idioms, and explains the reasons.

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## Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Conflict of Interest

The author states that this article has no conflict of interest.

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