

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

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**HỒ THỊ HOÀNG NGÂN**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO**

**IDIOMS AND PROVERBS RELATING TO WOMEN**

**IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE**

**Field Study: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Code : 60.22.15**

**MASTER THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**(SUMMARY)**

**Danang, 2012**

The thesis has been completed at the College of Foreign Languages,  
Danang University

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The thesis to be orally defended at the Examining Committee.

Time: 29/10/2012

Venue: Danang University

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 RATIONALE

Language is often described as a living thing. We can say that it is the most useful and interesting thing that human-being creates and possesses. And idioms and proverbs are very popular language phenomena that people use to express their ideas, experience, desire, love affairs, and feelings.

Additionally, each nation or language has a different culture with different characteristics; therefore, cultural aspects are prominently considered to play an important part in decoding idioms and proverbs. In reality, we often get troubles in our attempt to understand and use of idioms and proverbs.

Idioms and proverbs provide the language of mouth and the language of literature with a form of concise expression. Therefore, they are very emotive and persuasive to convey widely thoughts, ideas and feelings. With a short way, idioms and proverbs express perfectly the whole experience of life, society and history of the laborers.

However, one of the most typical topic that literature has mentioned is that the topic of the women. The image of the women is reflected variously and plentifully through idioms and proverbs. In some proverbs and idioms, women are described with a proud look and a noble beautiful feeling as follows: “Chè Vân Thái, gái Tiên Lữ”, “Chim sa, cá lặn”, “Cành vàng lá ngọc”. This may be a priority that the laborers want to present to the women.

In fact, to the family and society, women are so important. We can have a look at the following proverb: “A woman’s work is never done” - “Việc đàn bà khó mà làm hết” or “Men make houses, women makes homes” – “Đàn ông xây nhà, đàn bà xây tổ ấm”.

Being aware of the importance of idioms and proverbs in daily interaction as well as in learning language, a lot of researchers have made efforts to study issues and aspects in this field. Many researchers have concentrated on analyzing in syntactic, semantic and cultural features in idioms denoting color, human body parts or numbers, etc. Nevertheless, an investigation into the English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs relating to women has not been dealt with so far.

For these reasons above, I decided to choose the thesis entitled “An investigation into idioms and proverbs relating to women in English and Vietnamese”. Hopefully, my study will meet the demand of the people who are interested in this issue, and help the foreign language learners recognize, and translate the idioms and proverbs denoting women into another language. Furthermore, this study on semantic and syntactic characteristics and cultural features might help us deal with this part of the English language more carefully to contribute a small part to the learning and teaching foreign languages.

#### 1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

##### 1.2.1. Aims of the Research

The study is basically studied the syntactic, semantic and cultural characteristics of English idioms and proverbs relating to women in comparison with Vietnamese ones. More importantly,

providing language learners with a basic knowledge of this field will help them master the meaning of idioms and proverbs, and easily and naturally translating them to each of these languages. Language learners also benefit a lot in improving their language skill and make their language of communication and writing become richer. To some aspect, they can aware of the beauty of language to love their language and their culture more.

### **1.2.2. Objectives of the Research**

This paper is designed to aim at the following objectives:

- To present the English and Vietnamese syntactic and semantic features of idioms and proverbs relating to women as well as their cultural characteristics.

- To describe, compare and contrast the features mentioned above to clarify the similarities and differences of the two languages in this field.

- To suggest some implications for the teaching and translating English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

### **1.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

It is the fact that native speakers of English and Vietnamese are not all expert users of idioms and proverbs in their mother tongues. When they learn a foreign language, more or less they are affected by the negative transfer that may lead to their limited ability to express themselves effectively in the target language. Hence, idioms and proverbs should be studied in terms of some aspects: syntax, semantic and cultural perspectives. By this way, speakers can understand their structures, their literal and figurative meaning and their cultural characteristics. As a result, more or less, the results of

this study can be applied to make the persuasive and effective communication, teach and learn languages or help translators transferring source idioms into the target language ones more exactly.

### **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the syntactic and semantic features of idioms and proverbs relating to women in English and Vietnamese?
2. What are the similarities and the differences between English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs relating to women in terms of syntactic and semantic features?
3. How do we apply the works into the translation process of idioms and proverbs relating to women into Vietnamese?

### **1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

In this study, idioms and proverbs relating to women are chosen to study based on their population, occurrence frequency, and power of expression in English and Vietnamese as well.

In the thesis, not all idioms and proverbs relating to women are listed and analyzed because of the time, knowledge, and material limitation. Some typical terms will be chosen to study to make clear the similarities and differences in idioms and proverbs relating to women in English and Vietnamese. Particularly, in terms of syntax, English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs will be examined in phrase and sentence patterns. Semantically, these idioms and proverbs, collected in the literature works, articles, and dictionaries and on the internet, will be syntactically and semantically analyzed and compared to clearly illustrate the differences and similarities between these components of English. The comparison between two cultures will be mentioned as well.

## 1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

- Chapter 1 is the general introduction of the study, which consists of the rationale, signification of the study, the scope of the study, the research questions, and the organization of the study.
- Chapter 2 is the literature review, presents the previous studies related to the paper, the theoretical background of the study in which it lays emphasis on identifying syntactic, semantic characteristics of idioms and proverbs and cultural features as well.
- Chapter 3 is about the methods and procedures of the study. It will mention the aims, the objectives of the study, then the methodology, the design of the research, data collection, data analysis, and description of the corpus.
- Chapter 4 is the chapter for findings and discussion is devoted to the analysis and comparison of syntactic, semantic features and cultural characteristics of idioms and proverbs relating women in English and Vietnamese.
- Chapter 5 includes the conclusion and the implications, the limitations, and suggestions for further study.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1.1. Literature Review of Idioms

It goes without saying that idioms and proverbs reflect the various experiences of laborers' lives; moreover, they also reflect the soul of each country. Idioms and proverbs are used for the number of communicative, academic and literary purposes as pragmatic devices, and they have raised an increasing interest of linguists and researchers due to their linguistic function and capacity of expression. In reality, idioms and proverbs have been becoming a subject of study by several British, American and so on. Writers and linguists since the 1950s such as W.Mc.Mordie (1954), V.II.Collins (1958), Robert J.Dixson (1971), Adam Makkai (1984), D.A. Cruse (1987), V.Fromkin (1990), Jennifer Seidl & W.Mc. Mordie (1993), A.P. Cowie, R.Mackin, IR. McCaig (1993), Milada Broukai (1998). Cruse, the author of "Lexical semantics" (1987), states that idioms are semantically lexical complex. This is considered as a traditional view point of idioms that are homophonous with grammatically well-formed transparent expressions. So as to make clear the concept of idioms, he gives some more related concepts to idioms, collocations and dead metaphor.

F.R. Palmer, the writer of "Semantics" (1990) defines idioms as consequences of words whose meanings cannot be predicted from the meaning of the words themselves. Semantically, idioms are single units, but not single grammatical units like words. He also brought

about some restrictions in syntactic features and noted that the problems of idioms were involved with a much wider issue word formation, by which what would appear to be new and more complex lexemes can be formed from single ones.

Cristina Cacciari & Patrizia Tabossi (1993) in “idioms-processing, structure, and interpretation” focus on 3 main points: idiom interpretation and the literal figurative distinction, acquisition and processing of idioms, and meaning and structure. In short, they can help the readers have a more vivid and clear understanding about idioms.

J. Wright in “idioms organizer” (2000) pointed out that an idiom is an expression that takes grammar functions in sentences, some idiomatic expressions are fixed such as *every dog has its day* but in many cases, some component can be changed. Very often the tense and the pronoun change: *he/ she/ we had a dog life*. In addition, he organized English idiom into 4 sections: areas of metaphor, individual metaphors, topics and key words.

In the “dictionary of idioms and their origins” (1994) by Linda and Roger Flavell, the authors had many essays that discussed idioms. Beside, idioms have also been a subject of a great number of studies and researches by many other linguists. The interest in idioms casts back a perception of the universality of prefabricated-memorized combinations in spoken and in written language, and in a wide recognition of the part they play in the first and language acquisition and speech production.

Since the end of 1970s, Vietnamese idioms have been recognized, collected and explained systematically. There have been

a lot of contrastive studies on the various aspects of English and Vietnamese idioms are carried out at Danang University by many MA scholars. “A Study of Some Characteristics of Structures, Meaning and Culture of English Idioms about Animals” by Pham Thi To Nhu, Danang University. “A Contrastive Analysis of English and Vietnamese Idioms Using the Terms of Body Parts” by Nguyễn Thị Hiệp carried out in 2001. The thesis “Semantic Structures of Words Denoting Human Body Organs in English –Eye-Ear-Nose-Mouth – (versus Vietnamese) by Nguyễn Dương Nguyễn Hào in 2001. Nguyễn Văn Long [2002] with the thesis “Semantic Features of English and Vietnamese Idiomatic Verb Phrase”. In 2004, Nguyễn Thị Lệ Thu did a contrastive study into semantic features of similes in English and Vietnamese idioms through the thesis “An Investigation into Simile in Idioms – a Contrastive analysis between English and Vietnamese”. In 2006, Võ Thanh Quyên with the thesis: “A Contrastive analysis of Idioms Denoting Human Feelings in English and Vietnamese.” In 2009, Nguyễn Thị Thu Mai took over the thesis: “An Investigation into Syntactic and Semantic features of Idioms Denoting Causes and Results (English versus Vietnamese)”.

### 2.1.2. Literature Review of Proverbs

Fifty years after Trench’s book, F. Edward Hulme (1841–1909) published his volume on *Proverb Lore: Being a Historical Study of the Similarities, Contrasts, Topics, Meanings, and Other Facets of Proverbs, Truisms, and Pithy Sayings, as Explained by the Peoples of Many Lands and Times* (1902). Hulme’s treatise basically replaced Trench’s popular volume, and it was appropriate that it was reprinted in 1968 to honor the work of this folklore scholar. But

according to proverbial wisdom, “All good *things* come in threes,” and thus there is also Archer Taylor’s (1890–1973) magisterial volume on *The Proverb* (1931).

From 1975 up to now, some elaborate works connected with proverbs have done their share to the knowledge of the field and one of the wholehearted authors we must not miss is Chu Xuân Diên who showed his profound understanding, deep opinion and clear analysis of the distinction between the two commonly mixed forms: idioms and proverbs in his *Tiểu luận về tục ngữ Việt Nam* (1997) which I consider a valuable source for my study. His other books include *Tục ngữ Việt Nam* with co-authors Lương Văn Đăng, Phương Tri (1975).

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1. Definition of Idioms**

Cruse (1986) pays much attention to the semantic features of idioms, according to him, “idiom is an expression the meaning of which cannot be inferred from the meaning of its parts.”

Michael McCarthy Felicity O’Dell, writers of *English Idioms In use* [25, p6], considers idioms are expressions which have meaning that is not obvious from the individual words. For example, the idioms drive somebody round the bend means make somebody angry or frustrated, but we cannot know this just by looking at the words.

Hoàng Văn Hành et al., [47] affirm that idioms are set expressions which are stable in morpho- structure, complete and figurative in meaning, used widely in communication, especially in speech.

### **2.2.1.1. The Main Characteristics of Idioms**

*a. Structural Stability*

*b. Semantic Ambiguity*

*c. Symbolism*

*d. National Traits*

### **2.2.1.2. Idioms and Other Language Unit**

### **2.2.2. Definition of Proverbs**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2001) a proverb is “a short pithy saying in common and recognized use; a concise sentence, often metaphorical or alternative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all”.

#### **2.2.2.1. Characteristic of proverbs**

*a. Many eloquence characteristics*

*b. Syntax structure and rhythm*

*c. Bright ethnic and geographical characteristics*

#### **2.2.2.2. Idioms and Proverbs**

### **2.2.3 Definition of Women**

### **2.2.4. Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

### **2.2.5. Language and Culture Relationship**

**2.2.5.1. Concept of culture**

**2.2.5.2. The Relation of Culture and Language**

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

#### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is designed to meet the aims and objectives of the study mentioned above. In order to achieve this purpose, a great number of idioms and proverbs relating to women from many sources in two languages – English and Vietnamese have been collected and processed differently, and then analyzed and compared to one another.

#### 3.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

#### 3.3. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

##### 3.3.1. Data Collection

##### 3.3.2. Data Analysis

#### 3.4. INSTRUMENT FOR ANALYSIS

#### 3.5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In term of reliability, both data and background for the study are reliable. Moreover, the results and findings in this thesis are surely withdrawn from the work with the accurate statistics from data analysis without any prejudices or preconceptions.

In term of validity, this study meets all required criteria. In order to make the sample of the study, all English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs are drawn from dictionaries, and other reliable sources.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IDIOMS AND PROVERBS RELATING TO WOMEN

##### 4.1.1. Phrase Structures

##### a. Noun Phrase

**Table 4.1: Noun Phrase Structures of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs relating to Women.**

	English	Vietnamese
<b>Noun Phrases Patterns</b>	[1] (Det) Adj + N	[1] N + Adj, N + Adj
	[2] (Det) + N + N	[2] N + N, N + N
	[3] NP + Prep Phrase	[3] N + Det, N + Det
	[4] N's + N	[4] Nhất + N, Nhì + N, Ba + N
		[5] N + nào + N nấy
		[6] N + V, N + V

##### b. Verb Phrases

**Table 4.2: Verb Phrase Structures of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs relating to Women.**

Verb phrases	English	Vietnamese
	[5] V + N/NP + Prep Phrase	[7] V + N, V + N

	[6] V/VP + N/(NP)	[8] V + N + V + N, V + N + V + N
	[7] VP + N + To-inf + N/NP	[9]V + Adj, V + Adj
	[8] V + Prep Phrase	

*c. Adjective Phrases*

**Table 4.3: Adjective Phrase Structures of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs relating to Women**

	English	Vietnamese
Adjective Phrases		[10] Adj + Nhur + N
		[11] Adj + VP, Adj + VP
		[12] Adj + N/ NP, Adj + N/NP
		[13] Adj + Prep Phrase

*d. Prepositional Phrases*

**Table 4.4: Preposition Phrase Structures of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women.**

	English	Vietnamese
Prepositional Phrases	[10] Prep + NP	
	[11] Like + N, Like + N	

**4.1.2 Sentence Structures**

*a. Simple Patterns*

**Table 4.5: Simple Sentence Structures of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

	English	Vietnamese
Simple Sentence Structures	[1] S + V + O	[1] S + V + O
	[2] S + V + C	[2] S + V + C
	[3] S + V + O + A	[3] S + V + (O) + A
	[4] S + V + O + C	[4] S + V

*b. Compound patterns*

**Table 4.6: Compound Sentence Structures in English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

	English	Vietnamese
Compound Sentence Structures	[5] S + V + O + Coordinator + S + V + O	[5] S + V, S + V
	[6] (Sub cl. as) S + V + O + A; (Sub cl. as) S + V + O + A	[6] S + V + O + A, S + V + O + (Sub cl. as) A
	[7] S + V + C + (Sub cl.as) A, S + V + C + A	[7] S + V + O, S + V + O
		[8] (Sub cl. as) S + V + C, (Sub cl. As) S + V + C

		[9] S + V+O+C, S+V+O + C
		[10] (Adv cl. as) S + V + C, (Adv cl. As) S + V + C

*c. Complex patterns*

**Table 4.7: Complex Sentence Structures in English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women.**

	English	Vietnamese
<b>Complex Sentence Structures</b>	[8] S + V + O + A	[11] (Sub cl. as) S + V + (Sub cl. as) C
	[9] (S) + V + (sub cl. As) + A	[12] S + V + (sub cl. As) C
	[10] S + V + (Sub cl.as) A	[13] (Sub cl. as) S + V + O
		[14] (S) + V + O + (sub cl. as) A

**Table 4.8: A Summary of Syntactic Features of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women		English	Vietnamese	
<b>Syntactical Analysis</b>	<b>Phrase Structure</b>	Noun phrase	+	+
		Verb phrase	+	+
		Adjective phrase	+	+
		Adverb phrase	-	-
		Prepositional phrase	+	-
	<b>Sentence Structure</b>	Simple pattern	+	+
		Complex pattern	+	+
		Compound pattern	+	+

**Table 4.9: A Summary of Semantic Fields of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women			English	Vietnamese
<b>Figurative</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Love affairs -</b>	+	+

<b>Characteristics of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women</b>		<b>Marriage</b>		
	<b>2</b>	<b>Family Relationship</b>	+	+
	<b>3</b>	<b>Richness and Poverty</b>	+	+
	<b>4</b>	<b>Gratitude and Ungratefulness</b>	+	+
	<b>5</b>	<b>Youth and Old age</b>	+	+
	<b>6</b>	<b>Suffering</b>	+	+
	<b>7</b>	<b>Pregnant, Childbirth, Upbringing and Death</b>	+	+
	<b>8</b>	<b>Appearance</b>	+	+
	<b>9</b>	<b>Personality</b>	+	+
	<b>10</b>	<b>Situation</b>	-	+
	<b>11</b>	<b>Advice</b>	+	+
	<b>12</b>	<b>Criticism</b>	+	+

*4.1.3. Parallel Structures*

*4.1.4. Elliptical Structure*

## **4.2. SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IDIOMS AND PROVERBS DENOTING WOMEN**

### **4.2.1. Symbolic Characteristics of Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

*4.2.1.1. Metaphor*

*4.2.1.2. Metonymy*

*4.2.1.3. Hyperbole*

*4.2.1.4. Simile*

*4.2.1.5. Symmetry*

*4.2.1.6. Antithesis*

### **4.2.2. Semantic Fields of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

### **4.2.3. Similarities and Differences in Semantic Features of English and Vietnamese Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

*4.2.3.1. Similarities*

*4.2.3.2. Differences*

#### **4.3. CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IDIOMS AND PROVERBS RELATING TO WOMEN**

There are some cultural characteristics in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs and some cultural factors that affect the idioms and proverbs such as religious words, cultural images, symbolic animals, human body parts, social regimes, weather, family custom and education.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **5.1. CONCLUSIONS**

Chapter 1 presents the rationale of the study and states what the study is aimed at. Also, the research questions, scope of study and method of the study are included. Chapter 2 provides a review of the related previous studies, fundamental and essential theoretical preliminaries concerning the subject under consideration which serves as the basis foundation of data analysis and finding discussion in the following chapters. Chapter 3 is designed to describe the methods and procedures of the paper. Chapter 4 presents the finding and discussion of the research where the semantic and syntactic characteristics of English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs relating to women are focused.

#### **5.2. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.2.1. Implications for Language Teaching and Learning**

In the process of teaching English to Vietnam's students, teachers should put more emphasis on teaching idioms and proverbs for learners at all levels and raising their awareness in learning as well as using idioms and proverbs.

##### **5.2.2. Implications for Translating Idioms and Proverbs Relating to Women**

a. Idioms and proverbs can have either literal or non-literal meanings because most idioms and proverbs are constructed from components that have non-literal meanings quite remote from the senses of the individual words.

b. And it is the context where the idioms and proverbs occur that help reduce the semantic ambiguity, one typical feature of idioms and proverbs.

c. Moreover, when the literal meaning is realized to be unsuitable in the context, the non-literal meaning will take its place.

d. The learners should equip themselves with knowledge of principle of meaning transfer beforehand.

e. In addition, a profound understanding of cultural characteristics of idioms and proverbs relating to women in English and Vietnamese certainly benefits the learners a lot in the translation due to the fact that the relationship between language and culture is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways.

### **5.3. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The study remains some inevitable limitations and more detailed discussions are still needed. For these reasons, there are some other aspects that need to be further investigated such as:

- Investigation into the pragmatic aspect of English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs relating to women.

- Investigation into the stylistic devices used in English and Vietnamese idioms and proverbs relating to women.