



A Study on the experiential cognition of the metaphorical concept of "Tiger" in Chinese and Thai Languages

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Abstract

This study is based on the theory of experiential cognitive linguistics to explore the similarities and differences in the meanings of tiger-related words in Chinese and Thai. The research employed the literature review method and comparative analysis to compare 175 tiger-related words selected from the "Modern Chinese Dictionary" and "Dictionary of Idioms" in Chinese, with 52 tiger-related words from the "Thai-Chinese Dictionary" and "Royal Institute Dictionary" in Thai. The research found that the semantic extension type of the tiger concept metaphor is closely related to people's experience and perception of tigers. When Chinese and Thai people pay the same attention to tigers, the semantic extension of the concept of tigers in Chinese and Thai languages will overlap; otherwise, there will be semantic dislocation and semantic vacancy. Second, the scope of the metaphorical mapping of the tiger concept involves the conceptual domains related to "people" and "things." Third, there are both commonalities and differences in the conceptual metaphor mapping of Chinese and Thai languages, embodying the complexity in the process of human abstract concept formation. The findings of this study will provide teachers with diverse teaching materials, helping students understand and compare the meanings of tiger-related words in Chinese and Thai, thereby broadening their linguistic perspectives. Additionally, it will facilitate cultural exchange and understanding between Chinese and Thai language learners. From a linguistic perspective, the comparative analysis of tiger-related words in Chinese and Thai contributes to interdisciplinary research collaboration.

Keywords: tiger experiential cognition comparison between Chinese and Thai

1. Introduction

Animals have a very close connection with human life. In the process of human reproduction and evolution, animals have had a significant impact on people's clothing, food, shelter, and transportation. Firstly, in primitive societies with extremely low productivity, animals were one of the sources of food for people. Secondly, with the development of productivity and advancements in agricultural production techniques, large domesticated animals such as horses and cattle played a crucial role in the development of agrarian societies. Thirdly, in today's highly developed productivity, animals have become a source of various high-quality proteins necessary for human life. Fourthly, captivating animal performances have become a source of joy for both adults and children.

In their interaction with animals, people, based on their various experiences and perceptions of animals, attribute specific meanings to them, such as the ferocious tiger, the agile leopard, the cunning fox, and so on. This phenomenon widely and universally exists in human language systems. The primary reason for this is that humans live on the same Earth, in the same objective world, with similar physiological structures and sensory organs, and share common social experiential factors, leading to many similarities in language and culture across different ethnic groups. American cognitive linguist Ronald W. Langacker (2004), in his work "Foundations of Cognitive Grammar," emphasizes the close connection between semantic extension and human experiences and perceptions, suggesting that semantics are constructed through humans' cognitive understanding and interpretation of experiences in specific contexts. This viewpoint emphasizes that the meaning of words is shaped by human cognitive processes, thus highlighting the close relationship between experiential cognition and semantic extension.

Studying the cognition of words containing tiger would have positive implications for the teaching of Chinese and Thai languages. Firstly, through cognitive research on words containing tiger in Chinese and Thai, second-language learners can acquire a wider range of vocabulary resources. As a symbolically significant animal, the tiger is richly represented in Chinese and Thai. By learning and understanding these words, learners can expand their vocabulary and enhance the accuracy and diversity of their Chinese and Thai language expressions. Secondly, tigers hold important positions and symbolic meanings in the cultures of China and Thailand. By studying Chinese and Thai words related to tigers, second-language learners can gain a better understanding of the role of tigers in the two cultures, legendary stories associated with tigers, as well as customs and traditions related to tigers. This understanding helps learners delve deeper into the cultures and values of China and Thailand, promoting intercultural communication and understanding. Thirdly, studying the cognition of words containing tiger in Chinese and Thai enables learners to grasp the usage and semantic differences of these words in various contexts. This helps learners choose appropriate words and express themselves accurately. Additionally, by examining the collocations and usage patterns of words containing tiger learners can enhance their language proficiency, leading to more natural and fluent expressions. Fourthly, researching words containing tiger in Chinese and Thai provides new teaching resources and materials for Chinese and Thai instruction. Teachers can design diverse teaching activities and tasks based on the characteristics of these words, thereby stimulating learners' interest and motivation.

2. Research Objectives

As a product of human sociocultural experiential cognition, language analysis of the commonalities and differences in the expression of the same concept at the linguistic level among different ethnic groups and languages can help second language learners reduce barriers to cross-cultural communication, improve learning efficiency, and deepen mutual understanding between nations. Therefore, this paper selects the concept of "tiger," which is familiar to both Chinese and Thai people, and examines the role of the "tiger" concept in the construction of abstract concepts and the patterns followed in its semantic extension from a Chinese-Thai comparative perspective. The aim is to explore the similarities and differences in experiential cognition of the same object between the Chinese and Thai ethnic groups. Cognitive research on

words containing tiger in Chinese and Thai languages can provide teaching resources and materials for language instruction. By conducting in-depth studies on the meanings and usages of these words, teachers can design relevant teaching activities to assist learners in better mastering language expression and usage.

3. Research Methodology

1) In order to systematically compare tiger-related words in Chinese and Thai, first collect animal vocabulary related to tigers from dictionaries and corpora. Then, based on the target domains of metaphor, divide them into tiger-mapping human domain and tiger-mapping object domain, and further distinguish them. Then, compare and analyze the metaphors of animals in Chinese and Thai within each category.

2) The comparative study of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai involves comparing and analyzing differences between different cultures. Cross-cultural research methods can help researchers understand and interpret the similarities and differences of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages within cultural and social contexts. By comparing the symbolic meanings of tigers and related traditional customs in both language cultures, we can reveal the cultural connotations and cultural cognition associated with animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages.

4. Theoretical concepts and related research

The theoretical foundation of this study is the theory of experiential cognition. This theory was proposed by American psychologist Jerome Bruner in 1956 and emphasizes that individuals construct their understanding and cognition of the world through interaction and experience with the external environment. Firstly, the theory of experiential cognition suggests that the meaning of words is constructed through individuals' interactions and experiences with the environment. Individuals attribute specific meanings and concepts to words based on their own experiences, which can be acquired through perception, observation, practice, and social interactions. Secondly, the meaning of words depends on context and situation. The theory of experiential cognition highlights that the meaning of words is context-dependent. The same word may have different meanings and semantic relationships in different contexts. Individuals need to consider the influence of context and situation when using and understanding words in order to accurately grasp and apply their meanings. Thirdly, the theory of experiential cognition emphasizes that the meaning of words is dynamic and subject to change. As individuals accumulate experiences and knowledge, the meaning of words can also change. Through continuous learning and experiences, individuals' understanding and usage of words evolve and adjust.

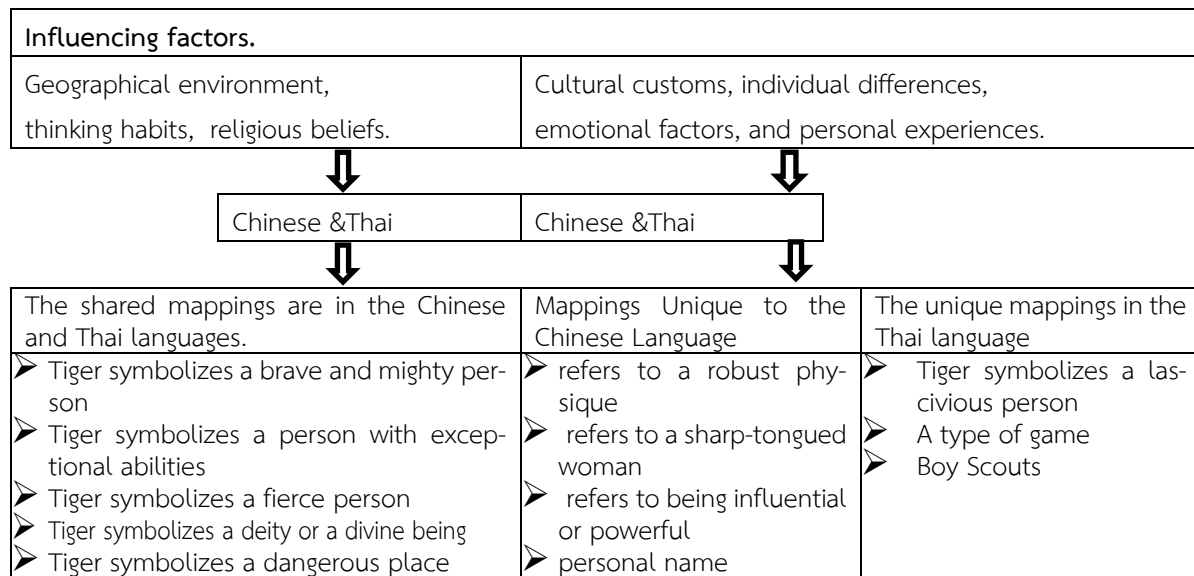
The Chinese term 'Hu(tiger)' corresponds to the Thai term 'Suea (tiger)'. In their primary sense, both terms refer to "a mammal with a large, round head, yellow fur, and black stripes. They have acute hearing and a sense of smell, are fierce and powerful, are good at swimming but not at climbing trees, and hunt for prey such as birds and other animals at night. They are collectively known as tigers (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 7th edition)." In daily communication, besides conveying the conceptual meaning, the term "Hu(tiger)" in Chinese and "Suea (tiger)" in Thai can also carry pragmatic meanings such as cultural meanings, symbolic meanings, metaphorical meanings, and so on. Examples in Chinese include expressions like "Hu Jia Hu Wei"

(a fox assuming the majesty of a tiger), "Hu Tou Hu Nao" (tiger-headed and tiger-brained), "Hu Jiang" (tiger general), and "Hu Tou She Wei" (tiger head, snake tail). In Thai, examples include "Seua Dam" (black tiger), which metaphorically refers to a brave black person, and "Seua Phu Ying" (female tiger), which metaphorically refers to a womanizer or someone who habitually exploits women. Often, people may not be aware of the metaphorical expressions when using these words in communication. As mentioned by Shu Dingfang (2000) in her work, "From a cognitive perspective, once a fresh metaphor is accepted, its metaphorical nature begins to weaken. With the increasing frequency of use, its metaphorical meaning becomes integrated into the word's actual meaning." Therefore, conducting an in-depth study of the pragmatic meanings of "Hu(tiger)" and "Suea (tiger)" can help Chinese and Thai language learners better understand the cultures of both countries and reveal the interaction between language and cognition.

The research related to the semantics of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages consists of a total of 18 articles. Among them, there are 2 articles from Thai journals, 3 articles from Chinese journals, 1 Thai master's thesis, and 12 Chinese master's thesis. The specific research topics are as follows: a comparative study on the semantic aspects of Chinese and Thai idiomatic expressions containing the word "Hu" (tiger) in their publication titled "A Comparative Study of Chinese Idiomatic Expressions Containing the word 'Hu' (tiger) with Thai Idiomatic Expressions Containing the Word 'Suea' (tiger)." They found that there is consistency in the six aspects of "will, sensation, adventure, education and nurturing, submission and surrender, and human actions and behaviors" in idiomatic expressions containing "Hu" (tiger) in both Chinese and Thai languages. Other researchers such as Atcharaphon Pavaputanon (2019), Wu Wenfei (2018), Nichapat Chuthakawinmongkhon, Pichayapa Amnuaychoktawee (2017), Kritanan Ming-kwan (2017), Liao Zhenzhu (2015), Chutima Khemcharoen (2015), Li Zhiwen (2014), Lin Xianlian (2014), and Cheng Tianci (2012) have provided detailed discussions on the pragmatic meanings (cultural meanings, symbolic meanings, and other pragmatic meanings) of "Hu" (tiger) in the Chinese and Thai languages.

In summary, based on the collected materials, it can be seen that scholars from China and Thailand have conducted extensive and in-depth research on idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and proverbs containing the word "Hu" (tiger) in Chinese and "Suea (tiger)" in Thai. The research primarily focuses on the structure, grammatical functions, and semantics of tigers in the Chinese and Thai languages. There has been relatively less attention given to the metaphorical meanings of tigers in these languages. This paper, from the perspective of experiential cognition and based on specific language data, categorize the semantic types of metaphorical mappings related to the concept of tiger in Chinese and Thai, explores their similarities and differences, and reveals the cognitive variations between the Chinese and Thai peoples as well as the cultural constraints of the metaphorical expressions involving the tiger concept.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating Cognitive Comparison of Tiger-Related Vocabulary in Chinese and Thai Languages



5. Results

5.1 The Cultural Connotations of Tiger in Chinese and Thai Languages

In traditional Chinese culture, "Hu" (tiger) is considered the "king of beasts," and its most prominent symbol is the character "Wang" (king) on its forehead. This perception stems from the tiger's fierce nature, its position at the top of the food chain, and its rarity of encountering a worthy opponent. Due to its ferocity, the tiger poses a threat not only to birds and animals in the natural world but also to humans and livestock. As a result, the tiger has two distinct images in the minds of the Chinese people: one is the mighty and courageous "Hu Jiang" (tiger general), and the other is the oppressor of the weak, the "Hu Lang Zhi Bei" (vicious tiger or wolf). It is this contradictory yet unified understanding of the tiger that evokes both loves and hate in people's hearts.

First, totems, ward off misfortune and suppress evil beasts. As the king of beasts, the tiger used to be widely distributed within China. During the primitive society period, with low levels of productivity, people faced fierce tigers that they couldn't conquer. The fear of tigers was so great that it elevated the tiger to a natural deity in people's minds. Many primitive tribes regarded the tiger as their ancestor and established it as their totem, worshipping it. Secondly, status, power, and outstanding individuals among the people. In the early stages of human society, the worship of the tiger as a totem and its own majestic and courageous nature made the tiger an important symbol for rulers to proclaim their identity and status. Thirdly, it signifies danger, terror, and hazardous territory. The tiger, due to its ferocity and majesty, has made the place where it resides and lives a synonym for "dangerous and hazardous" territory. Fourthly, it represents brutality, ruthlessness, and evil forces. Due to the fierce and ruthless nature of tigers, it is often used in the Chinese language to metaphorically refer to people or situations in life that oppress the weak and display brutality and heartlessness.

Thailand is located in the tropical region and has rich vegetation within its borders. Due to the tiger's predatory nature, which often involves ambush hunting, the forests provide highly favorable conditions for the tiger's hunting and survival. As a result, tigers are widely distributed in the extensive forests of Thailand. Firstly, it is the removal of evil, avoidance of calamity, and the Tiger God Shrine. Tiger Lord safeguards the local people's safety and health and is revered and worshipped by the people. Secondly, it is about being mighty, courageous, and outstanding among people. "Seua Ru" (Tiger knows) refers to a person being as clever as a tiger. "Seua Son Lep" (Tiger hides its claws) refers to a person with great strength intentionally concealing their abilities. Thirdly, it is about ferocity, cruelty, and the heart of a tiger. In "Khao Pen Seua" (He is a tiger), "Seua /Hu (tiger)" implies that the person is fierce like a tiger.

In conclusion, the terms containing "Seua /Hu (tiger)" in Chinese and Thai languages carry rich cultural connotations. For example, in both languages, Seua /Hu (tiger) can be used to metaphorically describe outstanding individuals, as well as dangerous people or things. However, the differences are based on geographical factors, climate variations, traditional culture, religious beliefs, ways of thinking, and social life specific to the Chinese and Thai ethnic groups.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of the Conceptual Metaphor of Tiger

Various animals in the natural world are closely linked to human activities such as clothing, food, shelter, transportation, agricultural production, and social development. They use animals as a mirror to reflect upon human characteristics and, in this process, create numerous language expressions related to animals. Certain features of the source domain, represented by "Seua /Hu (tiger)" are highlighted and mapped onto the target domain of "Ren" (humans), including appearance, mentality, psychological activities, and behaviors. This allows people to better understand themselves by leveraging the metaphorical representation of "Seua /Hu (tiger)".

5.2.1 Comparative Analysis of Metaphorical Mapping of Seua /Hu (tiger) with the Target Domain of Humans

Lakoff (1999) argues that concepts are formed through bodily and neural experiences of the world. Due to the shared physiological structure and sensory organs of humans, there are certain similarities in their thinking patterns and behavioral activities.

1) Tigers metaphorically represent "brave and mighty individuals".

In the hunting era, the ancestors of the Han ethnic group formed a psychological consensus regarding the "power" and "ferocity" of tigers during their struggles with the "forest overlord" and "king of the jungle." They regarded tigers as symbols of "bravery," "mightiness," and "courage." Similar metaphorical expressions exist in Thai as well, such as Seua Kaw (white tiger: metaphorically referring to brave Caucasian people).

2) "Hu" metaphorically refers to a person of outstanding abilities.

In addition to metaphorically referring to individuals who are "brave, mighty, courageous, majestic, and extraordinary," "Seua /Hu (tiger)" is also used to metaphorically describe those who are "excellent, outstanding, exceptionally capable, and exceptionally wise." For example, Seua Sangwian (tiger in the arena: a prominent figure in a certain field).

3) "Seua /Hu (tiger)" metaphorically refers to a person who is "ferocious" and "dangerous."

Due to the tiger's exceptional hunting abilities, it has few rivals in the animal kingdom. This is reflected in language, where numerous expressions metaphorically refer to individuals as "ferocious," "savage," "cruel," or "dangerous" using the imagery of tigers.

In summary, during the agricultural society, when faced with the brave, powerful, and mighty tiger, people often felt powerless to resist. The fear instilled by "Seua /Hu (tiger)" was immense. Therefore, when encountering similar situations in life, the people of the Han and Thai ethnicities like to metaphorically refer to those who bring danger to their lives and well-being with the "ferocity" and "cruelty" of a tiger.

5.2.2 Unique Metaphorical Expression Patterns in Chinese

Firstly, due to the tiger's large size, powerful hind legs, long and strong tail, and muscular and energetic physique. This is reflected in the language with many words using "tiger" to metaphorically refer to individuals with a robust and powerful physique, such as strong as a tiger. However, after analyzing Thai language materials, it is found that the Thai language does not have this usage. Secondly, in addition to using "tiger" to metaphorically refer to adults with a robust and powerful physique, the ancient Chinese people also used "tiger-headed and tiger-brained" to refer to children who were "strong and honest." Thirdly, in the Chinese language, use "tigress" refers to "fierce and sharp-tongued women."

5.2.3 Unique Metaphorical Expressions in the Thai Language

Due to the differences in thinking between Thai and Chinese people, Thai individuals use "Seua Non-Gin" to metaphorically refer to those "silent partners" who benefit from behind the scenes without actively participating in the operation. On the other hand, "Seua Baa" can be used to metaphorically refer to "wild tiger soldiers" or "lecherous individuals."

5.3 Comparative Analysis of the Metaphorical Mapping of "Seua /Hu (tiger)" in Chinese and Thai when the Target Domain is an Object

The tiger is a unique species in Asia, primarily native to Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. The most primitive tigers originated in China, where the tiger symbolizes the "king of all animals" and the "king of the mountains," representing strength and grandeur.

5.3.1 Common Metaphorical Characteristics of "Seua /Hu (tiger)" in Chinese and Thai Language

1) The Tiger as a Metaphor for the Deity

In the eyes of the Han Chinese people, the tiger is a symbol of warding off evil, bringing disaster relief, ensuring peace and prosperity, and guarding wealth. In the streets of Thailand, it is common to see temples dedicated to the "Tiger Deity" and Thai people wearing tiger amulets on their chests.

2) The Tiger Symbolizing Dangerous Territory.

Early Thai and Chinese ancestors recognized that despite the tiger's immense power, its "fierce" nature made it a symbol of danger.

5.3.2 Unique Metaphorical Expressions in Chinese

Firstly, due to the inherent kingly aura of the tiger and the prominent character "Wang" (king) on its forehead, Hu Tou She Wei" is also used to describe someone whose actions are deceptive and inconsistent with their words. Secondly, in some rural areas and remote mountain regions of China, people choose names for their children that include the character "Seua /Hu (tiger)" to ward off evil and ensure their children's health and strong growth.

5.3.3 Unique Metaphorical Expressions in the Thai Language

In the Thai language, there is a specific metaphorical expression called "Seua Gin Wua" (tiger eats cow), which refers to a board game. The game consists of a 16- grid board with 4 tigers and 12 cows.

6. Conclusions

The comparative study mentioned above shows that the conceptual metaphor of "tiger" in Chinese and Thai is based on the process expansion of "reality-cognition-language". The foundation of the metaphorical mapping of "tiger" is the result of people's cognitive processing of various tiger features. Wang Yin (2011) points out that language is a human creation, which is the result of people's "interactive experience" and "cognitive processing" of reality. For example, "Thii sùm seua jong bprà-yàt" ("Beware of the tiger's ambush") is the result of people's further conceptualization after their cognitive understanding of the fierce predatory nature of tigers, and it carries a clear experiential quality.

In the process of human cognition, individuals are influenced not only by the objective world but also by their subjective psychological factors. Wang Yin (2005) points out that humans have imaginative brains and various cognitive approaches. During the process of categorization and conceptualization, different features of things can be understood from different perspectives. Therefore, although the Chinese and Thai people share the same physiological structure, they exhibit differences in the process of cognitive understanding due to the influences of cultural traditions, customs, and religious beliefs. Specifically regarding the concept of "Seua /Hu (tiger)", due to the different focal points of attention for the two ethnic groups, semantic misalignment and semantic gaps occur in the process of metaphorical mapping.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Application of Research Findings:

The comparative study of the semantics of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages, based on the foundation of experiential cognition theory, contributes to learners' accurate understanding of word meanings and enhances their vocabulary acquisition and language expression skills. Through research on the semantics of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages, learners and teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations and symbolic meanings of animal vocabulary in both languages. This helps Chinese and Thai language learners comprehend and appreciate the differences between cultures and improves their intercultural communication skills. By studying the semantics of animal vocabulary, learners and teachers can establish stronger connections with words in terms of emotions and memories. Through research on the semantics of animal vocabulary containing tiger in Chinese and Thai

languages, teachers can gain a better understanding of learners' individual characteristics and language experiences. This allows for personalized teaching support and the development of teaching materials, ultimately improving the learning outcomes and satisfaction of Chinese and Thai language learners.

7.2 Next Steps in Research:

With the development and advancement of corpus technology, the next step in research would involve constructing a relatively large-scale corpus of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages and collecting and organizing actual language usage data of animal vocabulary. By analyzing the usage and semantic variations of animal vocabulary in different contexts, the actual language use and semantic features of animal vocabulary in Chinese and Thai languages can be revealed.

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