

Teaching English Idioms from the Perspective of Translation under the Conceptual Integration Theory

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Abstract: English idioms hold significant value as a gateway to Western society and as a tool for enhancing the authenticity and effectiveness of language expression. Consequently, the acquisition of English idioms remains a crucial endeavor for language learners. Nevertheless, the challenges associated with English idioms arise from cultural and cognitive disparities, as well as the intrinsic nature of these linguistic expressions, rendering them arduous for both educators and students. This research examines the distinctive attributes of many English idioms and provides pedagogical approaches based on cognitive perspectives. Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) will serve as the theoretical foundation for this analysis, with a specific focus on the initial stage of idiom acquisition, namely translation. The objective of this paper is to examine English idioms through a systematic categorization, wherein they are classified according to the congruence of their imagery elements. The three discerned categories comprise English idioms exhibiting akin imagery elements in both English and Chinese, those manifesting imagery elements absent in the Chinese language, and those portraying imagery elements incongruent within the Chinese cultural context. The primary objective of this study is to enhance the efficacy of instructing non-native speakers, particularly those proficient in Chinese, in the acquisition of English idioms. This will be achieved by effectively managing the intricacies and intricacies involved in bilingual idiom acquisition.

Keywords: Idioms teaching, idioms translation, Conceptual Integration Theory, imagery elements, English language teaching

1. Introduction

Idioms, as a manifestation of cultural essence, have gradually emerged and evolved during historical progression, exhibiting strong interconnections with local history, religion, politics, social life, and other pertinent factors [1]. The process of translation for English learners is a cognitively intricate integration process. It involves a thorough comprehension of language structure and grammatical meaning and a deep understanding of cultural background and contextual expression. The comprehension and utilization of English idioms can enhance the understanding of English culture and improve the naturalness and efficiency of expression. Consequently, the overall cognitive integration mode becomes crucial in translation activity. English idioms are frequently distinguished by their utilization of metaphorical imagery and allusions, rendering them challenging to comprehend

directly. Additionally, their extensive word usage, coupled with the disparities in thinking and culture between Chinese and English, further complicates the task of comprehending and employing English idioms in the process of learning the language; English teachers should also prioritize addressing this difficulty in their instructional practices [2].

In recent years, there has been a notable application of conceptual integration theory in transdisciplinary domains. This application involves the construction of novel and intricate meanings by integrating diverse sources of information through the cognitive process, which, in this case, facilitates grammar acquisition and enhances cultural communication. Therefore, adopting the Conceptual Integration Theory when considering English translation and the pedagogy of idioms can offer more perspectives and recommendations to readers and professionals in the English language industry. This approach can assist educators in facilitating a deeper understanding of linguistic information during the study of idiomatic expressions, ultimately enabling authentic intercultural communication. Based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, this paper will examine the conceptual integration theory and its application in the field of idiomatic language learning, beginning with the initial stage of translation in idiomatic language acquisition. Also, it will explore various instructional approaches for teaching different types of English idioms to enhance students' comprehension and application of these linguistic expressions.

In the process of acquiring idiomatic expressions, learners initially engage in the task of translating English idioms into their First Language. This step serves two purposes: to establish a connection between the familiar cognitive context of the native language and the target language being learned and to alleviate the challenges associated with comprehending idiomatic expressions' meaning and usage contexts [3]. The Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT), introduced by cognitive linguists Fauconnier and Turner in 1997 and 2002, posits that individuals generate intricate cognitive structures by blending information structures from various cognitive domains in their cognitive processes and linguistic expressions. These domains encompass the Input Space, the Generic Space, and the Blended Space. The cognitive process of language is explicated from a "dynamic" standpoint, and this theory has found extensive application in the field of translation [4]. Previous study has suggested that this theory presents a novel framework for enhancing people's comprehension of creative cognition, linguistic complexity and variety, and the phenomenon of cultural production. The advent of CIT is perceived as compelling evidence supporting the cognitive underpinnings of human thought and language and the interconnectedness between cognition and language [5]. Some scholars have examined the application of this theory in the context of idiom translation and its implication for idiom teaching on a macro-level. Additionally, the theory has been found to exert a notable influence on teaching practices. However, there remains a lack of systematic demonstrations regarding the specific methods employed in teaching idiomatic languages. The primary contribution of this work resides in its ability to establish a connection between cognitive science and language teaching, so offering a deeper cognitive basis for instructional practices and enhancing the alignment between the teaching process and students' cognitive requirements. Furthermore, in accordance with the notion of CIT, there is a development of novel pedagogical approaches, with a particular focus on improving students' cultural awareness and intercultural communicative skills.

2. Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT)

In Conceptual Integration Theory, Conceptual Integration Networks (CINs) can be defined as psychospatial networks that are organized as a framework derived from the background knowledge of the cognitive subject [6]. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner propose that a Conceptual Integration Network has four distinct conceptual spaces: Input 1, Input 2, Generic Space, and Blended Space. Within this network, Input 1 and Input 2 both contribute to the projection of shared structure and abstract information into Generic Space. Subsequently, through a process of partial mapping and

matching across spaces, this information is selectively projected into the Blended Space, ultimately culminating in the production of the final cognitive outcome [7].

This study illustrates the aforementioned four spaces as four distinct interpretations within the context of English idiom translation and comprehension: Input Space 1 - English idiom, Input Space 2-Chinese context, Generic Space-the cognitive subject (learners)'s comprehensive framework built upon the basis of reality, and Blended Space-the translation output, see Figure 1:

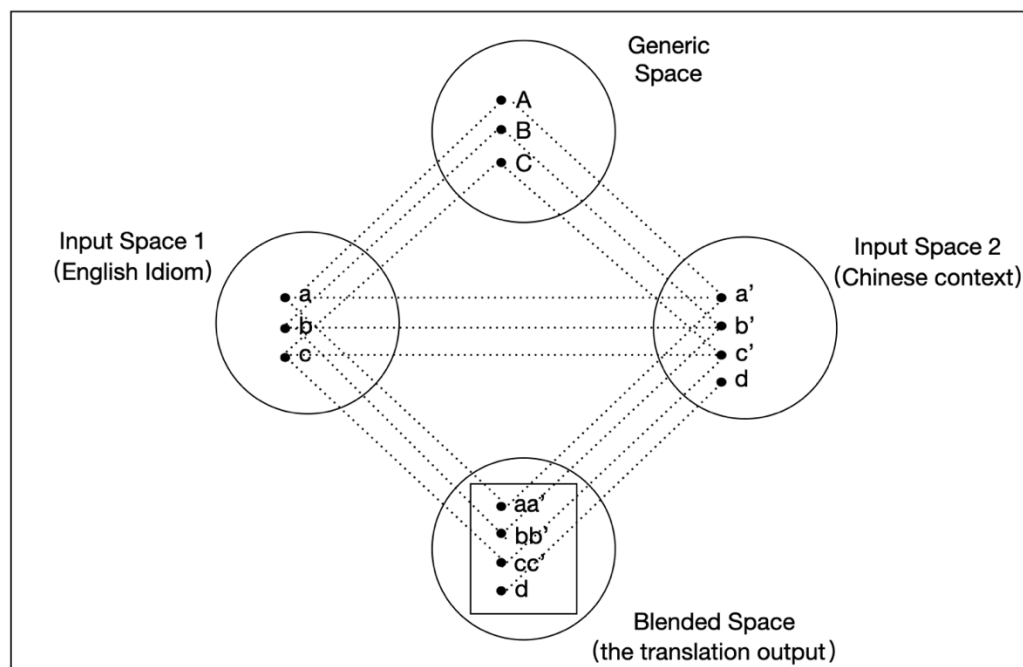


Figure 1: The 4 spaces of CIN within the context of English idiom translation and comprehension.

3. Categorization of Idioms Translation in Relation to Conceptual Integration Theory

Due to the prevalent use of metaphors and allusions in idiomatic expressions, learners frequently encounter difficulties in comprehending the literal meanings and appropriate contexts in which English idioms are employed. This research will examine the characteristic attributes of English idioms through a systematic categorization according to the imagery elements used in idioms.

3.1. English Idioms with Similar Imagery Elements in English and Chinese

With the realms of English idioms, there are some that exhibit a substantial degree of equivalence or notable similarity when compared to Chinese idioms in terms of their structural frameworks, imagery elements, and overall functions. Idioms with this characteristic can be referred to as the "Idioms with similar imagery elements in English and Chinese." For instance, the idiom "The last straw (压死骆驼的)" and the idiom "a rising tide lifts all ships (水涨船高)". Taking the latter as an example, the phrase shares both a literal and metaphorical interpretation with the Chinese idiom "水涨船高", "a rising tide" corresponds to "水涨", "lifts all ships" corresponds to "船高". In CIT, owing to the significant functional overlap between frames, imagery elements, and imagery elements, the direct projection from Input Space 1 and 2 to the Blended Space can facilitate rapid completion of translation and comprehension tasks by learners.

In light of the preceding statements, the idioms in question manifest a relatively simple structure, while harboring an abundance of metaphorical significance. These expressions often stem from comparable cultural contexts or shared life encounters, and they share certain resemblances in terms

of idiomatic functions. Moreover, they tend to employ highly descriptive and vibrant language to convey abstract notions. Thereby, their superiority in easing learners' comprehension of meaning is manifest.

3.2. English Idioms with Imagery Elements that Do Not Exist in Chinese

English idioms with imagery elements that do not exist in Chinese" pertains to those that lack equivalent imagery elements in Chinese due to the differences in culture between Chinese and English. For instance, the idioms "have a ball (有勇气的)" and "out of the blue (突然地)". Using "have a ball" as an example, it can be observed that the imagery element "ball" employed in this expression lacks a corresponding imagery element within the Chinese cultural context. Additionally, the literal interpretation of this idiom fails to convey its metaphorical meaning in the Chinese context through literal translation. From the standpoint of CIT, the process of translating and comprehending idioms necessitates the supplement of the Chinese context. This involves projecting the Input Space 2 (see the element d in Figure 1) solely into Blended Space.

It is evident that such idiomatic expressions prioritize abstraction over precise sensory depictions, thus abstaining from generating vivid and concrete sensory experiences [8]. These idioms place a larger emphasis on logical and memorable forms of communication. They have a wider range of expressions and structures that are adaptable to many settings and requirements while also relying heavily on specific contexts.

3.3. English Idioms with Imagery Elements Mismatched in Chinese Context

Due to cultural differences, there is a class of idioms in English whose frames and imagery elements also exist in Chinese idioms, but the metaphorical meaning of the elements is different, while the particular meaning is often expressed by another imagery element in Chinese, which can be called "English idioms with imagery elements that are mismatched in Chinese context" [9]. For example, "lucky dog (幸运儿, literal translation: lucky guy)", and the idiomatic expression "She is a real dragon. (她是个母老虎, literal translation: She is a tigress) ", and so on. Taking "She is a real dragon." as an example, the imagery element "dragon" in Western culture denotes "vicious dragon", which is distinct from "auspicious dragon" in the Chinese context. Thus, "tigress" is used as a substitution according to the Chinese context in the translation and comprehension. The frames of these idioms in Chinese and English are basically the same, but the imagery elements are not equivalent. Based on the CIT, in the process of translating and understanding these idioms, learners need to selectively extract some of the elements in Input Space 1 and project them into the Blended Space together with the distinct elements (element e in Figure 1) in Input Space 2 [10].

In this case, the functions and meanings of the idioms are different due to the huge cultural divergence, and even the same imagery elements are sometimes given different symbolic interpretations [11]. Therefore, given the "non-superficial" traits of meaning, expressing the meaning of such idioms is confined and necessitated by cultural variables to the maximum extent feasible and is also influenced by specific contexts.

4. Implications for Pedagogical Approaches

In order to enhance students' acquisition of idioms, educators might employ specific teaching approaches tailored to particular types of idioms, hence allowing more precise and positive results in terms of learners' learning outcomes.

4.1. Emphasizing the Link between English and Chinese Imagery Elements

In the realm of idioms with similar imagery elements in English and Chinese, it is advisable to actively use the case study method and emphasize the connection between the imagery elements employed in both languages (as lines aa', bb', and cc' in Figure 1). In the meantime, it is imperative for educators to contrast the idioms within English and Chinese authentic contexts. This approach will enable instructors to assist students' identification of similarities and differences between the two languages. Accordingly, students will be equipped to engage in independent inquiry and the exploration of linguistic principles.

Classification Comparison is also a widely applicable approach for learning idioms with similar imagery elements in English and Chinese. Through concentration on the acquisition of a specific category of idiomatic expressions, students can enhance their understanding of analogous idioms [12]. As an example, when using the imagery element "eye", the idiom "eagle eye" is used in English, whereas in Chinese, the expression turns to "目光如炬 (literal translation: eyes like a torch)". In both English and Chinese, "eye" serves as an element that conveys an individual's emotional disposition and capacity, thereby establishing a strong link between the "eye", cognition, and emotional perception. Nevertheless, distinctions arise in the utilization of modifiers and imagery, as exemplified by the disparity between "eagle" and "torch".

Teachers could also encourage the practice of brainstorming because it helps to invigorate students' comprehension and application, as well as to consolidate the new knowledge into memory. This approach facilitates the accumulation of vocabulary among students while strengthening their understanding of the general meanings and uses of those idioms. Cultural connotations are at the heart of idioms, and understanding their history and distinct cultural connotations is crucial to understanding how they are taught and acquired.

In addition, with some methodological penetration, role-playing and simulation scenarios could also help students employ idioms more naturally. Second, the integration of modern educational technology into a variety of teaching and learning activities, such as online interactive whiteboards and solitaire-based platforms, focuses on creating or using short stories related to idioms in an entertaining way that aids students in developing a sense of language use and drive their interest. These approaches help students recognize the links between imagery elements through superficial correlations.

4.2. Intensifying the Contextual Projection from Input Space 2

The particularity of English idioms with imagery elements that do not exist in Chinese mainly stems from different cultural cognition. Specifically, students primarily comprehend the underlying meaning of these idioms based on the literal translation, while the background knowledge of the Chinese context is relatively weak and insufficient for beginners of idioms compared to the distinct projection of the input space. Therefore, it is evident that the pedagogical approach for these idioms should prioritize the students' comprehension of the related contextual knowledge. Additionally, it is crucial to delve into the historical origins and background of the idioms, which further enrich the content of the projection of Input Space. Students are advised to incorporate the elements from both the original and target idioms within Blended Space to develop a novel and thorough understanding. For instance, for classroom activities, instructors could combine Example Teaching that activates learners' minds and Small-group Instruction that allows learners to engage in spontaneous, thought-provoking discussion [13]. As so, students' cultural background knowledge is added by examining the origin of idioms. The implementation of personalized learning paths is recommended as a means to assist students in effectively memorizing idioms. This can be achieved through group collaboration, interactive games, role-playing, and scenario simulation. Additionally, it is important to encourage

students to adapt their learning methods to align with their individual preferences, allowing them to explore various interpretations and practical applications of idioms, thereby fostering learners' understanding ability. The learning focus should not be limited to oral practices; students' writing skills should also be emphasized. Encouraging students to apply the target knowledge in writing articles providing timely feedback and review can offer an opportunity for students to systematically understand the idioms they have learned [14]. In the meantime, it would deepen students' cognitive level of the content and facilitate effective retention of idioms through systematic accumulation [7]. The act of engaging in repeated practice has been shown to enhance the process of memory consolidation [15].

4.3. Fostering the Mechanism for Recognizing Cross-Cultural Differences

For English idioms with imagery elements that are mismatched in the Chinese context, it is crucial to have a technique for recognizing distinctions in cross-cultural contexts. As Figure 1 displays, the distinct elements from Input Space 2 will eventually be projected as replacements into the Blended Space during the cognitive process. This demonstrates that learners are more prone to the Negative Transfer of their native language, which results in incorrect retention of the original English idioms [16]. In order to help students understand the fact that there are differences between the original elements and the elements in the Blended Space, teachers should emphasize the differences between the original imagery elements in Input Space 1 and distinct elements in Input Space 2. Teachers should also guide students to have the ability to identify these differences. In order to lessen the bias in linguistic habits caused by divergent cognition, students can diminish it by using the Comparative Analysis Approach to discover which aspects are the result of being introduced by the local culture and which are distinctive in the target language and culture. Teachers also need to explain the replacement of distinct elements in Input Space 2 to minimize the impacts of Negative Transfer on their native language. In order for students to independently figure out the actual meanings of the idioms in light of their own background knowledge, understand the actual usage, and recognize the differences between the elements, teachers can, for example, take advantage of learners' Top-down cognitive mechanisms by providing specific contexts and settings in which idioms are used. In addition, it is important to promote and organize cross-cultural communication among students through face-to-face communication practice, so that students can actually experience the differences in how different idioms are used in an organic way and succeed in cross-cultural conversion. This can successfully increase their comprehension of their own learning blind spots and inadequacies, assist them in obtaining a deep understanding of English idioms, and define the path of their future language learning and greatly consolidate what they have learned.

5. Conclusion

The author explores in-depth some cutting-edge methods for bettering the instruction of English idioms using Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT). This article divides idioms and their corresponding methods of instruction into three main categories based on the degree of similarity between Chinese and English imagery elements: English Idioms with similar imagery elements in English and Chinese, English idioms with imagery elements that do not exist in Chinese, and English idioms with imagery elements that are mismatched in Chinese context. The analysis further demonstrates that CIT is significant and inspiring for learning English idioms. It makes it possible for teachers and students to detect the dynamic process of acquiring English idioms and look into their underlying understanding mechanisms. The author outlines teaching strategies for each category, which improve pupils' understanding of various idioms. Upon careful examination, it becomes evident that an emphasis should be placed by educators on highlighting the interconnection between

pertinent components within the two languages, fostering self-directed learning, and facilitating the expansion of vocabulary. This study also advises educators to learn about the origins of idioms by fusing Example Teaching with group collaboration to support an interactive learning approach, which strengthens memory. Besides, the author recommends stressing the original imagery elements in Input Space 1 and correcting differences for idioms with mismatched imagery functions to lessen the impact of Negative Transfer on their first language. Throughout the teaching, It is essential to provide authentic context of using target idioms, help students develop an understanding of differences between imagery elements, and incorporate cross-cultural knowledge. To lead students to methodically and continuously deepen their understanding of English idioms, teachers should also follow the laws of cognition and allow students to integrate English idioms into the acquired linguistic knowledge structure.

In general, this article first attempts to investigate teaching English idioms from the standpoint of Conceptual Integration Theory, which offers a fresh theoretical viewpoint for the related fields. By highlighting the link between cognitive process and language acquisition, the thesis suggests a teaching strategy emphasizing the significance of culture and context in language learning, which can aid students in integrating and applying their language knowledge more effectively. It also establishes a theoretical foundation for enabling students to develop their cross-cultural communicative competence.

However, the limitations of this discussion are evident in its focus solely on students from specific regions, potentially resulting in biased generalizations derived from empirical findings. Despite the fact that this article offers fresh perspectives on how to teach English idioms, there may still be some challenges in implementing CIT into practical teaching. In the future, Conceptual Integration Theory can be applied to a wider range of language acquisition areas, such as other foreign language learning. Further exploration of the applicability of conceptual integration theory in different cultural contexts can provide more relevant teaching strategies for learners from different cultural backgrounds and advance the research on the application of conceptual integration theory in English language teaching.

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