

Building an Idiomatic Data System Teaching Vietnamese for Foreigners



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ABSTRACT: Vietnamese idioms are a "special synthetic form of folk knowledge" (Cao Huy Dinh), which contains elements of language, culture, and customs imbued with national identity. For teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, teaching idioms is considered a quite difficult category, and one of the basic reasons is that teaching this vocabulary unit has not been given due attention. To help learners master and use idioms fluently in communication activities, thereby understanding Vietnamese most deeply and essentially, the report raises the issue of building an idiom corpus system to Teach Vietnamese to foreigners at intermediate and advanced levels. This is an important and necessary step to help instructors choose idioms appropriate to the cognitive level of foreign learners.

KEYWORDS: Idioms, Vietnamese language teaching, foreigners, corpus.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese idioms are a "special synthetic form of folk knowledge" (Cao Huy Dinh), which contains elements of language, culture, and customs imbued with national identity. Therefore, in Vietnamese communication activities, idioms are a lively, highly effective linguistic material that Vietnamese people use as a common habit. The good use and application of idioms is considered a measure of Vietnamese people's understanding and ability to use Vietnamese.

For foreigners learning Vietnamese, using idioms is not at all simple. Because to use idioms in communication, they must have a certain level of Vietnamese language and culture. Currently, at Vietnamese language training establishments for foreigners, Vietnamese language teaching in general is increasingly being innovated in the direction of communication. This means that teaching not only focuses on language knowledge but also integrates Vietnamese cultural and social knowledge. However, according to our observations, teaching idioms has not received enough attention, so it has not met the needs and interests of foreign learners.

To help learners master and use idioms fluently in communication activities, thereby understanding Vietnamese most deeply and essentially, the report raises the issue of building an idiom corpus system to Teaching Vietnamese to foreigners at intermediate and advanced levels. This is an important and necessary step to help instructors choose idioms appropriate to the cognitive level of foreign learners.

II. CONTENT

1. The situation of teaching idioms in Vietnamese language textbooks for foreigners

To learn about the issue of teaching idioms in Vietnamese language textbooks for foreigners, we conducted a survey of 9 sets of Vietnamese language books. Specific results are as follows:

Table 1: Survey table of the number of idioms in Vietnamese language textbooks for foreigners

No.	Books/textbooks for teaching Vietnamese for foreigners	Number of idioms	Idioms
1	Basic Vietnamese – Vu Van Thi	0	
2	Vietnamese for foreigners – Basic program - Nguyen Van Phuc (Editor)	2	Every cloud has a silver lining (Tái ông thất mã), a wonderful day (Ngày lành tháng tốt)
3	Vietnamese textbook (4 books) – Nguyen Viet Huong		
	+ Basic Vietnamese (book 1)	0	
	+ Basic Vietnamese (book 2)		

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	+ Basic Vietnamese (book 3)	4	When in Rome, do as the Romans do (Nhập gia tùy tục), God gives him what he hates (Ghét của nào trời trao của ấy), Every Jack has his Jill (Nồi nào vung ấy), Spend money like water (Tiêu tiền như nước)
	+ Basic Vietnamese (book 4)	22	While there's life, there's hope (Còn nước còn tát), Bitter pills may have blessed effects (Thuốc đắng dã tật), As thick as ants (Đông như kiến), Beautiful like a fairy (Đẹp như tiên), Ugly as a ghost (Xấu như ma), Big fish in a small pond (Ếch ngồi đáy giếng), As strong as a horse (Khỏe như voi), As black as coal (Đen như (hòn) than), Dull as a cow (Dốt như bò), As soft as butter (Mềm như bún), As fat as a pig (Béo như lợn), Sharp as a water (Sắc như nước), White as snow (Trắng như tuyết), At a snail's pace (Chậm như sên), As pretty as a picture (Đẹp như tranh), As quick as lightning (Nhanh như chớp), The early bird catches the worm (Trâu chậm uống nước đục), Hair-raising (Dựng tóc gáy), Better safe than sorry (Cẩn tắc vô ưu), A picture is worth a thousand words (Nói có sách, mách có chứng), When in Rome, do as the Romans do (Nhập gia tùy tục), Man proposes, god disposes (Học tài thi phận).
4	Textbook set of 4 volumes – Đoàn Thiên Thuật (editor)		
	-Vietnamese level A. Volume I	0	
	-Vietnamese level A. Volume II		
	+ Practicing Vietnamese B.	6	At full speed (Ba chân bốn cẳng), Not to go into details (Cưỡi ngựa xem hoa), As populous as an ant hill (Đông như kiến), As happy as a clam (Vui như tết), As slow as a tortoise (Chậm như rùa), Become prosperous (Ăn nên làm ra)

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	+ <i>Practicing Vietnamese C.</i>	23	Swimmingly (Thuận buồm xuôi gió), Ripe old age (Gần đất xa trời), As quick as lightning (Nhanh như chớp), Vanished from sight (Không cánh mà bay), Eat like a bird (Ăn như mèo), Live economically (Bóp mồm bóp miệng), A single parent (Gà trống nuôi con), Equivalent (Một chín một mười), Man proposes, god disposes (Học tài thi phận), Unthinking (Nhanh nhẩu đoảng), Storm in a teacup (Bé xé ra to), Better luck next time (Thua keo này bày keo khác), As strong as a horse (Khỏe như voi), To take pains in picking holes in other's coats (Bới lông tìm vết), Cut from the same cloth (Giống như đúc), The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing (Trống đánh xuôi, kèn thổi ngược), Any port in a storm (Chết đuối vớ được cọc), A long tongue is a sign of a short hand (Mồm miệng đỡ chân tay), Sell like hot cakes (Đắt như tôm tươi), Rushed into (Cắm đầu cắm cổ), Do as I say, not as I do (Nói một đằng, làm một nẻo), I go where the moment takes me (Nay đây mai đó), Children of the Dragon, Grandchildren of the Immortal (Con rồng cháu tiên)
5	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (5 volumes) – Nguyen Van Hue (editor)		
	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (Volumes I)	0	
	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (Volumes II)		
	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (Volumes III)	2	Fine feathers make fine birds (Người đẹp vì lụa), Mud-walled cottage (Nhà tranh vách đất).
	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (Volumes IV)	1	At full speed (Ba chân bốn cẳng)
	<i>Vietnamese language textbook for foreigners</i> (Volumes V)	13	Homeless (Màn trời chiếu đất), Suitable alliance (Môn đăng hộ đối), Out of sight, out of mind (Xa mặt cách lòng), A blessing in disguise (May nhờ rủi chịu), Be head over the heels (Mê như điên đảo), Parsimonious (Đo lọ nước mắm, đếm củ dưa hành), As slow as molasses (Chậm như rùa), Not to care a fig (Coi trời bằng vung), Haste makes waste (Dục tốc bất đạt), To be over head and ears in love (Chết mê chết mệ), No man is a hero to his valet (Bụt chùa nhà không thiêng), Young and inexperienced (Trẻ người, non dạ), A match is made in heaven (Tâm đầu ý hợp).
6	Advanced Vietnamese (For foreigners – Volume 1) – Nguyen Thien Nam	11	Drunkenness reveals what soberness conceals (Rượu vào lời ra), Take coals to Newcastle (Chở củi về rừng), It's the first step that counts (Vạn sự khởi đầu nan), Out of the frying pan, into the fire (Tránh vỏ dưa gặp vỏ dừa), When in Rome do as the Romans do (Nhập gia tùy tục), Give him an inch and he will take a yard

			(Được voi đòi tiên), Money makes the mare go (Cổ tiền mua tiên cũng được), Beggars can't be choosers! (Ăn mày đòi xôi gấc), There's no smoke without fire (Không có lửa làm sao có khói), One skill, one dignified self (Nhất nghệ tinh nhất thân vinh), Teach fish swim (Dạy đi vến sông).
7	Vietnamese for foreigners Advanced level by Trinh Duc Hien (editor), Dinh Thanh Hue, Do Thi Thu.	11	To run as fast as one's legs can carry one (Bán sống bán chết), To have a stable life (Cổ an cư mới lạc nghiệp), You are gentleman (Hào hoa phong nhã), To have sufficient cash to conduct transactions (Đồng ra đồng vào), Being able to finish what one has started (Cổ đầu có đuôi), To call a spade a spade (Nói toạc móng heo), Sprout (Đâm chồi nảy lộc), To go out early and return late (Đi sớm về khuya), As fresh as a daisy (Tươi như hoa), Fine custom (Thuần phong mỹ tục), One of a kind, actually (Cổ một không hai)
8	Advanced Vietnamese for foreigners - Institute of Linguistics, Vu Thi Thanh Huong (editor)	34	Have a face that would stop a clock (Ma chê, quỷ hờn), Very short (Ngắn chẳng tày gang), Let me take each one in turn (Mỗi người một ngã), Blood Sweat and Tears (Dầm mưa dãi nắng), Close-knit (Như hình với bóng), Như nước với lửa, He carries fire in one and water in the other (Vừa ăn cướp vừa la làng), Thankless (Vong ân bội nghĩa), The devil looks after his own (Mèo mù vớ cá rán), Ripe old age (Gần đất xa trời), Through thick and thin (Chia ngọt, sẻ bùi), Rice as dear as pearls (Gạo châu củi quế), Như môi với răng, Spotted feet, muddy hands (Chân lấm tay bùn), Run away and fly away (Cao chạy xa bay), Be at the end of one's tether (Chuột chạy cùng sào), Two peas in a pod Giống nhau như hai giọt nước, like a fish on cutting board (Cá nằm trên thớt), Like water and fire (Như nước với lửa), As innocent as a lamb (Hiền như bụt), As ugly as sin (Xấu như ma), Đẹp như tiên, To toil and moil (Bán mặt cho đất bán lưng cho trời), Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth (Con ông cháu cha), Give him an inch and he will take a yard (Được voi đòi tiên), Two dews, one sunshine Hai sương một nắng, To take the bit between one's teeth (Ngậm đắng nuốt cay), Đầu chày dít thớt, Nourish a snake in one's bosom (Nuôi ong tay áo), Tread-water feeding (Há miệng chờ sung), Earn firewood for three years and burn for an hour (Đốn củi ba năm thiêu một giờ), Each bird loves to hear himself sing (Mẹ hát con khen hay), He that knows nothing doubts nothing (Điếc không sợ sung), At full speed (Ba chân bốn cẳng)

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9	Vietnamese book series by Buu Khai - Phan Van Giuong (4 volumes)		
	+ Vietnamese for beginners 1 (Buu Khai - Phan Van Giuong)	0	
	+ Vietnamese for beginners 2 (Buu Khai - Phan Van Giuong)		
	+ Vietnamese intermediate 3 (Phan Van Giuong)	2	Delicacy (Cao lương mỹ vị) A myriad things go according (Vạn sự như ý)
	+ Vietnamese intermediate 4 (Buu Khai - Phan Van Giuong)	1	Bitter cold (Cắt da cắt thịt)
Tổng:		132	

Based on statistical data on the number of idioms in Vietnamese language textbooks for foreigners, we have some comments as follows:

Idioms are taught in Vietnamese language textbooks for foreigners, focusing on intermediate (B1, B2) and especially advanced (C1, C2) levels. This also stems from the characteristic of idioms as fixed combinations containing socio-cultural values. Therefore, learners at the basic level (A1, A2) cannot fully absorb vocabulary units loaded with cultural values.

The idioms taught are diverse and rich in many different types: there are pure Vietnamese idioms (Spotted feet, muddy hands (*chân lấm tay bùn*), *chuột chạy cùng sào*, Give him an inch and he will take a yard (*được voi đòi tiên*) and so on); there are Sino-Vietnamese idioms (suitable alliance (*môn đăng hộ đối*), Haste makes Waste (*dục tốc bất đạt*), When in Rome, do as the Romans do (*nhập gia tùy tục*), Better safe than sorry (*cẩn tắc vô ưu*) and so on.); There are original idioms and also variant idioms (Each bird loves to hear himself sing (*mẹ hát con khen hay – con hát mẹ khen hay*), Earn firewood for three years and burn for an hour (*đốn củi ba năm thiêu một giờ – kiếm củi ba năm thiêu một giờ*), teach fish swim (*dạy đĩ vén váy – dạy đĩ vén sống*) and so on).

2. Principles for building an idiom corpus system to teach Vietnamese

2.1. Principles ensure scientificity

This principle requires that the selection of idiomatic materials for teaching must ensure content accuracy. Because units such as idioms, proverbs, proverbs, and aphorisms are units that easily have boundaries confused. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to specific cases in the use of idioms: what context should the idioms be placed in so that students can understand the exact meaning of the idioms, cultural and social factors, and how to use them? communication behavior of Vietnamese people.

2.2. Principles to ensure feasibility

Feasibility is the ability to be implemented in practice, specifically the ability to be applied in actual teaching and learning, and at the same time must bring about the expected effect. This principle needs to be applied and concretized in a flexible and creative way in teaching idioms to foreign students. Specifically, the selection of teaching idioms needs to pay attention to the cognitive level of students, especially the level of awareness and understanding of the meaning of Vietnamese vocabulary. In addition, "installing" idioms in specific contexts also requires attention to choosing contexts that suit the student's cognitive level.

2.3. Principles to ensure integration

Integration is understood as the synthesis of many elements, or in other words, the connection between related knowledge areas in a unit of lesson. For teaching idioms, vocabulary knowledge is not separated into an independent unit or element, but it will be associated with grammatical knowledge as a mutual complement, that is, not only towards word reception but also to be able to create that word using certain grammatical structures. These are inseparable elements when teaching language.

2.4. Principles focus on communication activities

The ultimate goal of language teaching is to aim at communication skills and the ability to apply in real life the system of knowledge learned. Therefore, to help foreign students recognize and understand the meaning and usage of idioms, attention should be paid to placing idioms in specific contexts. This will help learners easily understand the meaning of idioms as well as easily apply idioms in similar life situations.

3. Establishing an idiom corpus system to teach Vietnamese

Based on the principles set out, we believe that teaching idioms to foreigners learning Vietnamese should be distributed at levels from low to high. Because learners at any level want to learn and discover elements associated with culture in the foreign language they are learning, on the other hand, idioms are also isolated in many groups and types.

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At the elementary level, especially level 2, students are required to be able to exchange information on simple, familiar everyday topics, and describe themselves, their surroundings, and other things. In matters of essential need, instructors can choose simple, easy-to-understand idioms that have the closest meaning to students. These idioms according to us are

- Idioms whose central component coincides with one or more words already in the combination.
- Idioms with reflective images are familiar images that can be shaped by pictures, photos, activities, and postures.
- Idioms consist of only a small number of words (about 3 to 5 words).

Example:

- The central element is formal characteristics: Thin as a crane (*gầy như hạc*), tall as a heron (*cao như sếu*), big as an elephant (*to như voi*), fat as a buffalo (*béo như trâu*), short as a duck (*thấp như vịt*), tall as a mountain (*cao như núi*), long as a river (*dài như sông*) and so on.

- Central factors are attribute characteristics (movement, cognition, state and so on): slow like a turtle (*chậm như rùa*), fast like a squirrel (*nhANH như sóc*), run like a horse (*chạy như ngựa*), strong like an elephant (*khỏe như voi*), fierce like a tiger (*đữ như cọp*), climb like an ape (*leo như vượn*), cold like ice (*lạnh như băng*) and so on.

Through the examples of idioms given above, it can be seen that the comparative model (A is like B) is an easy model to accept at a low level. Because "A like B: is synonymous with A. In particular, the A's here are all elements associated with each person (tall, big, fat, short, thin... - human form; running, climbing, fast, slow, strong, fierce... - characteristics in terms of movement, state, physical condition, nature). The B are also objects, animals, and natural phenomena clearly shaped by images. Therefore, the meaning of the idiom becomes specific, definite, and easy to apply.

At the intermediate level, when students are able to describe and narrate different topics, the idiom system taught will gradually change in complexity. Detail:

- The number of words in an idiom can be greater than five.
- The images included in idioms do not just stop at familiar, specific images but can include abstract images.

At this level the teacher continues to use the comparative structural model (A is like B) but can use more complex A's and more abstract B's. For example: A is the characteristic of cry and movement; B is the activity or characteristic of the object. B is composed of a phrase or clause such as *screeching like a hoe* (*ra rả như cuốc kêu*), *barking like a dog biting a ghost* (*cầm cắn như chó cắn ma*) and so on ; *fierce like a buffalo ramming a grave* (*hùng hục như trâu húc mộ*), *waddling like a duck* (*lạch bạch như vịt bầu*), *probing like a stork catching shrimp* (*lò dò như cò bắt tép*), *slithering like a hoe* (*lúi như cuốc*), *jumping like a plover* (*nhảy như choi choi*), *climbing like an ape* (*leo như vượn*) and so on. ; B are abstract objects with characteristics related to the religion and cultural beliefs of Vietnamese people such as As ugly as sin (*xấu như ma*), *dirty like a ghost* (*bẩn như ma lem*), *pamper* (*chiều như chiều vong*), *urge* (*giục như giục tà*), *standing like a growing mallow tree* (*đứng như bụt mọc*) and so on.

Idiom teaching focuses on the advanced level. The criteria for establishing idioms at this level are:

- Diversify idiom formation models.
- Complexity in recognizing the meaning of idioms.
- Images included in idioms carry cultural and ethnic characteristics of Vietnamese people.

Therefore, at this level, it is necessary to expand and deepen into the form of metaphorical idioms. This is a form that accounts for a large number of Vietnamese idioms. Choosing to teach this form of idiom at a high level stems from the difficulty in absorbing idioms. Metaphorical idioms are a form of idiom created through a symbolic mechanism, which means taking real things and events to refer to characteristics, properties, activities, and situations... that are generally generalized at the same time between people. Images with specific properties and characteristics, activities, properties... people can recognize similar associative relationships in meaning. Unlike comparative idioms, which have similarities in meaning between the idiom and one or more words in the language, in metaphorical idioms, the meaning of the expression is not directly available in the language but must be inferred from a number of words. words in the language. Therefore, determining the meaning of the language as well as applying it fluently requires students to grasp the socio-cultural linguistic values of idioms. For example, to understand the meaning of the idiom "The anvil is under the hammer" (*trên đe dưới búa*), it is necessary to understand the common activities in blacksmithing. An anvil is a block of iron or steel used as a fixed forging platform to place the metal on top to hit with a hammer. So this is the image lying on the anvil and in the position under the hammer (the hammer comes down). Idiom expressing a situation of being oppressed, dangerous, and difficult to escape.

Likewise, "barking dogs never bite" (*chó cắn áo rách*) is an idiom that uses the specific images "chó cắn" (dog biting) and "áo rách" (torn shirt). In Vietnamese culture, dogs are animals that are often looked down upon, despised, and "dog bitten" so they often bring bad luck. A torn shirt is a shirt that is torn or torn due to being old or patched many times. So, the shirt was torn and bitten by a dog, which means this situation is an extreme situation. The symbolic meaning of this idiom often refers to people who are poor or down on their luck and are continuously chased by bad luck over and over again.

Thus, the cognitive level of foreign students is a reference system for instructors to choose and build the teaching of idiom forms. This once again confirms that idioms are not just vocabulary units that should be taught at the advanced level but can be

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taught at the intermediate and even elementary levels. The characteristics of each idiom form corresponding to the 6-level Vietnamese competency framework are the basis for building this teaching work.

III. CONCLUSION

Based on the recognition of the importance of teaching idioms to foreign students at all levels, the report proposed the work of building a Vietnamese language teaching system for foreign students. This is a job that helps teachers have orientations so that students at all cognitive levels can remember and understand the structural features and meaning-making mechanisms of idioms, thereby applying them to each situation, communicate properly and effectively.

Teaching idioms to foreigners learning Vietnamese is an important teaching activity but will certainly encounter many difficulties. Correct selection of teaching materials appropriate to students' level of awareness and use of Vietnamese will certainly help students understand, master, and use idioms effectively in communication.

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