

A Comparative Study of French and Myanmar Proverbs and Sayings in Speaking

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Abstract

This paper is the analysis on the Comparative Study of the Proverbs and Sayings based on speaking in Myanmar and French languages. The necessary data are collected and retrieved from the French dictionary, Myanmar Proverbs and Sayings Book, and the Internet websites. Then the proverbs and sayings from the two languages are presented in comparison with five kinds of metaphors. They are Metaphor concerning animals, human's habits, situations, things and taste. This paper is written using Comparative and Descriptive Methods, with the aims to expand the knowledge and vocabulary of the usage of related proverbs and sayings, to apply them in real life situations which are similar and different in two languages.

Key words: Proverbs, Sayings, Metaphors

I. Introduction

The proverbs and sayings are one of the everyday language uses. The advantage of their use is that it is easy to understand and emphasize the meanings more clearly. Moreover, by studying the proverbs and sayings, it will improve the learning process of the target language and literature of the students. The frequent use of them can help the language become stronger and widespread. It is found that these proverbs and sayings have been used for ages, which make them last long and retain their own identities and characteristics until today. The behaviors and daily activities of people in different societies are described in figurative speeches in pleasant amusing ways. They are not only useful in literature but also in language communication. As they are essential in a language acquisition process, this paper is developed as the comparative study of the Proverbs and Sayings based on speaking in Myanmar and French languages.

II. Aims and Objectives

Objectives of this paper is that by studying the Proverbs and Sayings based on the speaking in Myanmar and French languages, it would be helpful to learn about their usage, to expand the vocabulary range, to be able to apply in speaking and writing, not to have any difficulties in translation, and to assist in teaching and learning processes.

III. Material & Methods

In this paper, French proverbs and sayings are firstly explored and collected from the dictionaries, textbooks, and the Internet Websites and they are studied, compared and matched with the Myanmar proverbs and sayings found in Myanmar books. Then the books about metaphoric usages are studied and analyzed to identify the different categories step by step. Thus, the Comparative and Descriptive Method is used in this paper.

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IV. Research Questions

The following research questions are identified in the research paper.

1. Why are proverbs and sayings useful in everyday language?
2. Which French proverbs and sayings are similar with Myanmar proverbs?
3. How are they similar and different?

V. Literature Review

Sayings

Sayings are speeches which are used from generation to generation as an important record, reference to describe or imply the meanings without examples or also with the meanings.

Proverbs

Proverbs is defined as “a speech expressed in a simple, concrete and effective way using examples so as to learn a lesson from” (pg. 89, Myanmar Dictionary). The main difference between proverbs and sayings is that a proverb is used to exemplify what one means while a saying is used to imply the meaning in a conventional way without using any exemplification.

Metaphorical Expressions

A metaphorical expression is the spoken and written language used in accordance with its own nation, country, location, culture and language.

In the research paper (1996-1997 academic year) of Diploma course by Ms. Thant Zin Aye, “The Study of French and Myanmar Proverbs”, there is a comparative study of similar seven proverbs and different twelve proverbs, but there is no proverb based on speaking. Although it has explanations but neither analysis nor figurative expresses are found.

In December 2017, there was a research paper collaboratively written by the Head of Department and the teachers from the French Department of Yangon University of Foreign Languages, called “The Study of Comparative Study of the Proverbs in Myanmar and French languages”. In eleven chapters of the paper, the proverbs and sayings are about nature, weather, flowers, plants and fruits, people, body parts, mind, time, work, animals, things, nations, and others but none is about speaking. In addition, there is a comparison but not an explanation. In each chapter, there is an analysis and a conclusion with an overall analysis in the end.

Therefore, in this paper, when the Proverbs and Sayings are compared using metaphorical language with explanation on significant points and analysis. In this way, Myanmar students are expected to apply them in speaking and writing, and to be useful in teaching and learning process.

VI. Findings

In this paper, “the Comparative Study of the Proverbs and Sayings based on speaking in Myanmar and French languages”, five types of metaphorical expressions are presented:

- I. Metaphor concerning animals
- II. Metaphor concerning human’s habits
- III. Metaphor concerning situations

IV. Metaphor concerning things

V. Metaphor concerning taste

I. Metaphor concerning animals

1.1. French Proverb : Chien qui aboie ne mord pas.

Myanmar Proverb : ဟောင်လွန်းသည့်ခွေးလူမလေး။

The direct meaning of the French proverb is that « The dog which barks too much do not bite. » while in the Myanmar proverb, it means « People do not pay much attention to the dog which barks too much. ». Actually, it means that “the one who talks or shouts with anger is not really dangerous”. In comparing the two proverbs, it is a metaphor using animals as both of them give an example of dog for the person who likes to talk or shout with anger.

1.2. French Proverb : Donner de la confiture aux cochons.

Myanmar Proverb : ကျွဲပါးစောင်းတီး။

The direct meaning of the French proverb is that « The jam is given to a pig. ». While in the Myanmar proverb, it means « The harp is played near a buffalo. ». Actually, it means that “even a valuable talk is not worth given to someone who does not have the ability to analyze right and wrong” comparing to such animals as a pig or a buffalo.

II. Metaphor concerning human's habits

2.1. French Proverb : Beaucoup de paroles, peu d'effets; Beaucoup de bruits, peu de fruit.

Myanmar Saying : စကားများအမှားပါ။

In the same way as French proverb, in Myanmar saying « When there is talking too much, there would be more chances to make mistakes and then become useless. » as a metaphoric expression to describe the talkative nature and habit of people.

2.2. French Proverb : Il est plus facile de dire que de faire (Easier said than done.)

Myanmar Saying : အပြောလွယ်၊ အလုပ်ခက်။

To mention that instead of waiting time in talking, it would be clearer to see how hard it would be by carrying out a task, French people use this proverb which means, « It is easier said than done. » Myanmar people use the saying which means, “Easy to say, hard to do. Believe not when say, know when done”. This metaphorical language is also used to express the human's habits of talking about a task more than carrying it out.

2.3. French Proverb : Au vrai dire perd-on le feu.

Myanmar Proverb : မှသားမပါ၊ လင်္ကာမချော။

French mean that it would be successful only when the truth is hidden and the lie is said by saying « When the truth is said, you would lose like fire. ». In Myanmar proverb, it means, « Without a lie, it wouldn't be an eloquent speech. ». The truth and the lie are expressed metaphorically to describe about the human's nature and habit.

- 2.4. French Proverb : Qui parle trop, personne ne l'écoute.
 Myanmar Saying : ကျောပူတာသာခံချင်သည်။ နားပူတာ မခံချင်ဘူး။

To describe the situation « when one would be able to do lots of work but cannot stand the nagging », Myanmar proverb describes “how the talking too much (nagging) is not liked by people” in the same way as French to exemplify the human’s nature and habit.

- 2.5. French Proverb : A vrai dire peu de paroles.
 Myanmar Saying : ဆိုခဲစေ၊ မြဲစေ။

The French proverb means that “it would take a lot of words and time to tell lies while the truth needs only a few words and keep them right.” In Myanmar proverb, it also means, “The truth is hard to say, and once it is said, it is to be kept”.

- 2.6. French Proverb : La vérité sort de la bouche des enfants.
 Myanmar Saying : ကလေးနှင့်အရူးပြောစကားကမှန်သည်။

The proverbs of French “The truth comes from children’s mouth” and Myanmar “the things that talked by children and fools are right” imply that the words said by children are right, highlighting the innocence of children.

- 2.7. French Proverb : Parler à bâtons rompus.
 Myanmar Saying : စားမြုံ့ပြန်သည်။

The meanings are recalling and referring to the things of the past, things done in the past, i.e. reminiscence. French people give example as « a broken stick » while Myanmar proverb metaphorically expresses “how cows do the re-chewing or ruminating process.” A broken stick and the re-chewing are expressed metaphorically to describe about the human’s nature and habit.

III. Metaphor concerning situations

- 3.1. French Proverb : Les paroles s'en vont, les écrits restent.
 Myanmar Saying : နှုတ်တရာ၊ စာတစ်လုံး။

The meaning of the French proverb is that “the talking can disappear as the time passes while the written records would be handed over from one generation to another.” Myanmar saying also means, «While the words said are gone, the written words would be more effective and evident. » to express the similar possible situation.

IV. Metaphor concerning things

- 4.1. French Proverb : La parole est d'argent, mais le silence est d'or.
 Myanmar Proverb : ဆိတ်ဆိတ်နေထောင်တန်။

The meaning of the French proverb is « Speech is silver, Silence is gold », and the Myanmar proverb is « It worths thousands when one is silent. ». It implies that it would be priceless when one keeps silent when he/she should not be. In other words, it would gain benefits by keeping one’s mouth shut, comparing silence with « Gold » in French, and « valuable money » in Myanmar.

- 4.2. French Proverb : Faire toute une montagne.
 Myanmar Proverb : တစ်စိတ်ကို တစ်အိတ်လုပ်။

The meanings are exaggerating about something which is actually nothing much to talk about. « A mountain » is used in French proverb as in « Making a mountain out of something. » whereas « a bag » is used in Myanmar, « Making a part as if it was a whole bag. » to exemplify the exaggerative talking.

- 4.3. French Proverb : Un coup de langue est pire qu'un coup de lance.
 Myanmar Saying : ကြမ်းကျံလျှင်နှုတ်၍ရသည်၊ စကားလွန်လျှင် နှုတ်၍မရ။

The meaning of the French proverb, "Un coup de langue est pire qu'un coup de lance" « A word (insulted) is worse than being thrown with a spear. » is it is more painful to be insulted than hurt physically. Also in Myanmar saying, « If one is trapped in a hole of the floor, it can be redrawn. But if one has said something, it cannot be unsaid. ». Therefore, if something harsh or extreme is said, it cannot be retaken or undone and can hurt the feelings. Depending on the difference in languages, the usage to give examples are varied with a spear and floor.

V. Metaphor concerning taste

- 5.1. French Proverb : On prend plus de mouches avec du miel qu'avec du vinaigre.
 Myanmar saying : နှုတ်ချိုသျှိုတပါး။

The meaning in the French proverb is that “it would be more beneficial and successful to talk in a polite way more than a harsh or rude way.” Similarly, Myanmar saying means that “if one talks sweetly, it would help him finish his tasks.” It is a beautiful metaphoric expression usage with honey or sweet vinegar and sweet words.

VII. Analysis & Discussion

Proverbs and sayings have been a common flowery language usage to bring the better understanding, clearer expressions, and more emphasis.

The proverbs (1.1) and (1.2) are used to exemplify with animals. In (1.1), the dog is similarly used for giving examples. While French says « cannot bite », Myanmar expresses a bit differently that « they are not respected or respectable ».

In the proverb (1.2), French uses « jam » and « pig » to highlight the meanings of having value and being dumb which are clearly not compatible as jam is a typical breakfast meal made with certain effort. Similarly, Myanmar also uses « buffalo » and « harp » which certainly do not go together. Since the meaning is that « it would be useless when a valuable thing is given to a person who do not know its value and use. », they imply in the same way with only difference in the given examples of animals « buffalo » and « pig ».

In the proverb (2.1), the same impression is applied to imply the human's nature and habits that talking too much can make mistakes and no benefits in spite of the different languages.

In the proverb (2.2), the original meaning of the French proverb is « easier said than done » while the Myanmar proverb also means « easy to say, hard to do » and they both mean the same.

In (2.3), the French proverb « Au vrai dire perd-on le feu » and the Myanmar proverb « Without a lie, it wouldn't be an eloquent speech. » or « No lie, no eloquent » are both commonly used to express the nature and habits of people.

In (2.4), to express that both Myanmar and French people would rather take an action than nagging or the long winding talk, French says, "Qui parle trop, personne ne l'écoute." and Myanmar say, « I prefer getting hot on my back (i.e. from working) to having my ears hot (i.e. being nagged) » in the similar usage.

In (2.5), the French proverb means that it would take a lot of words and time to tell lies while the truth needs only a few of words and keep them right. In Myanmar proverb, it also means, « The truth is hard to say, and once it is said, it is to be kept ».

In (2.6), « the things said by children and fools are right » is the expression to highlight the nature and habits of people as adults would keep silent to express the truth while children would speak out the truth innocently. Therefore, the honesty is expressed in the similar manner.

In (2.7), both languages have the same meanings to express the things which have been already done are said over again. The difference is the comparison of words: « a broken stick » and « the re-chewing or ruminating process of a cow ». A broken stick and the re-chewing are expressed metaphorically to describe about the human nature and habit.

In (3.1), both French and Myanmar proverb means similarly: Writing is more evident than speaking. Thus, the proverb, « hundred times of talking and one word are the same » are used in a similar way.

In (4.1), French proverbs means « keeping silent worth's gold valued at thousands » and Myanmar proverb means « It worths thousands when one is silent. ». So French compares silence with gold while Myanmar compares it with money.

In (4.2), exaggerating about something which is actually nothing much to talk about is expressed as « A mountain » in French whereas « a bag » in Myanmar differently.

In (4.3), the implications are similar. Yet, the choice of words for metaphorical expressions are different with « spear » and « floor ». This expression has been used since 18th century until now.

The implications of the (5.1) are similar although the explications are different comparing honey, sweet vinegar with sweet words.

When the other combinations are analyzed such as the silence is compared with the thousands of money, exaggeration with a thousand note and a bag, when something is said and undone, it is compared with spear and floor, sweet words to gain success is with honey and sweet vinegar, etc, it is interesting to see the different comparison clearly.

In both languages, the proverbs and sayings have been existing and being used for ages. They were composed based on the nature of human beings and environments, it could be analyzed that there would be similarities and differences due to culture and traditions.

VIII. Conclusion

Every language in the world has its own proverbs and sayings and it is vital to know and apply them in speaking and writing.

Mainly they are used when one wants to express the contents concisely and effectively. Therefore they play an important part in everyday use.

When the proverbs and sayings in Myanmar and French languages, it is found that (1.1), (2.1), (2.2), (2.3), (2.4), (2.5), (2.6) and (3.1) are similar while (1.2), (2.7), (4.1), (4.2), (4.3) and (5.1) are different. These similarities and differences are already mentioned in the analysis session. They are varied due to their own culture, tradition and geographical factors. It is hoped that this paper would be helpful for learners of French language to be able to use the proverbs and sayings of French by comparing with similar and different ones from Myanmar language, and also to be able to assist them in overcoming difficulties in their learning process.

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