

Comparative analysis of Indonesian and Chinese idioms containing the human body part "eye"

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the connotations of idioms containing the human body part "eye" in Indonesian and Chinese. Understanding idioms containing the human body part "eye" is crucial in cross-cultural communication, helping to avoid misunderstandings and enhance understanding of different cultural values. The authors used semantic analysis to describe the connotations of idioms containing the word "eye." The data for this study were collected from Indonesian and Chinese articles in dictionaries, news articles, short stories, and online opinion pieces. The results showed that significant differences between idioms containing the "eye" element in Indonesian and Chinese. Chinese idioms showcase linguistic beauty through their philosophically rich forms and meanings, while Indonesian idioms demonstrate cultural diversity with their flexible, adaptable structures and everyday-life connotations.

Keywords: Idioms, Semantic, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and culture is like two things that cannot be separated (Chaer, 2014:71). This is in line with Jiao Yan (2019), who states that language development is based on culture. Culture is the key to learning language. The two complement each other and are continuous in their respective developments. The close relationship between language and culture creates a symbiotic relationship that leads to a deeper understanding of both aspects. Understanding the relationship between language and culture also opens the door to the

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IJEVSS, Volume 04 Issue 04, 2025



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development of effective cross-cultural communication skills. Students become more sensitive to cultural differences and are able to communicate more wisely in a multicultural environment. In this way, language education is not only about learning words and grammar, but also a journey to understand and absorb cultural diversity through the use of language.

Chinese learners who study Indonesian also learn Indonesian culture. Indonesia and China are agricultural countries located in Asia. However, Indonesian and Chinese are two languages that are not related; Indonesian belongs to the Austronesian language family, while Mandarin belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Therefore, when learning Indonesian, most Chinese learners often encounter obstacles or make mistakes. One of these obstacles or mistakes is difficulty in understanding or misunderstanding the meaning of Indonesian idioms. Idioms are unique expressions that cannot always be interpreted directly from their constituent words. Understanding idioms is important not only to enrich one's vocabulary, but also to understand the cultural nuances behind the language. Therefore, foreign learners, especially Chinese learners with a Chinese cultural background, often experience difficulties when they encounter Indonesian idioms, due to the differences in language and culture between Indonesia and Chinese.

Louisa Buckingham (2006) states that "Idioms are widely recognized as stumbling blocks in foreign language acquisition; it is often said that the 'arbitrary' and specific nature of language makes it difficult for learners to understand and acquire, and resists translation." Idioms can consist of more than one morpheme that cannot be translated separately, but rather as a whole. Furthermore, the meaning of idioms cannot be translated literally or verbatim. This is because the meaning of idioms is connotative, not denotative, which is a meaning that is indicated directly or the actual meaning. Then, connotative meaning, as mentioned above, means that the meaning contained has additional meaning that is expressed figuratively. According to Juhara, Budiman, & Rohayati (2005, p. 105), connotations are divided into two types: positive connotations and negative connotations. One example of an idiom in Indonesian is "gelap mata" (blinded by rage), which has a negative connotation. This idiom means to be so angry that one loses control, becomes violent, or is unable to think clearly. Negative connotations are also found in the Chinese idiom "眼红/红眼病". This idiom means someone who cannot see or understand goodness and beauty because of a disturbance in their mind, which is often caused by diseases of the heart such as envy, jealousy, or hatred.

The examples and research references above demonstrate that idioms containing the names of human body parts, such as "eyes," in Chinese and Indonesian have negative, positive, and neutral connotations. Therefore, this study aims to identify the connotations of idioms



containing the names of human body parts, such as "eyes," in Chinese and Indonesian, in order to correctly understand their meaning. Furthermore, this study aims to describe the deeper connotations of these idioms from a cultural perspective, thereby facilitating clearer translations of texts containing idioms containing the names of human body parts, such as "eyes," into Indonesian and Chinese.

METHOD

This study is a linguistic investigation within the field of semantics. Its subject matter comprises idioms in Indonesian and Chinese that incorporate the bodily element "eye," observed from a specific perspective. Consequently, this research falls under descriptive qualitative study. Creswell (2008) notes that qualitative research is a method or inquiry used to explore and understand central phenomena (general and broad). This research method was chosen because it enables the researcher to understand and interpret the meaning of human behavioral interactions within specific contexts based on their own perspective (Gunawan, 2013).

The analysis will be presented descriptively, drawing data from dictionaries, articles, and reference materials. The data comprises idioms in Indonesian and Chinese related to the name of the body part "eye." We will screen these idioms based on the connotations they embody. Finally, we will present these idioms by interpreting the connotative names for the body part "eye" in Indonesian and Chinese, thereby gaining deeper insight into why this body part carries positive or negative connotations.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study found significant similarities and differences between idioms containing the word "eye" in Indonesian and Mandarin. These differences are reflected in the structure and symbolic meaning of the idioms, as well as in the meanings and differences in social culture, values, and ways of thinking that they reflect. There are several idioms about the eye in Indonesian. The following table lists idioms containing the word "eye" in Indonesian that have been found.

Table 1 . Idioms containing the word "eye" in Indonesian

Indonesian Idioms	Description
Cuci mata	Have fun looking at something beautiful
Main mata	Making contact with other parties for purposes that benefit certain parties.



Gelap mata	Unable to think clearly; raging (because of extreme anger)
Saksi mata	A person who witnessed an event himself
Mata uang	Currency
Menutup mata	Intentionally ignoring mistakes
Membuka mata	Make someone realize something important
Mata pelajaran	Certain topics studied in school or college
Cendera mata	Commonly known as souvenirs or gifts
Halwa mata	Something fun
Memandan sebelah mata	Not looking objectively
Mata elang	Similar to an eagle, namely having sharp eyesight in observing
Mata-mata	a person assigned to investigate secretly; a secret agent.
Mata duitan	Greedy for money; greedy for money; all that matters is money

In Chinese ,there are also idioms about eyes that are used as material for comparing idioms in both languages in this study.The following table lists idioms about eyes in Chinese that have been found and used as material for analysis.

Table 2 .Idioms containing the word “eye” in Chinese

Chinese Idioms	Description
势利眼	Flattering the wealthy while treating those of lower social standing with contempt
火眼金睛	Sharp-eyed and perceptive, capable of accurately discerning the authenticity, goodness, and evil of things.
眼观六路，耳听八方	To describe someone as quick-witted and perceptive, capable of meticulously observing and listening when faced with situations, thereby gaining a



	comprehensive understanding of the circumstances.
眼中钉，肉中刺	A metaphor for someone or something one intensely hates and despises, and is eager to get rid of.
眉开眼笑	An expression of joy and delight
青眼有加	Show affection or respect for someone by looking them in the eye
睁一只眼，闭一只眼	To see something yet pretend not to see it, metaphorically referring to adopting an attitude of tolerance, indulgence, or avoidance toward matters.
耳听为虚，眼见为实	What you hear with your ears is unreliable; only what you see with your own eyes is truly reliable.
有眼不识泰山	To be so narrow-minded as to fail to recognize someone of high status or great ability; also to be unable to discern a person of exceptional skill.
眼不见，心不烦	As long as something is out of sight or beyond one's immediate awareness, it will not cause distress.
目光长远	A person who is able to see things from a long-term perspective
怒目而视	

The eye is a vital sensory organ shared by all humanity, yet the differences in idioms related to “eyes” in Chinese and Indonesian far outweigh their similarities. These disparities profoundly reflect the distinct cognitive patterns and cultural values underlying the two languages.

Comparison of Idiom Structures

Table 1 indicates that the word “eye” in Indonesian can be combined with elements categorized as verbs, as in *cuci mata* (wash one's eyes), *main mata* (flirt), *tutup mata* (close one's

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IJEVSS, Volume 04 Issue 04, 2025



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eyes), and membuka mata (open one's eyes). This part of the body can also be combined with elements categorized as nouns, for example in mata uang (currency), mata pelajaran (subject), and cendera mata (souvenir), and adjectival idioms, such as gelap mata (blinded by greed).

Based on research, idioms containing the word “eye” in Indonesian and Mandarin have distinctive structural characteristics, and their constituent elements reflect the diversity of each language and culture. Indonesian idioms typically use flexible phrases with varying numbers of words, while Mandarin idioms mostly consist of four or more fixed characters, but the total number of words in an idiom still tends to be even. This is concise and symmetrical with extraordinary formal beauty, reflecting the tradition of classical Chinese literature.

Comparison of Idiom Meanings

The two languages share limited common ground in their fundamental meanings, but exhibit significant differences in specific expressions and areas of emphasis.

Although Chinese and Indonesian are vastly different languages, humans share similar physical structures and physiological responses. Therefore, expressions related to “eyes” in both languages exhibit fundamental commonalities. For instance, when people get angry, they often widen their eyes. Chinese uses the phrase “怒目而视glaring angrily” to describe this, while Indonesian has a specific term, gelap mata, meaning “eyes darkening” specifically to denote that unable to think clearly; raging because of extreme anger. This proves that the eyes are the most intuitive conveyors of inner emotions—a universal experience across cultures.

Although both Chinese and Indonesian use “eyes” as a metaphor, the specific expressions reveal distinct differences. These differences are like two mirrors, each reflecting the unique ways of thinking and values of their respective cultures.

First, the two countries' ways of thinking differ significantly in how they perceive the world. Chinese idioms often embody a comprehensive, holistic wisdom. For instance, “eyes on six roads” (眼观六路) goes beyond its literal meaning of “eyes looking in six directions.” Its deeper implication is the need for a big-picture perspective, requiring people to simultaneously be aware of all surrounding aspects—a highly dialectical and thorough way of thinking. Indonesian, however, tends to be more direct and vivid. Take “eagle eyes” (Mata elang) as an analogy for exceptionally sharp vision, capable of pinpointing targets with eagle-like precision. One emphasizes “breadth” and “comprehensiveness,” while the other stresses ‘accuracy’ and “sharpness”—reflecting underlying differences in cultural thinking.

Secondly, cultural backgrounds exert a deeper influence on “how emotions and attitudes



are expressed.” Chinese idioms often convey meaning subtly and elegantly, rooted in profound historical and cultural heritage. For instance, “青眼有加” (qingyan youjia) originates from an ancient anecdote about Ruan Ji, where looking at someone with the black part of the eye signifies admiration and appreciation. This expression is exceptionally refined and reflects a collectivist culture that values human relationships and connections. Conversely, many Indonesian idioms are direct and pragmatic. Take “mata duitan” (money-eyed), which bluntly describes someone whose eyes are only for money, portraying them as greedy. This expression cuts straight to the point, reflecting a direct focus on practical interests and a more individualistic mode of expression.

Finally, idioms also reveal differing emphases on “how people interact with one another.” Chinese idioms often highlight the relationship between ‘observing’ and “being observed,” reflecting a heightened vigilance and sensitivity to one's surroundings. For instance, “under someone's watchful eye” vividly describes being closely monitored and controlled. Meanwhile, Indonesian has developed unique terms tied to social roles. The most typical example is “mata-mata” (spy), whose literal meaning is “eye-eye,” vividly portraying spies as numerous pairs of eyes observing covertly. This may relate to Indonesia's history as an archipelago nation, where greater vigilance toward outsiders' backgrounds was historically necessary.

CONCLUSION

Idioms involving body parts are the essence of linguistic culture. As the most vital organ of perception, the “eye” carries rich metaphorical meanings in idioms. This study reveals significant similarities and differences between idioms containing the “eye” element in Indonesian and Chinese. Overall, idioms in both languages share common meanings and symbolic significance. Humans share identical bodily structures and experiences of using eyes, leading to the universality of fundamental metaphors such as “seeing is understanding” and “the eyes reveal emotions.” The similarities and differences in structure and vocabulary between Chinese and Indonesian idioms not only reflect the distinct ways these languages perceive society but also reveal divergences in cultural values, thought patterns, and philosophical concepts. Chinese idioms showcase linguistic beauty through their philosophically rich forms and meanings, while Indonesian idioms demonstrate cultural diversity with their flexible, adaptable structures and everyday-life connotations. These similarities and differences provide a cross-cultural perspective for linguistic research, laying the groundwork for enhancing mutual understanding and communication between different cultures.



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