

## TEACHING VIETNAMESE COMPARATIVE IDIOMS FOR FOREIGNERS IN THE APPROACH OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, teaching Vietnamese for foreigners has gained remarkable breakthroughs, however, teaching Vietnamese idioms, especially comparative idioms, as a foreign language, has not been paid due attention. The reason is that teaching idiom is considered a quite difficult category in which learners mainly learn by memorizing and learning by heart. The article uses comparative method as well as data processing to research into the teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners in the approach of cognitive linguistics, namely through conceptual metaphors, helping learners understand the meaning, grasp the structure and apply it into specific situations.

**Keywords:** *Cognitive linguistics; idioms; teaching Vietnamese; foreigners; comparative idioms.*

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## GIẢNG DẠY THÀNH NGỮ SO SÁNH TIẾNG VIỆT CHO NGƯỜI NƯỚC NGOÀI THEO HƯỚNG TIẾP CẬN NGÔN NGỮ HỌC TRI NHẬN

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### TÓM TẮT

Tuy việc giảng dạy tiếng Việt cho người nước ngoài những năm gần đây đã có sự phát triển khá mạnh, nhưng việc dạy thành ngữ tiếng Việt như một ngoại ngữ, đặc biệt là thành ngữ so sánh vẫn chưa được quan tâm đúng mức bởi lẽ dạy thành ngữ vốn được xem là một phạm trù khá khó, người học chủ yếu học theo kiểu ghi nhớ và thuộc lòng. Bài báo sử dụng phương pháp so sánh và thu thập, xử lý dữ liệu để nghiên cứu việc dạy thành ngữ so sánh tiếng Việt cho người nước ngoài theo hướng tiếp cận ngôn ngữ học tri nhận, cụ thể là thông qua các ẩn dụ ý niệm giúp người học có thể hiểu được ý nghĩa, nắm vững cấu trúc cũng như vận dụng nó vào những tình huống cụ thể.

**Từ khóa:** *Ngôn ngữ học tri nhận; thành ngữ; dạy tiếng Việt; người nước ngoài; thành ngữ so sánh.*

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## 1. Introduction

In parallel with the nation's development, Vietnamese is also gradually asserting its position as one of the languages chosen to be learnt by many foreigners as a foreign language. Therefore, in recent years, teaching Vietnamese for foreigners has been paid much attention and strongly invested. However, it is undeniable that because it is quite new, teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language has not gained as much achievements as other foreign languages. In addition, the method of teaching Vietnamese for foreigners is basically traditional, as a result, learning has not achieved high efficiency, especially the study of Vietnamese idioms. Many foreign students can understand and speak Vietnamese very well and many students even achieve C1 level when taking the Vietnamese proficiency tests, however, they are still very confused and do not understand a lot of Vietnamese idioms and most of them have a lot of difficulties in using Vietnamese idioms. The fact that only advanced learners can learn idioms or the method of teaching idiom is mainly that the teacher explains the meaning of idioms through images or visual aids while students memorize and do exercises, teaching Vietnamese idioms for foreign students in general and Vietnamese comparative idioms has not yet achieved the desired efficiency. Foreign students can speak Vietnamese, however, they cannot yet understand the way of very unique and special cognition of the world of Vietnamese people through the Vietnamese language.

In this article, the writer wants to mention how to teach Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners in the approach of cognitive linguistics. This is an approach that makes teaching and learning Vietnamese comparative idioms "easier" than memorizing and learning the meaning of each specific idiom by heart. However, teaching

Vietnamese as a foreign language in the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics or application of cognitive methods into teaching Vietnamese idioms for foreigners has not been paid due attention. As the writer Ly Toan Thang said: "in the native language of students and the foreign language, the Vietnamese not only has the noticeable differences that have been mentioned in linguistics books on phonetics, vocabulary and grammar; but also has more important, more interesting and less researched aspect - they are different ways in mental process such as conceptualization, categorization or explanatory manipulations of things, the phenomenon of the world around us, used by Vietnamese or foreigners in their own language" [1; p.122].

Due to the article limitations, the writer only gives an approach to cognitive linguistics: teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms through conceptual metaphors, and survey data are comparative idioms introduced in "study of Vietnamese idioms" by Hoang Van Hanh [2] because this is a thorough and quality research project of Vietnamese idioms. This project gives a clear classification of Vietnamese idioms and specific criteria for distinguishing idioms from other categories such as proverbs, words combinations, etc.

## 2. Methodology

In order to achieve the aim of this piece of research, the article uses comparative method and data collection and process to research into the teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners in the approach of cognitive linguistics.

## 3. Findings and discussion

### 3.1. Concept of idioms and Vietnamese comparative idioms

#### 3.1.1 Vietnamese idioms

According to researchers of Vietnamese language in general and vocabulary in

particular, idioms have been considered as a vocabulary unit. Idioms and words are the two parts that make up the vocabulary system. Therefore, there are many different definitions of Vietnamese idioms:

The Vietnamese Dictionary of the Institute of Linguistics defines: "Idioms are a set of fixed words that are familiarly used and their meanings cannot usually be explained in a simply manner by the meaning of the words that make up it" [3; p.358].

Writer Tran Ngoc Dung said: "Idioms are the expression of language-specific ideas. In term of structure, most idioms do not form sentences with inseparable and non-analyzed words. In term of meaning, the idiom has a meaning that cannot be replaced or modified in other words to bring the same original meaning" [4; p.14].

According to Professor Hoang Van Hanh - one of the few people who are dedicated to idioms research, "Idiom is a combination of words of fixed, stable morphology – structure and complete, figurative meanings that are widely used in daily communication, especially in conversational language" [2; p.31].

As such, researchers generally agree that idioms are a fixed set of words, expressing a complete meaning and they are often used in everyday communication.

### 3.1.2 Vietnamese comparative idioms

According to Prof. Hoang Van Hanh: "A comparative idiom is a combination of stable words, derived from the comparison, with symbolic meaning, such as: *rags and tatters, fit as a fiddle, Fish on the chopping board, head on the block, jumping up and down, etc*" [2; p.101]. Accordingly, Vietnamese comparative idioms have some following characteristics:

a. The components denoting the comparative relation and the compared thing (comparative structure) in the comparison idiom are compulsory and stable parts on the surface

structure as well as the deep structure. If the comparative structure is broken, there will be no longer comparative idioms. The choice of words that denotes the comparison and compared factor deeply express national character.

b. The properties of the components denoting the comparative relation are compulsory in the deep structure but are not necessarily stable in the surface structure, therefore, this attribute may or may not appear during use.

c. In many specific situations, the properties of the components denoting the comparative relation may be omitted while the meanings of such comparative idioms do not change. Therefore, the comparative idioms can be transformed into metaphorical combinations.

### 3.2 Current situation of teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners

Idioms are an important part of Vietnamese language in particular and languages in general, therefore, in order to well learn Vietnamese or any other foreign language, learners should well understand the meaning and able to use idioms in communication. However, learning foreign languages is difficult while learning idioms is more difficult. This fact is right for foreigners who learn Vietnamese, specifically, many foreigners can speak Vietnamese very well but it is extremely difficult for them in listening comprehension of Vietnamese idioms, even more difficult to use Vietnamese idioms in communication. The reasons are mentioned as follows:

Firstly, in teaching Vietnamese idioms, especially Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners so far, teachers often teach in a traditional way, in the approach of idioms with illustrated images, then explain the meaning of idioms and give examples, finally students are requested to practice by exercises. In addition, this teaching method to encourage learners to learn the meaning of each idiom by heart, memorize by doing

exercises for repeating these idioms and finally students apply them into similar educated situations.

Secondly, when teachers teach Vietnamese idioms for foreigners, they often consider it as a "very difficult category" and they tend to ignore or not focus on them, especially for teaching Vietnamese at simple levels because they think that at these levels, it is only necessary for students to learn regular communication and they do not need and also not able to learn such idioms.

Thirdly, there is currently very little content of idioms in textbooks of teaching Vietnamese for foreigners, or if any, such idioms are explained very simply and teaching them often takes very little time. For example, in the textbook "Thực hành tiếng Việt trình độ B" (Vietnamese Practice at Levels B) and "Thực hành tiếng Việt trình độ C" (Vietnamese Practice at Levels C), edited by Doan Thien Thuat [5], there is a content called "Colloquial idioms and expressions". This is one of the well-developed, quality Vietnamese textbooks, which are selected by many universities and teachers as the main curriculum. However, the contents of idioms in this curriculum is very little, accounting for a lower rate than that of other teaching contents. Learners almost cursorily learn "little" contents of some Vietnamese idioms mentioned in the curriculum, even when teaching, many teachers skip this part because they think their students are unable to understand.

Fourthly, the current method of teaching Vietnamese idioms in general and comparison idioms in particular for foreign students who study Vietnamese is still mainly listing some idioms and practicing how to remember these idioms by asking learners to practise the exercise of filling idioms in the blank or rewriting them, etc. Therefore, the learners can only remember these idioms in each example, specific circumstances that are neither applied

in other cases nor understood in another context. Moreover, memorizing these idioms does not last, specifically, when learning some new idioms, it is easy for the learners to forget the idioms they have just learned.

Fifthly, Vietnamese idioms in general and Vietnamese comparative idioms in general are often associated with the culture, cognition of the world of Vietnamese people, or associated with the classic reference and historical references. Therefore, when teaching Vietnamese idioms, it may be a significant shortcoming if teaching only the contents of idioms without mentioning the cultural background, habits, etc of Vietnamese people. However, it is very difficult to explain the meaning, origin, or classic reference and historical references of Vietnamese idioms for foreign students as teaching for the Vietnamese. Therefore, the only way is that learners have to memorize these idioms and use them in similar situations. In addition, teachers often teach idioms in specific context where they appear, therefore, students only mechanically remember; if they encounter that idiom in another situation, they still do not understand them.

### ***3.3 Cognitive linguistics and teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms for foreigners in the approach of cognitive linguistics***

#### ***3.3.1 Cognitive linguistics***

Cognitive science began to develop in the United States around the 1960s, in parallel with a very new trend of world linguistics at that time, called transformational grammar, followed by generative grammar of famous linguist- Chomsky. That's why he is considered one of the founders of cognitive science. He wrote: "... the cognitive revolution shows an interest in the states of the brain, how they are manifested in human behavior, especially in its cognitive states: knowledge, understanding, explanation, beliefs, etc. The approach to human thought

and activity in such terms makes psychology study and the sub-subject that constitutes it - linguistics - become a part of natural sciences that study the human nature and its manifestations, mainly a brain" [1; p.19].

As one of the first Vietnamese researchers who receive the introduction of cognitive linguistics, as the first person to lay the first foundation for cognitive linguistics in Vietnamese research, Professor Ly Toan Thang said, "The cognitive linguistics is a new school of modern linguistics, in which linguistic research is carried out on the basis of human experience and perception of the objective world as well as the way the way that people conceptualize and categorize the objects and situations of this objective world" [1; p.43].

The fact that human perceive the world and conceptualize the objects and situations can be clearly seen in their uses of conceptual metaphor. This will be mentioned below.

### 3.3.2 *Conceptual metaphor*

If traditional linguistics considers metaphor as a means of rhetoric, a flowery way of speaking based on the similarities between two things and phenomena, then cognitive linguistics asserts that metaphor is not just a means of rhetoric but also a mode of thinking, a tool to conceptualize the world. The author Lakoff [6] asserts that metaphor is not based solely on similarity. It is hidden in everyday language, especially folk songs, proverbs and idioms. Metaphor is not just a matter of words but ideas, which allow people to express thoughts about themselves and the world.

The author Ly Toan Thang said that "Conception is not first and foremost not only the result of the process of thinking, the process of reflecting the objective world on the human mind; but it is the product of cognitive activity, it is a container of human knowledge or understanding of the world based on experience from generation to

generation; The concept brings both universal humanity and national specific characteristics" [1; p.64].

The author Tran Van Co emphasized that the concept is the "container" of human understanding of the world formed in consciousness in the process of cognition and embodiment in language. The author also have the same point of view when asserting that in the concept, there is an universality (concept) and specific characteristics (culture expressed in many different forms) [7; p.73].

Lakoff and Johnson [6] indicated that metaphorical expressions do not appear randomly and discretely, but in larger groups, called conceptual metaphors; characterized by a projection between two domain, from the source area to the target domain and generalized by the formula "TARGET AS SOURCE". The conceptual metaphor is a mechanism that helps us understand and express an abstract idea through a more specific one based on our experience of the objective world.

According to Lakoff [6], conceptual metaphor is systematic "mappings" between two conceptual domains: the source domain is a category of experiences mapped or projected into the target domain as another experience domain.

Thus, conceptual metaphor is a cognitive mechanism in which a process of conceptual mapping from source to target takes place.

### 3.3.3 *Teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms to foreigners through conceptual metaphors*

#### a. *Common conceptual metaphors in Vietnamese comparative idioms*

\* Vietnamese comparative idioms using "plant" as the source domain which appears a process of mapping the concept that "man" is the target domain, in which the human aspects are expressed through the plant world.

SOURCE DOMAIN (PLANT)	mapping =====>	TARGET DOMAIN (MAN)
<p>- To describe the human appearance, Vietnamese comparative idioms often use words that describe forms and properties of plants.</p> <p>Examples: <i>a yellow face like turmeric (mặt vàng như nghệ), as black as a false ginseng (đen như củ tam thất), as thin as a rice leaf (mỏng như lá lúa), as green as a leaf (xanh như tàu lá), as fresh as a daisy (tươi như hoa), a face as an oval (mặt trái xoan), etc. [2]</i></p> <p>- To describe human personalities and qualities, Vietnamese comparative idioms use words that describe the properties of plants.</p> <p>For examples: <i>As spicy like chili (cay như ớt), as good-natured like a potato (lành như củ khoai), etc. [2]</i></p>		<p>- Vietnamese comparative idioms describes the state and emotions of people through images of the state of plants.</p> <p>For examples: <i>As perplexed as chives (rối như canh hẹ), As mournful as a withered leaf (rũ như tàu lá héo), as cosy as a bamboo grove (như tre âm bụi), etc. [2]</i></p> <p>- Describe human situations with images of plant's properties.</p> <p>For examples: <i>as eating chili (như ăn phải ớt), as rooted tree (như cây bèn rễ), as two trees with branches intertwined (như cây liền cành), as bananas ripened (như chuối chín cây), etc. [2]</i></p>
<p>* The process of mapping concepts takes place from the source domain as "animals" to the target domain as "man".</p>		

SOURCE DOMAIN (ANIMAL)	mapping =====>	TARGET (MAN)
<p>- Describe appearance and constitution of human beings with images depicting the appearance and constitution of animals.</p> <p>For examples: <i>As ugly as an owl (xấu như cú), As fat as a buffalo (béo như con trâu truong), khỏe như trâu mộng (as rude as a gelled buffalo), As black as crow (đen như quạ), etc. [2]</i></p> <p>- Describe the human personalities with idioms that describe the properties of animals.</p> <p>For examples: <i>As slow as a tortoise (chậm như rùa), As fierce as a tiger (ác như hùm), as dirty as a leper (bẩn như hủi), As intrepid as a Fire-bellied Toad (gan như cóc tía), As stubborn as a crab (ngang như cua), etc. [2]</i></p> <p>- Describe the situation and position of people by idioms that indicate animal characteristics.</p> <p>For examples: <i>As ragged as a leech nets (inrags and tatters - rách như tổ đũa), Feel</i></p>		<p><i>like duck in water (như cá gặp nước), feel like a free bird from the cage (như chim sổ lồng), Like a fish on the chopping board (như cá nằm trên thớt), like a headless chicken (như gà mất tóc),etc. [2]</i></p> <p>- Idioms describe activities, states of animals to refer to human activities and states.</p> <p>For examples: <i>to snore like a pig (ngáy như bò rống), be stupefied like a goose (ngghệt mặt như ngỗng ỉa), to conceal like a cat hiding its shit (giấu như mèo giấu cú), to jump like a lark (nhảy như sáo), To talk violently like a climbing dragon, to act weakly like a sick cat</i></p> <p>- <i>Loud talking, little doing (nói như rồng leo, làm như mèo mửa), Be stealthy like a mouse in the daytime (thì thụt như chuột ngày), Be depressed like a dog with his tail between his legs (tiu ngầu như chó cụp đuôi), etc. [2]</i></p>

\* The process of mapping ideas takes place from the source domain as "nature" to the target domain as "man".

SOURCE DOMAIN (NATURE)	mapping =====>	TARGET DOMAIN (MAN)
<p>- To describe the personalities and qualities of people, comparative idioms use descriptions of the property of nature. For examples: <i>As strong as a storm (mạnh như vũ bão), As hot as fire (nóng như lửa),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- Describe human action through comparative idioms describing the attributes of nature. For examples: <i>to snore like a thunder (ngáy như sấm), as quick as wind (nhanh như gió), as quick as lightning (nhanh như chớp),</i> etc. [2]</p>		<p>- Idioms describe the characteristics of nature to talk about a person's situation. For examples: <i>As different as the Moon and the Sun (như mặt trăng mặt trời), As separate as morning star and evening star (như sao hôm sao mai), As weak as a raindrop (như hạt mưa rào), To wait like waiting for rain in the drought (như hạn mong mưa),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- Describe the properties of nature to talk about people's emotional state. For examples: <i>Be like a bolt from the blue (như sét đánh ngang trời - như sét đánh bên tai),</i> etc. [2]</p>

\* The process of mapping the concept takes place from the source domain as "literature character" to the target domain as "man".

SOURCE DOMAIN (LITERATURE CHARACTER )	mapping =====>	TARGET DOMAIN (MAN)
<p>- Describe the personalities of people in words that describe the personalities of literature characters. For examples: <i>As hot - tempered as Truong Phi (nóng như Trương Phi), As skeptical as Tao Thao (đa nghi như Tào Tháo), a liar like Cuoi (nói dối như Cuội), a debtor like Lord Chom (nợ như Chúa Chôm),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- Comparative idioms describe situations of peoples by the fate of literature characters. For examples: <i>To be transfixed like Tu Hai's death in hardness (chết đứng như Từ Hải/như Từ Hải chết đứng), As separate as The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd (như vợ chồng Ngâu), As wealthy as Thạch Sung (giàu như Thạch Sùng),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- To describe the constitution and personalities of people, comparative idioms use words describing the constitution and personalities of literature characters.</p>		<p>For examples: <i>As strong as Truong Phi (khỏe như Trương Phi), As gentle as a Buddha (hiền như Phật), As big as a Colossus (to như Hộ pháp),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- To describe the shape of people, comparative idiom uses words describing the appearance of literature characters. For examples: <i>as pretty as an Angel (đẹp như Tiên), as ugly as a demon (xấu như Dạ Xoa), Like Tay Thi with her mind lost, Like Hang Nga startled (Tây Thi mất vía, Hằng Nga giật mình),</i> etc. [2]</p> <p>- Describe human actions and habits in words that describe the actions of literature characters. For examples: <i>to mumble like a fortune - teller with mistaken lot telling (lầm bầm như thầy bói nhầm quẻ), To tremble uncontrollably like Cao Bien's action (lẩy bẩy như Cao Biền dậy non),</i> etc. [2]</p>

*b. Teaching Vietnamese idioms to foreigners through conceptual metaphors*

As mentioned above, the teaching of Vietnamese idioms in general and Vietnamese comparative idioms in particular for foreigners in traditional linguistics often faces many difficulties for both learners and teachers. Therefore, the application of cognitive methods to teaching Vietnamese idioms in general and Vietnamese comparative idioms in particular is extremely necessary. In which the method of using conceptual metaphors is one of the popular and effective cognitive teaching methods.

In order to teach Vietnamese comparative idioms to foreigners through metaphors, the most important thing is to exploit and analyze idiomatic conceptual metaphors of idioms, then to use conceptual metaphors to explain the meaning of idioms. This teaching method does not require the learners to memorize the meaning of specific idioms, but first to guess about the origin of the idioms, then find the metaphorical meaning according to the origin of the idioms by linking with specific situations. For example, with the idiom "*Fish on the chopping board*", teachers might ask learners to guess the origin of the idiom by giving suggestive categories such as plants, animals or food. In this case, the majority of learners will choose "animals" or "food" because "fish" are often mentioned in these two areas. Then, teachers can explain the cultural or historical origin of idioms or help students relate to a particular situation. Here is the situation when a fish is on a chopping board, which means that the fish is about to be processed, caught out of its normal habitat to a dangerous place. Thereby, learners can deduce the meaning of idioms that a person is in an urgent, dangerous, life-threatening situation but cannot escape. Such activities force learners to think, thereby better understand and remember the meaning of idioms.

After guessing and finding metaphorical meaning, teachers help students exploit and analyze the conceptual metaphor of idioms through analyzing the conceptual metaphor that plays a role in creating the meaning of idioms, then use the conceptual metaphor to explain the meaning of that idiom. For example the idioms listed in [2] such as:

- *Like a headless chicken (như gà mất tóc)*
- *As ragged as a leech nets (in rags and tatters- rách như tổ đĩa)*
- *Feel like duck in water (như cá gặp nước)*
- *Feel like a free bird from the cage (như chim sổ lồng)*
- *Like a fish on the chopping board (như cá nằm trên thớt)*
- *To struggle like a leech in lime (Như đĩa phải vôi)*
- *To rejoice greatly like a cat that see a fat meat (Như mèo thấy mỡ)*
- *To rush in like swarm of bees (Như ong vỡ tổ)*
- *Be puzzled like a snake with its head lost (Như rắn mất đầu)*
- *To quickly and strongly eat like silkworm's eating (Như tằm ăn rỗi)*
- *Feel like a duck listening thunder (Như vịt nghe sấm)*
- *As speedy like a chicken with its head cut off (Te tái như gà mái mất đê)*
- *As speedy like a chicken with its head cut off (Te tái như gà mái nhảy ổ)*
- *As ragged as a leech nets (in rags and tatters - rách như tổ đĩa)*
- *Be destitute and exhausted as pupa (Xác như vờ, xơ như nhộng)*
- *To drive away like whisking flies away (Xua như xua ruồi)*

In the process of teaching the above idioms, teachers simply give examples and ask learners to explain the meaning of those idioms, students will face a lot of difficulties,



especially foreign students. But if teachers teach students about the conceptual metaphor: "using the characteristics of animals to talk about the situation, the position of the human being" then it will be easier for students to infer the meaning of the above comparative idioms.

In fact, when teaching Vietnamese idioms in general and comparative idioms in particular for learners, especially foreigners, teachers tend to explain the meaning (in the simplest way) to learners understand the meaning of that idiom (this meaning is usually only understood in a specific example or situation), then encourage learners to memorize that idiom by doing exercises like completing into the blank, rewrite sentences, etc. This teaching method is basically effective at the time of learning because learners can remember idioms just learned through repeated exercises, but will often forget them very quickly afterwards, because of the core of the problem is that learners are learning idioms in memorized form, when the number of idioms learned increases, memorizing all the idioms learned becomes extremely difficult.

As analyzed above by the author, most of Vietnamese comparative idioms are derived from conceptual metaphors, as comparative idioms below:

- *To snore like a pig (ngáy như bò rống)*
- *Be stupefied like a goose (ngật mặt như ngỗng ỉa)*
- *To conceal like a cat hiding its shit (giấu như mèo giấu cứt)*
- *To jump like a lark (nhảy như sáo)*
- *To talk violently like a climbing dragon, to act weakly like a sick cat - Loud talking, little doing (nói như rồng leo, làm như mèo mửa)*
- *Be stealthy like a mouse in the daytime (thì thụt như chuột ngày)*
- *Be depressed like a dog with his tail between his legs (tiu ngủ như chó cụp đuôi)*

In the above comparative idioms, the mentioned animals have a specific activity and state similar to human being, so teachers only need to explain to students the metaphor of the concept of "expressing an action, state of an animal to indicate the action, state of human being", then students will not need to memorize the meaning of each of these idioms, in addition, when meeting comparative idioms about actions, states of the animal, the ability to guess the meaning of learners also greatly increase.

At the step of teaching, analyzing conceptual metaphors, teachers can proceed in a way that provides conceptual metaphors and comparative idioms to illustrate, then let learners infer the meaning of these idiom. For example, from the conceptual metaphor "Characteristics and personalities of literary characters => Characteristics and personality of human beings", we have comparative idioms such as: "As hot - tempered as Truong Phi, As skeptical as Tao Thao, a liar like Cui, a debtor like Lord Chom", etc. [2]. Teachers guide students to understand that these idioms are not about characters in literature, but about human personalities (there are many similarities with such characters' personalities). Thus, students will understand the meaning of these comparative idioms, on the other hand, when meeting similar comparative idioms such as: "As strong as Truong Phi, As gentle as a Buddha, As big as a Colossus", etc [2], then learners will be easier to guess their meanings.

At this step, teachers can also develop by giving specific comparative idioms, then ask students to find the common meaning of these comparative idioms. For example, idioms such as: "a yellow face like turmeric, as black as a false ginseng, as thin as a rice leaf, as green as a leaf, as fresh as a daisy, a face as an oval," etc [2], teach can ask students to find the common meaning of these idioms by asking questions. For example: "These idioms

indicate plants, what are they? Are these plants described based on their physical appearance or internal characteristics? If we use these idioms to describe people, we understand that they describe the appearance or the inner personalities of people?”, etc. After discussing, students will find conceptual metaphor for the idioms above, which are “Form characteristics of plants => Form characteristics of people”. From this cognitive model, students will also be able to explain other comparative idioms such as: “*as eating chili, as rooted tree, as two trees with branches intertwined, as bananas ripened*”, etc. The only difference is that it is not used to indicate the human appearance but their situations and emotions. Similarly, when meeting other comparative idioms, learners will easily infer its meaning based on conceptual metaphors.

Another important step in the process of teaching idioms in general and comparative idioms in particular for foreigners in the cognitive direction is that teachers must provide cultural knowledge for learners, especially for idioms with a high cultural specificity because different cultural differences will create different conceptual domains. For idioms with different conceptual domain due to the large differences between cultures, learners will have difficulty in understanding their meanings, while for idioms with relatively similar source concept between cultures, learners will be easier to understand and to associate.

#### 4. Conclusion

Teaching Vietnamese idioms to foreigners, especially teaching comparative idioms can

generally be done by many methods, from many different perspectives. Receiving and applying cognitive methods to the teaching of Vietnamese idioms is still quite new but has initially affirmed its superiority. However, teaching for effective results and teaching that learners do not feel that Vietnamese idioms are too difficult, leading to being bored and ignoring idioms when learning are very difficult, requiring teachers to be very enthusiastic and have solid knowledge of Vietnamese idioms.

Teaching Vietnamese comparative idioms to foreigners according to the approach to cognitive linguistics, namely through conceptual metaphors mentioned above by the author, with the aim of helping learners save time space for memorizing the meaning of particular idioms, avoid the mechanically understood meaning of idioms in a specific situation, and be able to deduce the meanings of similar idioms.

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