

# Connotative Meaning in Animal Words Between Chinese and Indonesian Expressions: A Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract.** In intercultural communication, speakers sometimes experience misunderstandings because of the use of several expressions that contain different connotative meanings. One of the examples is the use of animal words. To minimize communication misunderstandings, conducting comparative analysis research on this topic is needed. The purpose of this research is to compare the connotation meanings of animal word expression in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese. This research used a qualitative research with a comparative analysis approach. The results showed that there are some differences found in the use of certain words, such as the words such as 牛 *niú* 'buffalo' 羊 *yang* 'sheep', and 猪 *zhū* 'pig'; and some have similar connotative meanings, such as 鸡 *jī* 'chicken', 鸭 *yā* 'duck', 鳄鱼 *èyú* 'crocodile', and 狗 *gǒu* 'dog'.

**Keywords:** animal, comparative analysis, connotative meaning

## 1 Introduction

Language is the cultural carrier and a tool of communication [1]. Language as a tool of communication means that language is a series of systematic sounds, in the form of symbols, arbitrary, meaningful, conventional, unique, universal, productive, varied, dynamic, identity, and a medium of social interaction that replaces individuals in stating something or expressing themselves to the interlocutor [2]. In modern society where globalization and immigration are progressing, communication between different cultures is unavoidable. Different cultural backgrounds and languages have made it more challenging for people to understand one another. These problems have led to the need for understanding the reasons behind intercultural miscommunication. Özdemir-Çağatay and Küllü-Sülü [3] through their research, synthesized the reasons for miscommunication among people with different cultures. It is stated that, there are some possible sources of intercultural miscommunication:

- 1) sociolinguistics transfer (one or more of the interlocutors is using a foreign or second language but employing the rules of speaking of his or her native language.)
- 2) verbal or linguistics clues, and non-verbal clues
- 3) intonation

- 4) politeness strategies
- 5) individual difference (including different ways of thinking, value, and belief)

From the various reasons stated above, this study focuses on the linguistic aspect as one of the reasons for miscommunication. This research highlights about linguistic clues, namely how lexical selection can be very considered in intercultural communication.

This phenomenon is no exception for communication between Bahasa Indonesia and Mandarin Chinese speakers. The difference between the two languages affects understanding between speakers with different cultural backgrounds. For example, the use of animal expressions in these two languages also sometimes has different meanings. This difference can be seen in the use of the word in everyday life. Figurative words in slang are one example of the use of animal-related word expressions. In addition, the use of idioms containing the word animal is also often used in everyday conversation. It is considered normal in Chinese speakers' conversations to help them build the context.

In contrast to Bahasa Indonesia, the use of idioms in everyday conversation is considered too formal so that the use of idioms is only used at certain occasions. For CFL in Indonesia, an understanding of the expression of animal words is very necessary to be a concern so that there are no misunderstandings in communicating with Chinese native speakers.

The selection of the animal-related word as the object of research is based on the use of these words which is relatively often used to explain the context of conversation in the form of idioms and slang. Therefore, the focus of this research is to compare the connotation meanings of animal word expression in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese.

Similar studies have been conducted previously [4] [5] with different research scopes. Waru et al [5] focused on the cultural aspects of idioms containing zodiac animals in Indonesian and Chinese. The animals compared are the 12 zodiac animals, Rat 老鼠, Ox 牛, Tiger 老虎, Rabbit 兔子, Dragon 龙, Snake 蛇, Horse 马, Goat 羊, Monkey 猴子, Chicken 鸡, Dog 狗, and Pig 猪. While the research of Ying et al [4] also has researched about idioms containing the word animal. These two previous researches compare and divide the findings into 3 categories, animal words with positive meanings, negative meanings, and neutral meanings or both.

In contrast to previous researches, this research is conducted to complement the research that has been carried out with a wider scope. The use of animal words that are compared not only comes from idioms, but also other figurative words such as in colloquial figurative or slang.

## **2 Methods**

This paper adopts the method of comparative analysis. Comparative analysis can take place between different entities, such as individuals, interviews, statements, settings, themes, groups, and cases [6]. This research focuses on compare and contrast Chinese and Indonesian animal-related words in figurative words. The data collected is taken from Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia dalam jaringan [7] for Bahasa Indonesia words, and 现代汉语词典 [8] and

Electronic Dictionary-Pleco for Chinese words. As data validation, both Chinese and Bahasa Indonesia native speaker are involved to recheck the animal-related words collected from the dictionary and its connotative meaning used in daily conversation.

### 3 Findings and Discussion

The following are the findings of animal-related words that are compared in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese. 7 animal words are words used in colloquial figurative. Each animal word is categorized into 2 categories, namely positive meaning, and negative meaning.

#### 1. 鸡 jī ‘chicken’

Speakers from outside China have to be careful with this word, especially when it is used in daily conversation. In colloquial figurative, 鸡 jī is not literally translated into ‘chicken’, but it means ‘prostitute’. In this case, ‘prostitute’ refers to female sex workers (n). To build the appropriate context, the following sentence is using the word 鸡 jī:

rénjiāshuō xiàngwǒzhèzhǎngxiàngdenǚrénbùyīnggāizuòjīde  
“人家说：像我这长相的女人不应该做鸡的。”

‘People say: a woman who looks like me shouldn't work as a **sex worker**.’

Similar to Bahasa Indonesia, ‘chicken’ or ‘*ayam*’ can have a negative meaning, for example the word ‘*ayam kampus*’ which means the term given to commercial sex workers from female students.

#### 2. 鸭 yā ‘duck’

Above explained about 鸡 jī ‘chicken’ which has negative meaning, 鸭 yā ‘duck’ also has similar meaning. 鸭 yā is not always ‘duck’, but in some context, it can refer to male sex workers (n). To build the appropriate context, the following sentence is using the word 鸭 yā ‘duck’:

bú shì wǒ fēi dé xiǎng zuò méi rén yuàn yì nián jì qīng qīng jiù qù zuò yā zhǐ shì wǒ bù dé bù zuò  
“不是我非得想做，没人愿意年纪轻轻就去做鸭，只是我不得不做。”

‘It's not that I want to do it, nobody wants to be a **sex worker** at a young age, it's just that I have to.’

鸭 yā in Bahasa Indonesia is ‘*bebek*’. Negative meaning is also reflected in its usage [7]:

*membek* (v): simply following and imitating people's opinions without consideration; having many wives.

*pembebek* (n): a person who follow and imitate others; a person who have many wives.

For example:

“*Jangan mau menikah dengan pembebek!*”

‘Just don’t marry a person who have many wives!’

### 3. 鳄鱼 èyú ‘crocodile’

鳄鱼 èyú ‘crocodile’ is ‘*buaya*’ in Bahasa Indonesia. Both in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese, 鳄鱼 èyú ‘crocodile’ has negative meanings. For example, 鳄鱼眼泪 èyú yǎnlèi ‘crocodile tears’ can be directly translated in Bahasa Indonesia as ‘*air mata buaya*’ Another example of ‘*buaya*’ that imply negative meaning:

***Buaya darat*** (n): a man who is unfaithful to one woman, likes to make sweet promises, but often breaks them.

### 4. 牛 niú ‘buffalo’

牛 niú in Chinese word can be varied in meaning. 牛 niú in Chinese culture symbolizes a hardworking person. But in most Chinese idioms, 牛 niú represents fool and stupid people [4] [5], but in some colloquial figurative, the word 牛 niú represents a positive meaning ‘awesome’

niú niúniú zhè mēfùzáfùwèntí nǐdōujiějuéle  
;牛牛牛! ;这么复杂的问题, 你都解决了!

‘**Awesome**, you have solved such a complex problem!’

In some examples, the word 牛 niú has negative meaning. 牛马 niúmǎ is one of them.

shuí yuànyìzuònúlì shuí yuànyìdāngniúmǎ  
;谁愿意做奴隶, ;谁愿意当牛马!

‘Who is willing to be a **slave**!’

Therefore, it can be seen that the word 牛 niú has both positive and negative meanings. It depends on the context of the sentence.

Unlike 牛 niú in Chinese, ‘*kerbau*’ or ‘*kebo*’ in Bahasa Indonesia have negative meaning. ‘*Kebo*’ represents a lazy person, likes to sleep kind of person.

### 5. 羊 yáng ‘sheep’

羊 yáng in Bahasa Indonesia can be translated into ‘sheep’ (*domba*) or ‘goat’ (*kambing*). It represents both negative meaning. But in Chinese, 羊 yáng symbolizes obedient, well-behaved person. 小绵羊 *xiǎo miányáng* means (n) obedient child.

The following sentences are the example of 羊 yáng in Bahasa Indonesia.

“Akulah gembala yang baik. Gembala yang baik memberikan nyawanya bagi **domba-dombanya** (Yoh 10:11)”

‘I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:11)’

Examples of the use of the word 'sheep' in Bahasa Indonesia are often used in scriptures (Bible) to describe weak animals, who are completely dependent on the care of a shepherd. ‘Sheep’ in this context, refers to human that needs God's salvation.

**Kambing hitam** (n): spacegoat

From both examples above, it can be seen that 羊 yáng in Bahasa Indonesia symbolize negative meaning.

## 6. 狗 gǒu ‘dog’

Both in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese, in terms of slang word, 狗 gǒu ‘dog’ has negative meaning. 狗 gǒu ‘dog’ in Bahasa Indonesia is ‘anjing’. This word often used in swear word. While in Chinese, for example 单身狗 dānshēn gǒu (n) ‘single (having no partner)’, the word 狗 gǒu represents self-deprecation or used to address people with derogatory tone.

## 7. 猪 zhū ‘pig’

猪 zhū ‘pig’ (babi) is another swear word that is commonly used in Indonesia. Therefore, it can be highlighted that in terms of colloquial figurative, ‘pig’ or ‘babi’ is used to emphasize negative meaning. While in Chinese, this word has both positive and negative meaning. It is based on the context. To build the appropriate context, the following sentence is using the word 猪 zhū ‘pig’ :

rúguǒbúshìyīnwéiwǒ tājiùbúhuìtáopǎole zhūtóu  
“如果不是因为我，她就不会逃跑了，猪头。”

"If it wasn't because of me, she wouldn't have run away, Pighead."

wǒcóngwèitíngzhǐguòàinǐ zhūtóu  
“我从未停止过爱你，猪头”

"I've never stopped loving you, Pighead"

From the examples above, it can be seen that 猪 zhū ‘pig’ in the word 猪头 describes stupid animal but not evil and innocent. Therefore, the word ‘pig’ can be used to address people who are closely related, such as close friends, girlfriends, etc.

The explanations of the 7 animal-related words in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese are summarized in the following table.

Animal-related words	Chinese		Bahasa Indonesia	
	Positive Meaning	Negative Meaning	Positive Meaning	Negative Meaning
鸡 jī 'chicken'		✓		✓
鸭 yā 'duck'		✓		✓
鳄鱼 èyú 'crocodile'		✓		✓
牛 niú 'buffalo'	✓	✓		✓
羊 yáng 'sheep'	✓			✓
狗 gǒu 'dog'		✓		✓
猪 zhū 'pig'	✓	✓		✓

**Table 1.** Animal-related words and its connotative meaning in Chinese and Bahasa Indonesia

## 4 Conclusion

From this research, it can be concluded that some words in different language contain different connotative meaning. This phenomenon might cause intercultural miscommunication. Therefore, an understanding of connotative words is needed among speakers, especially for those who communicate intercultural.

This research discusses the connotative meaning of animal-related words because its use is often found in daily conversation. The findings in this research are categorized into 2 (two): positive meaning, and negative meaning. Some words in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese have different connotative meanings, such as 牛 niú 'buffalo', 羊 yáng 'sheep', and 猪 zhū 'pig'; and some have similar connotative meanings, such as 鸡 jī 'chicken', 鸭 yā 'duck', 鳄鱼 èyú 'crocodile', and 狗 gǒu 'dog'.

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