

A Comparative Study of Idioms

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Research question

**What are the differences in word usage and image
by comparing Japanese and English idioms ?**

Introduction

- motive

We wanted to learn more about the languages.

- purpose

To facilitate communication between English and Japanese speakers

Background

A Comparison of Japanese and English Idioms Containing Body Names

- Focusing on "arm" and "arm" -

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by Mikiko Kihara

Table Does each word include the meaning of “**ability, skill**”?

○ include the meaning of “**ability, skill**”

✗ not include the meaning of “**ability, skill**”

Japanese	Japanese	English	English
「手」	「腕」	“hand”	“arm”
○	○	○	✗

Method

1.Find out what words “sky”,“cloud”,and”mountain”mean.

”kenkyuusyasinneiwadaijiten -six edition- (研究社新英和大辞典第6版)”
and “koujiennndainanahann (広辞苑第七版)”

2.Look up the Japanese and English idioms using each word and count them.

	“sky”	“cloud”	“mountain”
Japanese	25	18	40
English	23	26	25

3. Classify Japanese and English idioms

Category 1: same thing - different words

Category 2: same thing - same words

Category 3: different meanings - different words

4. Find out what each word means in the Japanese and English idioms.

5. Investigate differences and similarities by comparing English and Japanese idioms

Our results and discussion

Category 1: same thing - different words

Example1

Japanese:「青天井」(literal meaning:blue ceiling)

English:“The sky's the limit.”

《meaning》No money limit in trading or wagering.

[Discussion]

- Both idioms have a similar idea “the sky’s the limit→in fact the sky never runs out→there is no upper limit”.
- In Japanese,"青(blue)" means blue sky. "天井(ceiling)" also means the limit and the sky because it is above us.Therefore,"blue ceiling"means the blue sky.
- In English, "the limit" is used as the equivalent of "the ceiling" in Japanese.

Category 2: same thing - same words

Example 2

Japanese:「山を抜く力」

English:“faith will move mountains”

《meaning》 Mighty power

[Discussion]

The degree of power is expressed as "the power to move mountains" (an example of something that cannot be moved without great power is a "mountain").

Category 3: different meanings - different words

Example 3

Japanese:「生きた空もない」

English:“Have one’s heart in one’s mouth.”

《meaning》I don’t feel like living.

[Discussion]

- In Japanese, “空(sky)” expresses “state of mind”.
- In English, when you are extremely afraid of something, your heart beats faster and you feel like something is in your mouth. So we express the fear as "having a heart in your mouth",

Conclusion

- As you can see from Examples 1 and 2, words that are similar in conception are used in idioms with similar meanings if they feel the same.

For example, “mountain” means “big” and “sky” means “high”.

- As you can see from Example 3, when we use the word as a metaphor, different words are used in each idiom, and there are few similarities.

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Cooperation

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Example 4 Category 1: same thing - different words

Japanese:「雲を霞と」

English: "Take to the hill, go over the hill, head for the hills."

《meaning》She runs at full speed and hides herself.

[discussion]

- Both are idiomatic phrases with a similar idea of hiding one's appearance and escaping, expressed by "cloud," "haze," or "hill".
- In Japanese, "cloud" and "haze" are used because the figure is obscured by clouds and haze.
- The "hill" is used because the figure disappears from sight as it crosses the hill.

Example 5 Category 2: same thing - same words

Japanese: 「雲行きが怪しい」 (literal meaning: the direction of the clouds is doubtful)

English: "a cloud on the horizon" (literal meaning: there are clouds on the horizon)

《meaning》 a bad feeling

[Discussion]

The word "cloud" means that the weather is about to turn bad, as in "a dark cloud is

gathering".

Example 6 Category 2: same thing - same words

Japanese:「青天の霹靂」(literal meaning: thunder in a clear blue sky)

English: "come out of a clear blue sky"

《meaning》 suddenly, unexpectedly

[Discussion]

- In Japanese, it comes from The Southern Song Dynasty poet Lu Yu was on a sickbed when he suddenly woke up and began to write, and he compared the force of his writing to thunder. The word "thunder" was originally used to describe the force of his brushstrokes.
- In English, it is a metaphor for something falling suddenly from the sky.
- The origin is different, but the idea of "a sudden change in the blue sky" is similar

Example 7 Category 3: different meanings - different words

Japanese:「空を歩む」(literal meaning:walk on the sky)

English:“on pins and needles”(literal meaning:They’re on pins and needles)

《meaning》restless

[Discussion]

- In Japanese,the expression “walking on the sky”indicates restlessness,since walking on the sky is impossible due to the lack of stable ground.
- In English,it expresses an agitation like standing or sitting on a thin object like a pin or a needle.